Beyond the Boundaries: Exploring Diversity within Contemporary Feminist Thought

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Abstract

At a time of heightened awareness and public interest, post-9/11, with increased concerns surrounding the 'other' and pronouncements of the 'death of multiculturalism,' this thesis stresses the renewed relevance of cross-cultural feminist discussions. I examine a broad range of sources to show how the rhetoric of feminism is being co-opted to support the promotion of an 'us' and 'them' perspective, particularly in the media. By returning to well established feminist debates on difference, and the importance of adopting an intersectional position in order to avoid suggesting a singular experience of oppression based solely on gender, I argue for an intergenerational approach to current issues affecting feminism as we move into the fourth wave. Providing an original contribution, both by applying existing theory to highly contemporary debates, and by exploring the possibilities (and pitfalls) offered by online media to fourth wave feminism, I claim that the co-opting of a feminist position in an attempt to shore up national identity and discredit multiculturalism, has, in fact, created a resurgence of interest in feminism, but without a foundational understanding.

Taking the opportunity provided by this resurgence of interest to critically examine Western feminism through current debates surrounding FGC, 'honour'-based violence and veiling, offers a lens through which to explore assumptions of the 'post-feminist' West, and emphasize the renewed importance of engaging with the 'other' in feminist discussions. Globalization and multiculturalism, as well as the global communities forged on the internet, increasingly offer 'insider voices' whilst simultaneously questioning the myth of a pure 'other,' or a universal feminism. By looking back on previous debates and 'waves,' this thesis advocates the need to think across the boundaries of generations, as well as cultures, suggesting that an intergenerational and cross-cultural approach is key to moving discussions forward with the arrival of feminism's fourth wave.

Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

Signed ………………………………………….. Date ……………………………….

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Preface

The use of language, and specifically how to present, and sufficiently problematize, highly contestable terms such as race, culture, veiling and honour has been, as for others before me, a cause for concern throughout the writing of this thesis. In fact, days prior to submission, race appeared in scare quotes throughout the body of this work. However, after much deliberation, I took the decision to remove the scare quotes, at least for the majority of the instances 'race' appears. To a large extent, this decision was based on the belief that as so many of the terms used in this thesis are deeply problematic, choosing to present race in scare quotes and yet omitting these for culture, in particular, seemed inconsistent. Central to my argument within this thesis is the insistence that culture is as problematic, if not more so, than race, for reasons I discuss herein. Thus continually reminding the reader that culture is a problematic term through the use of scare quotes risked a visual emphasis that, as a short-hand alert, threatened to belie the complexity of the term.

Furthermore, if race and culture were to appear in scare quotes, then surely so should feminism, woman and Western. 'Western feminism,' for example, is a term frequently (mis)used in academic and popular media discussions, as if it can be taken to signify a fixed or homogenous group. As with culture, a central tenet of this thesis has been to challenge this notion or (mis)conception of Western feminism as a unified whole, drawing attention to the importance of recognizing the diversity offered both by long established debates amongst 'Western' feminists, and the influence of multiculturalism. The term 'veiling' can also give the misleading impression of a singular or homogenous practice, masking both the multiplicity of actions 'veiling' entails, as well as the breadth of meanings these practices can assume. However, as this thesis explicitly seeks to challenge the notion of 'veiling' as signifying a fixed practice with fixed meaning, the scare quotes again began to feel an unnecessary reminder. With regard to 'honour,' and specifically 'honour'-based violence, I have perhaps somewhat inconsistently, decided to retain the scare quotes. In this case, the decision to include scare quotes was taken to reflect not just that 'honour' is a contentious term when linked unproblematically with either violence or particular cultural beliefs, but also that 'honour'-based violence, as distinct from domestic violence, is itself an unhelpful and problematic distinction. This is not, I believe, a frequently argued position and thus I felt the scare quotes served to further reinforce my claims.

Finally, I have chosen to use the term Female Genital Cutting (FGC), rather than Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), to acknowledge the multiple practices that this covers. These range from what the World Health Organization refer to as all 'harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, e.g. pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterizing the genital area',[1] to infibulation and the removal or all exterior genitalia. The term mutilation, therefore, fixes the assumed meaning of these procedures, presenting them as without context and denying the possibility of there being any room for agency or choice. However, it is important to note that this is not to deny the seriousness of FGC. These decisions on style have not been taken lightly, and in fact, the difficulties encountered in the ostensibly simple choices surrounding how to present particular terms provides an insight into how fraught and contentious attempts to theorize or practice feminism across boundaries of race, class, culture and generations have increasingly become. Thus, a more rigorous acknowledgment and understanding of diversity should be encouraged that is grounded in the feminist debates that have gone before, yet acknowledges contextual shifts caused by multiculturalism or world events such as 9/11. Otherwise the gains made, at least in academic if not 'real' terms, by problematizing concepts such as race, risk being ignored or undermined.

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[1] The World Health Organization, http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/ [accessed 21st March, 2014].

Introduction

Feminism is undergoing a resurgence. Numerous high profile campaigns such as Everyday Sexism, started by Laura Bates, Caroline Criado-Perez's initiative to insist that women are represented on Bank of England bank notes, and Femen's less successful, but equally publicised protests, have ensured a strong feminist presence in both print media and online. However, this renewed interest in feminism, or more accurately, feminisms, and the heightened status feminism(s) have in the public and political consciousness, have (re)exposed fractures, inconsistencies and deep inequalities within these debates and their proponents' approaches, as well as the way in which feminist rhetoric is employed. These inequalities are particularly apparent in the relationship between what is frequently termed, 'third-world feminism' and 'Western feminism,' or increasingly within social media discussions, as 'white feminism' and 'intersectional feminism.' As this thesis explores, none of these feminisms is as homogenous or unified as their collective nametag implies. In fact, there are often as many ideological differences and approaches within the broad umbrella terms of 'third-world feminism' and 'Western feminism' as there are between two.

It is the contention of this thesis, through exploring contemporary debates within feminism and the intersections between feminism and multiculturalism in a post-9/11 context, that the rhetoric of feminism, and specifically assumptions about the unquestioned success and progress of feminism in the West, is increasingly being misused or re-appropriated. Concern for women's rights is now frequently invoked in order to justify aggressive foreign policy in the media. Debates engaging with the issues of immigration or exploring the various successes or failings of multiculturalism also often adopt 'post-feminist' rhetoric, presenting Western feminist aims as incompatible, or in conflict with the acceptance of cultural differences. However, this research also addresses the multiple meanings and manifestations associated with the concept of 'post-feminism,' both as signifying a time after feminism and specifically with relation to the understanding of 'postfeminism' as a distinct strand of feminist ideology, discussed in greater depth within this chapter and throughout the thesis. The unexamined trope of the liberated West as superior to all the rest is a common feature in media representations of discussions over Muslim women's right to choose to veil, for example, strengthens the assumption of the West as 'post-feminist' in perhaps the more

straightforward understanding of the term as a time after feminism. The renewed media interest in feminism thus provides a lens for addressing concerns over multiculturalism and immigration, specifically through issues such as the prevalence of 'honour'-based violence and female genital mutilation or cutting. However, this does not necessarily signal the promotion of feminist values, or indeed the arrival of a new wave of feminism. Although issues such as FGC and 'honour'-based violence are clearly highly important for feminists, and undoubtedly deserving of critique, they are often reduced by media representations into simplistic, binary battles between tradition and progress, East and West. This in turn, suggests a simplistic and singular vision of feminism where women in the West are presented as having achieved a level of equality that all other cultures should seek to emulate.

The perceived return of feminism to contemporary consciousness, through heightened media presence and political interest, - provides the opportunity not just to challenge the somewhat reductive view of feminism as past, promoting the view that we are, at least in the West, living in a 'post-feminist' society, *or*, indeed, that feminism is still necessary, but only for those who fall outside of the presumed benefits of Western culture. It also encourages a deeper analysis of the complexities of current manifestations of feminism in its multiple forms, particularly the complex relationship between 'post-feminism' and 'postfeminism' and the slippage between these two distinct terms. As I suggest throughout this thesis, contemporary presentations of the Fourth wave of feminism, both in newspaper analysis and online discussions, seem to seek to portray a stripped back, 'common sense' vision of feminism, precisely at a time when the multiplicity and complexity of feminist thought should be most celebrated. Evidence of this complexity and the multiple, and perhaps, most hotly contested, ways that feminists may seek to represent or promote their views, can often be found in cross-cultural feminist debates. For example, Femen's deeply problematic insistence on the powers provided by the baring of their breasts to 'liberate' their Muslim sisters, discussed at length in chapter 2 of this thesis. Femen's 'topless jihad' suggests a from of feminism that is not only paternalistic in its approach to women from different cultures, where members of the group assume that they know best despite assurances to the contrary from the Muslim women they are seeking to 'liberate', it is also playful, and arguably somewhat naïve, in its assumption that women's naked bodies, and particularly slim, white women's naked bodies, can so easily be reclaimed from a frequently sexualized and patriarchal portrayal, to be uncomplicatedly utilized as a feminist weapon. As such, the distance between Femen's position and that of the Muslim women they are seeking to 'help'

is as much ideological, highlighting the differences between feminisms, as it is cultural or geographical.

The boundaries between 'third-world feminism' and 'Western feminism' are becoming increasingly unstable due to globalisation and multiculturalism. Neither occupies an unproblematic relationship with place. For example, much third-world feminist theory is, and has been, produced by academics located in the West. Multiculturalism has also served to blur the lines between insiders and outsiders, creating new challenges for the production of anti-racist feminist theory, which, perhaps paradoxically, seeks to respect cultural differences whilst moving beyond notions of cultures as fixed or sealed off from one another. However, despite the possibilities offered by multiculturalism to challenge universalist and essentialist ideas based on race, historical events such as the attacks on the World Trade Center of September 11th 2001, can be seen to have reinscribed binary notions of fixed differences that are now more commonly attributed to culture. Multiculturalism has shifted from a process of integration to assimilation, with debates in the media singling out women's rights as a key area for concern and justification for a stronger, less benign, sense of nationalism. This in turn has brought feminism into the spotlight. The ability to allow for difference, both in experiences of oppression and in opportunities for liberation, is, I believe, key to the fourth wave of feminism. This involves moving beyond binary notions of the oppressor and the oppressed, as well as acknowledging multiple means of expressing 'agency' that can vary, depending on the time or place of enunciation. 'Western feminism' and 'third-world feminism' are thus better understood as implying differing modes of practice and analysis, rather than referring to different locations of study.

This lack of unity within feminist movements is, of course, not a new phenomenon. The notion of a unified and coherent feminist past, where women were united under universal aims, is at best romanticized, and at worst, a tool used to attempt to silence women who speak out against a majority view and imply that they are damaging the movement. Although, undoubtedly, there have been times when many women were in agreement over the need to pursue specific political goals, such as the campaign for suffrage, there have also been dissenting voices amongst them. This lack of unity, however, should not necessarily be regarded as negative. Instead, the diversity within feminist ideologies, and amongst feminists themselves, can be seen as a cause for celebration. Engagement with criticism from both outside and within the feminist 'movement' ensures that feminism remains a dynamic and

responsive ideology that attempts to resist essentialism and universalizing, in order to adapt to women's ever-changing experiences and a continually shifting political landscape. Although, as I have suggested, contemporary media discussions of feminist ideologies and activism often seem to present these as without history, and it is certainly true that there is considerable disagreement over feminisms' past and the terminology used to explore this, not least amongst feminists, feminist theory and practice does have a long and well-established history.

Feminist 'movements' are often conceptualised as 'waves,' though what distinguishes one wave from another is, like much within feminism, a contentious issue. A range of arguments is put forth for establishing the start of a feminist 'wave.' These vary from waves being defined by generations, with each new generation establishing a new 'wave,' or by stressing differences and tensions between the aims and ideologies associated with each particular wave. However, feminism ebbs and flows within generations, with various issues resurfacing in a cyclical fashion. In an exploration of the differences and similarities between feminist waves, Michele Beyers and Diane Crocker seek to problematize the portrayal of feminist waves in the media, arguing that popular media has 'played a role in perpetuating the idea of conflicting waves of feminism'.[1] As with differences between 'Western feminism' and third-world feminism,' there are significant ideological differences within singular 'waves' that belie the notion of the concept of a wave as able to capture accurately or conceptualise all feminist activity within a single, uniform movement. Angela McRobbie has also argued convincingly against using the wave model to describe feminist movements, writing:

> [n]ot only does this feed into a linear narrative of generationally led progress […] but it also stifles the writing of the kind of complex history of feminisms and of multiple feminist modernities that would challenge the often journalistic histories, those that unfailingly have beginnings and endings […].[2]

Now, apparently on the cusp of the 'fourth wave' this oversimplification is evident in the depiction of a feminism that is presented as having sprung from nowhere.

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[1] Michele Byers and Diane Crocker, 'Feminist cohorts and waves: Attitudes of junior female academics,' in *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol.35, issue 1, (January/February 2011), pp.1-11, p.3.

[2] Angela McRobbie, 'Inside and Outside the Feminist Academy,' in *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol.24, no.59, (March 2009), pp.123-138, p.126.

An interview with Laura Bates, the founder of Everyday Sexism, hails her as 'a leading figure in what is becoming known as the fourth wave of feminism,'[3] yet the headline quotes Bates as saying, ''Two years ago, I didn't know what feminism meant''. [4] This, we are reassured, is a common feature of fourth-wave feminism, where:

> other fourth-wave feminists tend to be a lot like her, not veteran activists steeped in feminist texts and brandishing manifestoes, but newcomers who had come across gender inequality, saw it was unfair, and decided to do something about it.[5]

In fact, Bates is presented as battling against 'feminism's achievements'[6] in her attempts to convince people that sexism and misogyny are still relevant issues for women today. Fourth wave feminism, as it is attributed to Bates, is thus presented as less of a wave that has gathered strength from those that have gone before it, than as a distinct and separate ideology that has emerged to deal with a specific set of circumstances, namely prevailing sexism. The paradoxes and possibilities of the fourth wave are explored in greater depth in the final chapter of this thesis, especially in relation to what the fourth wave can learn from previous 'waves' and the impact that reconceptualizing the relationship between feminism and multiculturalism could have in creating a feminism that resists essentialism. Although in many ways discussions of how to disrupt essentialist notions of gender and women's experiences have been prominent within feminist debates since the end of the second wave, globalization and multiculturalism have shifted the parameters of these debates, bringing what were at times abstract discussions about women who were conceptualized as elsewhere or 'other,' increasingly closer. Furthermore, world events such as 9/11 and the London bombings of 7/7 have again shifted debates surrounding multiculturalism. Those who were predominantly 'elsewhere' are now not only closer, but are also increasingly portrayed as threatening or problematic to a 'Western' way of life. Thus, perceived gains made by second-wave feminists in challenging universalist and essentialist ideas can, in places, be seen as being eroded rather than furthered, as we register the arrival of the fourth wave.

As the wave analogy is undoubtedly problematic, perhaps it is more productive to think of feminism as split into particular schools of thought in order to attempt to convey the

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[3] Decca Aitkenhead, 'Laura Bates Interview: 'Two years ago, I didn't know what feminism meant,'' in *The Guardian*, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/24/laura-bates-interview-everyday-sexism [accessed 27th February 2014].
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.

nuance and differences contained within each 'wave' of feminism, as well as the similarities. Each school has offered, and continues to offer, various advantages and disadvantages for analyzing women's positions in relation to 'patriarchy' – an increasingly contested term. Postmodern feminism, for example, attempts to address essentialist notions associated with the 'modern' Enlightenment values that advocated the concept of universally applicable ideas such as truth, knowledge or justice. Christine Di Stefano suggests, postmodernism 'promotes a politics and theory of disbelief towards the language of rights, rationality, interests, and autonomy as presumed characteristics of a humanistic self [...].'[7] Postmodernism could then simply be assumed to be in conflict with feminism, which, as Di Stefano asserts is 'firmly, if ambivalently, located in the modernist ethos, [...].'[8] Liberal feminism, for example, can be thought to be particularly dependent on Enlightenment values in arguing that women should benefit from these principles to an equal degree as men. Valerie Bryson asserts, 'feminist demands for equal rights have usually started from the claims that women are "as good as men", that they are entitled to full human rights, and that they should be free to explore their full potential in equal competition with men.'[9] However, although postmodern theorists resist the grand theory of universal rights, that is not to insist that postmodernism and feminism are wholly incompatible.

Postmodernism's problematizing of grand narratives and essentialism has offered feminism multiple benefits, as well as posing certain problems for practice. The questioning of a collective identity based on a biological understanding of gender, as theorized by feminists such as Judith Butler, also provides a framework for thinking through difference in relation to race, class and culture. Butler stresses the performativity of gender, challenging essentialist ideas of the category of 'woman'. Although abandoning the notion of a unified category called 'women' could seemingly undermine any collective movement that is seeking equality based on the notion that women are as good as men, by calling attention to the normative value of such a category, Butler instead allows for a wider acceptance of feminism. She asserts, '[w]hen the category is understood as representing a set of values or dispositions, it becomes normative in character and, hence, exclusionary in principle.'[10] This has meant

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[7] Christine Di Stefano, 'Dilemmas of Difference: Feminism, Modernity, and Postmodernism,' in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda J. Nicholson, (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.63-64.
[8] Ibid., p.64.
[9] Valerie Bryson, *Feminist Political Theory*, second edition, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p.139.
[10] Judith Butler, 'Gender Trouble, Feminist Theory, and Psychoanalytic Discourse', in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda J. Nicholson, (London: Routledge, 1990), p.325

that a 'variety of women from various cultural positions have refused to recognize themselves as "women" in the terms articulated by feminist theory with the result that these women fall outside the category [...].'[11] Far from rendering feminism unintelligible, postmodernism has in fact allowed for the movement to become more inclusive. As Butler argues:

> [t]he loss of that reification of gender relations ought not to be lamented as the failure of feminist political theory, but, rather, affirmed as the promise of the possibility of complex and generative subject-positions as well as coalitional strategies that neither presuppose nor fix their constitutive subjects in their place.[12]

However, Butler's concept of the performativity of gender is not simply that gender is a performance that can be picked up, or indeed suspended, at will. Instead, Butler argues against the notion of a unified or coherent self who exists outside of the performance, suggesting that 'gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed.'[13]

It is this idea of the "doing without the doer"[14] that Seyla Benhabib suggests is problematic for the relationship between feminism and postmodernism. Benhabib questions Butler's Nietzschean position, stressing that '[g]iven how fragile and tenuous women's sense of selfhood is in many cases, […] this reduction of female agency to a "doing without the doer" at best appears to me to be making a virtue out of necessity.'[15] She argues that 'feminist appropriations of Nietzsche on this question, therefore, can only lead to self-incoherence.'[16] Benhabib seeks to answer the question posed by Nancy Fraser and Linda J. Nicholson, in 'Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter Between Feminism and Postmodernism.' Fraser and Nicholson ask, '[h]ow can we conceive a version of criticism without philosophy which is robust enough to handle the tough job of analyzing sexism in all its endless variety and monotonous similarity?'[17] Benhabib's response is that 'we cannot, and it is this which makes me doubt that as feminists we can adopt postmodernism as a theoretical

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[11] Ibid., p.325

[12] Ibid., p.339

[13] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (London: Routledge, 1990), p.25.

[14] Seyla Benhabib, 'Feminism and Postmodernism: An Uneasy Alliance,' in *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*, Seyla Benhabib, Judith Butler, Drucilla Cornell and Nancy Fraser, (London: Routledge, 1995), p.22.

[15] Ibid., p.22.

[16] Ibid., p.21.

[17] Nancy Fraser and Linda J. Nicholson, 'Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter Between Feminism and Postmodernism,' in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda J. Nicholson, (London: Routledge, 1990), p.34.

ally.'[18] However, she does not dismiss the idea that postmodernism can offer anything to feminism entirely. She also notes the possibilities afforded by questioning grand narratives of history that have often overlooked or ignored minority voices or women. What she is deeply critical of is what she terms 'the strong version of the "Death of the Subject"' that, she argues, 'is not compatible with the goals of feminism.'[19]

Benhabib's caution over the relationship between postmodernism and feminism highlights the link between postmodern feminism and 'postfeminism.' This is not a 'post-feminism' associated with the idea of a time after feminism, or the realization of feminist aims – as the term, when presented with the hyphen, is used in this thesis – but rather a 'postfeminism' that implies feminism as having undergone a radical transformation in relation to the values that postmodernism questions. Stéphanie Genz and Benjamin A. Brabon write extensively on the multiple meanings and complexities of 'postfeminism' and 'post-feminism' including the possible differences that can be accounted for by choosing to omit or include the hyphen. Genz and Brabon argue that '[t]he disagreements over and multiplicity of postfeminism's meaning(s) are to a large extent due to indefiniteness and precariousness of the 'post' prefix whose connotations may be complex if not contradictory.'[20] They suggest that in their decision to forgo the hyphen, they are seeking 'to credit and endow postfeminism with a certain cultural independence that acknowledges its existence as a conceptual entity in its own right.'[21] However, this strategy is by no means universal, and 'postfeminism' when it appears without a hyphen cannot always be assumed to be denoting a separate and distinct form of feminism rather than a time after feminism. For example, in her discussion 'The Right to Be Beautiful: Postfeminist Identity and Consumer Beauty Advertising' Michelle M. Lazer refers to a 'postfeminist' discourse '[o]riginating in Western media and popular culture' that 'involves the popularization of feminist ideas, presented as if widely accepted and assumed, even while taking distance from feminism as a politics of the past.'[22] Within the body of this thesis, 'post-feminism' as is associated with this idea of the realization of

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[18] Seyla Benhabib, 'Feminism and Postmodernism: An Uneasy Alliance', in *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*, Seyla Benhabib, Judith Butler, Drucilla Cornell and Nancy Fraser, (London: Routledge, 1995), p.25.

[19] Ibid., p.20.

[20] Stéphanie Genz and Benjamin A. Brabon, *Postfeminism: Cultural Texts and Theories*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p.3.

[21] Ibid., p.3.

[22] Michelle M. Lazer, 'The Right to Be Beautiful: Postfeminist Identity and Consumer Beauty Advertising' in *New Femininities, Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, ed. Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff, (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2013), p.38.

feminist aims and thus the irrelevance of feminism to contemporary society, or at least 'Western' society, will be signalled by the inclusion of the hyphen. However, other theorists quoted within this research do not consistently take this approach.

Ann Brooks suggests that the distinction between 'post-feminism' as associated with a time after, or even backlash against feminism, can in part be attributed to Susan Faludi's book, *Backlash* (1992). Faludi's analysis of discussions of feminism in the media suggested that the term 'post-feminism' was being used to discredit the notion that feminism was still a valuable or relevant political movement. As such, Brooks links this understanding of post-feminism with a 'widespread "popular" conception' that is the 'result of the appropriation of the term by the media'.[23] In contrast, she suggests that 'postfeminism' as associated with 'the conceptual shift within feminist debates around equality to a focus on debates around difference',[24] particularly as a result of feminism engaging with postmodernism, post-structuralism and post-colonialism, is linked to 'the feminist academic community.'[25] However, I would suggest that as feminist academics increasingly turn their attention to both 'popular' media's portrayal of women, and the impact of 'popular' media on women's lives, this binary is being steadily eroded. Of course, how popular media 'impacts' on women's lives is of itself a contentious issue. Various disciplines and theorists have sought to address this issue, ranging from sociology and cultural studies to media studies. As this is predominantly a humanities-based thesis, I have gravitated towards a textual analysis approach when analysing all the literature, 'media' or otherwise, in this research. However, as discussed in greater depth later on in this introduction, the decision to utilize a textual analysis approach should not be seen to convey the assumption that a text's 'meaning' is fixed, or indeed that its 'impact' is always stable or as the author intended. In fact, with regard to this thesis, particular emphasis is placed on how a text's 'meaning' can shift or change, and is at times manipulated to suit different contexts, audiences or historical moments of enunciation. As is evident throughout this thesis, the frequently expressed 'feminist' aims or intentions of an author do not necessarily lead to their work having an uncomplicated or universally intelligible 'feminist' meaning or impact.

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[23] Ann Brooks, *Postfeminisms: Feminism, Cultural Theory and Cultural Forms*, (London: Routledge, 1997), p.2.
[24] Ibid., p.4.
[25] Ibid., p.4.

There is often not such a distinct line between those apparently advocating a 'new' form of feminism, and those who could be considered as part of the feminist 'backlash.' This can in part be associated with prominent, well-known feminists changing their position on certain issues, and in fact often adopting an entirely counter position to that which they had previously advocated. For example, Naomi Wolf, following the publication of *The Beauty Myth* (1990), quickly renounced what is termed as 'victim feminism,'[26] a form of feminism easily associated with her book, in favour of promoting a 'new' power feminism that stressed the importance and capabilities of the individual. Her vision of the third wave of feminism, set out in *The Beauty Myth,* and discussed in greater detail in chapter 4, described a movement that must focus on the collective and analyse how the marketplace was repressing women through a 'divide and conquer'[27] technique. By 1994, with the publication of *Fire with Fire: The New Female Power and How to Use It*, this focus was swiftly replaced with a 'feminism' whose ideals were more broadly in line with post-feminism. Women suddenly went from being a collective, oppressed or restricted by a society, and crucially, industry, that dictated how they should look and behave, forcing them into competition with one another, to individual agents, capable of 'choosing' to manipulate the 'beauty myth' to suit their own ends.

However, to complicate matters further, this shift from the collective to the individual is not solely a feature of a so-called 'power feminism.' The work of postcolonial, postmodern and poststructuralist feminists, as already noted, has also challenged the notion of women as a collective whole, arguing that frequently this simply reflects an essentialist and overly simplistic view of women, based on dominant, white, middle-class experiences. As Bryson observes, '[a] key aspect of white women's privilege has been their ability to assume that when they talked about themselves they were talking about all women, and many white feminists have unthinkingly generalised from their own situation, [...].'[28] The issues of white privilege and the multiple assumptions of white Western feminism are an overarching theme of this thesis, culminating in exploring the possibilities that the fourth wave may offer in both acknowledging and moving away from a feminism that promotes the white, Western voice, above all others.

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[26] Alyson Cole, '"There Are No Victims in This Class": On Female Suffering and Anti-"Victim Feminism,"' in *NWSA Journal*, vol.11, no.1, (Spring Issue), 72-96, p.75.
[27] Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*, (London: Vintage, 1990), p.284.
[28] Valerie Bryson, *Feminist Political Theory: an Introduction*, Second Ed, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p.227.

Within the body of this thesis, the term post-feminism or post-feminist, is used to address the notion that feminist aims have broadly been realised, equality has been achieved, and thus we are living in a 'post-feminist' society. The often unchallenged or unquestioned view of post-feminism, as presented both in media discourse and current political rhetoric, is of interest to this research for various reasons. More closely aligned to Brooks' academic understanding of postfeminism, and thus highlighting the interrelated aspects of the seemingly distinct concepts of post-feminism and postfeminism, I see exploring the slippage between these two concepts as a means of disrupting persistent essentialist positions adopted in relation to the perceived, or even manufactured, tensions between feminism and multiculturalism. Although this implies a postfeminist approach linked to post-colonialism, post-structuralism and postmodernism, it also closely engages with the notion of post-feminism as a time after feminism, and specifically the assumption that 'Western' women are now all benefitting from living in these post-feminist times. Post-feminism can, in this context, paradoxically be seen as both the rejection of feminism and a celebration of feminist gains. In many ways similar to much third wave feminist rhetoric, post-feminism rejects the idea of women as victims of structural oppression, instead, seeking to point to the gains made by women as individuals, if not as a group, in order to establish that the project of feminism has reached a successful conclusion, and thus feminist analysis is no longer relevant or necessary. As Angela McRobbie observes, '[p]ost-feminism registers, time and again, the seeming gains and successes of the second wave of the women's movement, implying that 'things have changed', so feminism is now irrelevant.'[29] This is not to suggest that a 'post-feminist' society fails to acknowledge the presence of inequality, but rather post-feminism seeks to remove gender from the equation.

There is, of course, a paradox in stressing the belief, that, as Rosalind Gill and Ngaire Donaghue have argued, 'contemporary media culture in the West is marked by a distinctly postfeminist sensibility,'[30] while also highlighting the recent wealth of interest that the Western media has taken in feminism and feminist issues. This is especially evident when defining post-feminism as, in part, characterized by a backlash towards feminist aims.

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[29] Angela McRobbie, 'Beyond post-feminism,' in *Public Policy Research*, (September/November 2011), pp.179-184, p.180.
[30] Rosalind Gill and Ngaire Donaghue, 'As if Postfeminism Had Come True: The Turn to Agency in Cultural Studies of 'Sexualisation,'' in *Gender, Agency and Coercion*, ed. Sumi Madhok, Anne Phillips, and Kaplan Wilson, (London: Palgrave Macmillian, 2013), p.241.

However, it is the position of this thesis that many of the media examples cited that are expressly promoting feminism, fit broadly within the concept of 'power feminism.' As already suggested, this can be closely linked with a post-feminist perspective. There is also the question of whether the feminism promoted or displayed in mainstream media is actually feminism at all, or indeed whether media attention is something that actually benefits feminism. As McRobbie argues'[t]his idea of holding onto some mild, and media-friendly version of feminism, has been a consistent feature of the post-feminist backlash, and it becomes more emphatic as it evolves into a substitute for feminism.'[31]

Furthermore, media articles focussed on feminism often seek to stress the divided, or 'catty' nature of feminism rather than celebrate feminist ideology in its various and multiple forms. This is an issue discussed at greater length in chapter 2, where debates over the validity of intersectional feminism are explored. The final chapter of this thesis, addressing the possibilities for the fourth wave, also argues that, although much of the feminism evident in the Western media furthers the notion of the West as post-feminist, rather than presenting the case for a newly revitalised feminist movement, there are signs of emerging voices that are challenging this media-friendly feminism, predominantly through social media sites such as *Twitter*. The emergence of this fourth wave can be conceptualised not only as a backlash against the backlash of post-feminism, but also as an unforeseen consequence of the promotion of Western feminism in the name of the 'war on terror' and foreign invasions, and the mobilizing of feminist rhetoric into mainstream media and public discourses in attempts to discredit multiculturalism.

In exploring the role of feminisms across cultures, this thesis analyzes various textual sources, ranging from autobiographical accounts of women's lives, polemical and political writing, journalistic research and fictional depictions. By utilizing a wide range of sources, a multitude of voices will be heard, creating the kind of 'thick description' Clifford Geertz describes in his book *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1993). Geertz's notion of 'thick description', an idea developed from the work of Gilbert Ryle, is that it is not the method that defines ethnography, but rather the 'intellectual effort'.[32] This effort should seek to go beyond the simple stating or recording of facts, something that is described as the mode of 'thin description.' Instead there should be an attempt to create or convey a 'thick description'.

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[31] Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change*, (London: Sage Publishing, 2009), p.31.

[32] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, (London, Fontana Press, 1993), p.6.

Geertz describes this as requiring an analysis that is, 'sorting out the structures of signification […] and determining their social ground and import'[33] rather than simply acknowledging their existence. Leti Volpp also notes the usefulness in taking a 'thick description' approach when constructing feminist analysis across cultures, arguing that 'thick description' provides 'a textured and detailed analysis […].'[34] Although this implies a sociological or anthropological approach, the exploration of literature that examines its social and political context, as well as its impact, is also the concern of the literary critic. Homi K. Bhabha states in *The Location of Culture* (1994), '[a]s literary creatures and political animals we ought to concern ourselves with the understanding of human action and the social world as a moment when something is beyond control, but it is not beyond accommodation.'[35] In order to accommodate this 'act of writing the world'[36] Bhabha argues that the critic's task is 'to show how the historical agency is transformed through the signifying process; how the historical event is represented in a discourse that is somehow beyond control.'[37] Bhabha asserts the importance and responsibility that the critic has in articulating this process of signifying and representing events.

This responsibility also necessitates exploring and negotiating the location of oneself within a culture, aware of the complex relationship between author, reader and text and interrogating where, and why, one situates meaning within this. Writing on the methodology of feminist textual analysis, Lynne Pearce comments that:

> [n]egotiating a position for oneself within this complicated set of author/text/reader relations is […] one of the key methodological concerns that besets the textual critic […]. Indeed, for literary critics, who sometimes have difficulty understanding what is exactly meant by 'methodology' in a discipline so unlike the data-based research of the social sciences, the decision of where to situate oneself […] may justifiably be thought of as *the* methodological issue.[38]

For the purpose of this thesis the production of meaning will be viewed as an ongoing process that results from the interaction between author, text and reader, in order to situate it within a wider cultural frame. This is not to discount the intentions of the author entirely, often made

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[33] Ibid., p.9.

[34] Leti Volpp, 'Framing Cultural Difference: Immigrant Women and Discourses of Tradition,' in *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, vol.22, no.1, (Duke University Press, 2011), pp.90-110, p.97.

[35] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (Oxon, Routledge Classics, 2004), pp.17-18.

[36] Ibid., p.18.

[37] Ibid., p.18.

[38] Lynne Pearce, 'Finding a place from which to write: the methodology of textual practice', in *Feminist Cultural Theory Process and Production*, ed. By Beverley Skeggs, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p.81.

explicit in polemical or political writings, but rather, it is not to assume that the text will automatically have the cultural impact that the author intended, or that the understanding of the reader will be that which was envisioned.

The decision to include fiction in this thesis has a dual purpose. Primarily, literature can offer beneficial insights into existing cultural values and attitudes, but also can serve as a vehicle for a process similar to Maria Lugones' notion of 'playful "world"-travel'.[39] As discussed in chapter 2, Lugones' theory of playful "world"-travelling stresses the importance of engaging with women who are 'other,' not simply by recognizing their existence, but through an act of 'love' born out of an attempt 'to see oneself in other women who are quite different from oneself'.[40] Although Lugones does not mention literature, or reading fictional accounts of other women's lives, I would argue that immersion into another woman's story can encourage a form of "world"-travelling where one can abandon their own perspective, albeit temporarily. This allows for recognizing oneself in another, with whose character, a reader can be invited to empathize, or even briefly inhabit, increasing our understanding of both the 'other' and ourselves. The concept of 'playful "world"-travelling', when combined with Rosalind Gill's notion of 'critical respect', an idea that allows for the voice and agency of an individual to be acknowledged whilst simultaneously maintaining an awareness of the various social structures that may influence or impact on the individual, is, I believe, key to progressing the fourth wave of feminism.

The role of literature in representing, and thus to an extent, establishing women's existence and lending weight to their experiences, should also not be underestimated. As Barbara Smith has argued in her essay, 'Towards a Black Feminist Criticism,' cited in the previous chapter of this research, the absence of Black lesbian literature reflected an inability of, or resistance to, accepting the realities of Black lesbian experiences. This lack of literature meant a complete lack of representation. Smith argues: '[t]he near nonexistence of Black lesbian literature which other Black lesbians and I so deeply feel has everything to do with the politics of our lives, the total suppression of identity that all Black women, lesbian or not, must face.'[41] "World"-travelling through literature can then not only provide a way of making

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[39] Maria Lugones, 'Playfulness, "World"-Travelling, and Loving Perception,' in *Hypatia*, Vol.2, no.2, (Summer 1987), pp. 3-19, p.5.
[40] Ibid., p.6.
[41] Barbara Smith, 'Toward a Black Feminist Criticism,' in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter, (London: Virago Press, 1986), pp.168-185, p.181.

'real' those whose existence is often marginal or hidden from view, it can also offer a way of transcending simplistic stereotypes, rendering the 'other' as at least partially or temporarily knowable and recognizable.

Engaging with media in the form of newspaper and online articles has also lent a sense of urgency to this project, as new issues or discussions surrounding cross-cultural feminism or multiculturalism have emerged on an almost daily basis. As these debates, or the contexts in which they are taking place, are incredibly dynamic, it has also been a challenge to respond to continual shifts and changes. For example, following my discussion of the problematic and often somewhat paternal attitude evident in Femen's engagement with Muslim women, claims emerged that the group is in fact run by a man. At a screening of the documentary, *Ukraine is not a Brothel*, director Kitty Green announced that Victor Svyatski was 'the mastermind behind the group.'[42] Writing in *The Independent* in September 2013, Geoffrey Macnab reports how Green revealed 'that Svyatski is not simply a supporter of Femen but its founder and éminence grise.'[43] After living with Femen members and filming their activism in order to make her documentary, Green is quoted as saying 'I realised how this organisation was run. He [Svyatski] was quite horrible with the girls. He would scream at them and call them bitches.'[44] Macnab also writes '[w]hen the Femen founder finally spoke to Ms Green, he sought to justify his role within the organisation and acknowledged the paradox of being a "patriarch" running a feminist protest group. "These girls are weak," he says in the film.'[45] This revelation does not undermine my argument regarding the patriarchal attitude Femen displays towards Muslim women over the issue of veiling, but rather, it reinforces my position.

The continuing evolution of the story, however, did raise issues over when the research for this thesis should stop. Indeed, many of the issues discussed in this thesis are now so frequently the subjects of intense media debates that deciding where a chapter should end, or when a discussion could ever seem satisfactorily concluded, has been an overarching concern. The decision to address such contentious and highly contemporary issues,

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[42] Geoffrey Macnab, 'The Man Who Made Femen: New Film Outs Victor Svyatski as the Mastermind Behind the Protest Group and its Breast-Baring Stunts,' in *The Independent*, http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/the-man-who-made-femen-new-film-outs-victor-svyatski-as-the-mastermind-behind-the-protest-group-and-its-breastbaring-stunts-8797042.html [accessed 26th February 2014].
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.

particularly through the inclusion of seemingly inherently unstable texts such as newspaper articles and online media, perhaps leads this research to the area of Cultural Studies. As Stuart Hall comments, writing on the inception of Cultural Studies as a discipline:

> Cultural Studies was an 'engaged' set of disciplines, addressing awkward but relevant issues about contemporary society, often without the benefit of that scholarly detachment or distance which the passage of time alone sometimes confers on other fields of study. The 'contemporary' – which otherwise defined our terms too narrowly – was, by definition, hot to handle. This tension (between what might loosely be called 'political' and intellectual concerns) has shaped Cultural Studies ever since.[46]

Certainly it was hoped that in taking an approach that combines the more 'traditional' or established principles of a Humanities thesis – namely utilizing textual analysis and literary theory in addressing 'literary' texts – with the broader concerns of Cultural Studies, as suggested by Hall, would allow for a fuller analysis of contemporary feminist discussions taking place both within and outside of the confines of academia. Thus this research has sought to address the 'tension' between 'political' and 'intellectual' concerns in an effort to ensure that, as Hall suggests, 'the answers should match, in complexity and seriousness, the complexity of the issues it addressed.'[47] Furthermore, 'that those answers, when and if found, would have consequences beyond the confines of an intellectual debate.'[48]

Although it is important to acknowledge the political act of producing feminist theory and the impact this can have, there is also the need to acknowledge the potential and, possibly inevitable, gaps between political theory and practice, and explore the ways in which these can be addressed. bell hooks examines such gaps at length, and their possible causes, in her book *Feminist Theory From Margin to Center* (2000). hooks recognizes that there is 'often little congruity between feminist theory and feminist practice',[49] something that she argues intensifies polarized debates between those engaged in activism and those engaged with producing and studying theory: between activists and academics. Although sometimes seen in conflict, the understanding of theory and practice as binary opposites is both unhelpful and misleading; instead theory can be seen as 'the guiding set of beliefs and principles that becomes the basis for action.'[50] hooks writes that there has been the 'formation of a false

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[46] Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Studies and the Centre: some problematics and problems,' in *Culture, Media, Language*, ed. Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe and Paul Willis, (London: Routledge, 1992), p.17.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.
[49] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory From Margin to Center*, (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p.113.
[50] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory From Margin to Center*, (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p.32.

dichotomy'[51] between theory and practice, leading those within the feminist movement who see education as a 'bourgeois privilege'[52], to value practice over theory. Like Mohanty, hooks advocates for a 'very real need to unite'[53] theory and practice and acknowledge how each influences the other. She suggests various methods for achieving this, ranging from the relatively simple, yet effective, linguistic strategy of stating 'I advocate feminism' rather than 'I am a feminist,' to creating and producing research that is accessible beyond the walls of academia. Although deceptively a very small change, in asserting that one advocates feminism rather than that one is a feminist, hooks argues that the focus is shifted from the personal, 'that feminism is an identity or lifestyle'[54] to the understanding of feminism as a 'political commitment'.[55]

This shift from 'I am' to 'I advocate' also moves away from the kind of absolutism and stereotyping that precludes or discourages women from associating themselves with feminist actions or thought due to feeling that they don't, or can't, identify with the images of feminism on offer. It encourages the comprehension of feminism as nuanced, rather than as a monolith, allowing for an appreciation and acceptance of the multiplicity of feminist thought, identities and experiences that create feminism(s). With regard to multiculturalism, the shift from 'I am' to 'I advocate' provides the space for women who live within seemingly patriarchal cultures to advocate the rights of women without having to embody them. This is not to go against the adage that the personal is political, but rather to acknowledge that people have multiple personal and political identities. With regard to this research it allows the exploration of multiple issues, feminisms and feminist perspectives that often fall outside of my own individual experience as a woman, analysing the points at which they meet or divide, in order to add to the discussion between feminisms and feminists and increase understanding and awareness of a wide variety of issues that form the body of contemporary feminist debates.

In terms of making theory accessible, hooks comments that 'there will be no mass-based feminist movement as long as feminist ideas are understood only by the well-educated

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[51] Ibid., p.113.
[52] Ibid., p.113.
[53] Ibid., p.30.
[54] Ibid., p.31.
[55] Ibid., p.31.

few.'[56] However, she does qualify that 'works should not be dismissed simply because they are difficult.'[57] The decision to utilize a variety of sources in this research can be seen, then, as not just an attempt to include a multitude of feminist voices, but also to acknowledge that a great many interesting and important feminist discussions take place outside the walls of academia. Currently, a large number of feminist debates take place via social media, blogging and *Twitter*, where feminists are utilizing the internet to discuss increasingly global issues on global forums. This not only brings feminist theories to a wider audience, stopping feminism being the preserve of 'the well-educated few,' it also helps further link theory with practice when social media sites are utilized to organise feminist rallies and direct action. However, it is important to note that even accessing these debates outside of the confines of academia requires a certain amount of privilege, not least involving having access to the internet and the time in which to use it. Within academia, too, feminist debates are not any longer confined solely to the remit of Gender Studies; they are taking place across disciplines and departments, encouraging a wider engagement with feminist issues.

Homi K. Bhabha also argues against the view of theory as purely the proprietary of academia, stating that 'there is a damaging and self-defeating assumption that theory is necessarily the elite language of the socially and culturally privileged.'[58] He further argues that it 'is a sign of political maturity to accept that there are many forms of political writing whose different effects are obscured when they are divided between the 'theoretical' and the 'activist'.'[59] Bhabha suggests that both theory and activism are, 'like the recto and verso of a sheet of paper,'[60] inseparable, with neither being more favoured than the other. As bell hooks asserts, 'the formation of a liberatory feminist theory and praxis is a collective responsibility, one that must be shared.'[61] To ignore the multiplicity of feminist thought and differing female experiences within a patriarchal system of dominance is to exclude certain women from feminist discourse and practice. However, the creation or utilization of a form of feminist theory that seeks to speak on behalf of all women, or liberate those who have yet to seek their own liberation, is deeply problematic.

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[56] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory From Margin to Center*, (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p.113.
[57] Ibid., p.113.
[58] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (Oxon, Routledge Classics, 2004), p.28.
[59] Ibid., p.32.
[60] Ibid., p.32.
[61] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p.17.

Acknowledgement of this responsibility in the process of articulating and representing textual evidence requires an awareness of my own voice and cultural background within the narrative of the thesis, adding an autoethnographic element to the research process. John W. Creswell suggests, 'in feminist research approaches, the goals are to establish collaborative and nonexploitative relationships, to place the researcher within the study so as to avoid objectification, and conduct research that is transformative.'[62] The aim is for a certain amount of transparency to be achieved whilst representing and commenting on the lives and experiences of women that are not my own. I am a white, Western, heterosexual, cis-gendered, woman. I am also an academic who could tentatively be described as 'middle-class' with regard to cultural capital, if not financial security. However, as with labels such as 'Western' or 'third-world' feminist, these identity descriptors often obscure as much as they reveal. Furthermore, people may frequently occupy seemingly conflicting or incompatible positions. For example, I am also a single parent, who, having narrowly avoided the assumed 'stigma' of being a teenager mother by a matter of hours, took an unconventional route into academia after leaving school at the age of fifteen with no qualifications.

At the conception of this thesis I was living in a predominantly Muslim Asian area of Gloucester. My daughter attended the local primary school, where a large majority of pupils were of Asian or British Asian ethnicity.[63] Although the head teacher, Tim Cooper, received the 'Anne-Marie Schimmel Award for championing a Muslim cause at the Muslim News Awards in London'[64] in 2010, community tensions were often high. Following the events of 9/11 there was widespread concern amongst the Muslim community over the risk of sporadic reprise attacks. These tensions were increased when, in 2005, local man Saajid Badat, was 'convicted of plotting to blow up an aircraft – he was conspiring with Richard Reid – and received a reduced sentence in return for co-operating with the British authorities.'[65] The Badat family lived on the same road as I did. Saajid Badat had attended the local grammar

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[62] John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design, Choosing Among Five Traditions*, (London: Sage Publications, 1998), p.83.
[63] Widden Primary School, Gloucester, on *Find My School*, http://www.findmyschool.co.uk/schooldetails.aspx?id=15472 [accessed Thursday 30th January 2014].
[64] 'Muslim News Award for Gloucester Head Teacher Tim Cooper' in *BBC Gloucestershire*, http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/gloucestershire/hi/people_and_places/religion_and_ethics/newsid_8575000/8575024.stm [accessed 30th January 2014].
[65] Laura Trevelyan, 'Shoe-Bomber Supergrass Saajid Badat Testifies in US', in *BBC News*, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-17820810 [accessed 30th January 2014].

school alongside many of my peers. Described by a BBC News report as a 'supergrass',[66] Badat gave evidence against al-Qaeda leaders that 'provided an insight into life in the al-Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan circa 2001, and painted a portrait of the studious young man from Gloucester who became radicalised.'[67] Badat claimed that he 'decided not to go through with his "mission"' as he was 'reluctant, frightened and worried about the implications for his family.'[68] Even having decided not to complete his task of blowing up a passenger aircraft, the repercussions for his family were evident. Badat's father was working as driving instructor at the time. Following his son's arrest, the family name was removed from the car. More recently, following the murder of Drummer Lee Rigby, in Woolwich, Gloucester has again returned to the news. Two men were convicted of an arson attack on the Mosque on Ryecroft Street in June 2013, the street on which I used to live. The attack is thought to be part of a feared surge in hate crimes against the Muslim community, in the wake of Lee Rigby's murder.

I also spend a considerable amount of time in France, visiting my parents, who although perhaps not immediately obviously, are themselves migrants. However, the notion of the ex-patriot English community as immigrants is often lost in discussions of French policy on immigration, especially amongst the ex-patriots themselves. For example, many of the English ex-patriots I have spoken with support the French decision to ban wearing the niqab, or 'veil', in public spaces, on the grounds of promoting integration. However, they are often less keen on the idea of introducing any policy that would make having a proficient grasp of the French language a prerequisite of living in France, an issue that arguably has as much impact on one's ability to integrate within a native culture as the adoption of the veil, if not more. Debates surrounding women's right to veil, and the visual 'othering' of Muslim women, specifically in Europe, are addressed at greater length in chapter 3 of this thesis.

Thus, in part, this thesis grew out of my own experiences of multiculturalism and feminism, and how these lived experiences increasingly seemed at odds with media representations of each. Although throughout the body of this research I do not refer to my own personal history as evidence for my critique, these experiences have undoubtedly played a part in shaping my analysis. What is evident from looking back on thirteen years of

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[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.

multiculturalism post-9/11 is the persistence of many of the debates surrounding notions of the fixed cultural assumptions of 'East' and 'West.' However, what I was unable to predict at the conception of this thesis was quite how much of a central role gender and 'feminism' would play in maintaining and establishing these assumptions in the mainstream media.

Western feminism – or perhaps more accurately, 'post-feminism' – is presented as the solution or natural product of 'enlightenment,' with women being offered the false choice between the assumed liberation of the West, and the outdated and patriarchal attitudes ascribed to Eastern cultures. There is little critique of what Western feminism actually encompasses or whether the assumed progress of Western feminism is as unproblematic as is frequently portrayed. When this critique is present, it is often in the form of cultural relativism, suggesting feminists in the West should refrain from commenting on cultures and experiences that are not their own until all injustices and inequalities have been resolved within their own communities, or in arguing for a similarity of experience and oppression that seeks to present all forms of 'oppression' as essentially the same. This is particularly evident in some approaches to cross-cultural feminist analysis whereby make-up or cosmetic surgery, for example, is suggested as being a form of cultural oppression, on a par with the practice of veiling.

A notable, although by no means uncontroversial, example of this approach is Shelia Jeffreys' *Beauty and Misogyny: Harmful Cultural Practices in the West* (2005), a text that is referenced at various points throughout this thesis. Jeffreys argues that Western cultural practices such as cosmetic surgery or make-up should be included in the United Nations Fact Sheet on Harmful Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children.[69] She suggests that these practices are similarly linked to male dominance, like practices such as Female Genital Cutting, which is included in the factsheet. Aspects of Jeffreys' analysis are problematic, not least because, as Julie Ancis has commented, 'female genital mutilation, female infanticide, and giving away girls for marriage as young as 11 or 13 years of age need to be recognized as less of a "choice" than adult women initiating visits to plastic surgeons

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[69] United Nations, 'Fact Sheet No.23, Harmful Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children,' http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FactSheet23en.pdf [accessed 10th January 2013].

for silicone implants.'[70] Carolyn Pedwell also convincingly argues the limitations of such cross-cultural comparisons, specifically in relation to Jeffreys' text. Pedwell suggests:

> Jeffreys's analogy figures gendered relations of power as both ontologically prior to and separable from other systems of domination. This prevents her from theorizing the multiple axes of power as central to the diverse meanings of the varied forms which veiling and beauty practices take.[71]

Pedwell also rightly stresses that use of the term 'veiling' 'problematically homogenizes a diverse collection of practices.'[72] The limits of cross-cultural analogies, as suggested by Pedwell, are that they often place gender as the primary or sole root of oppression, minimizing the impact of factors such as race, class, sexual orientation or ability. Furthermore, as I argue throughout this thesis and specifically in relation to practices such as veiling or FGC, analysis of these practices often ignores the locality in which they take place and presents their meaning as fixed, failing to address the influence of location in the production of meaning. For example, although in one situation or location veiling could be seen as a form of submission, in another, it can equally become a means of resistance.

However, 'resistance' and 'submission' are also loaded terms in cross-cultural feminist analysis, with submission commonly assumed to be a negative, implying a failure to resist oppression or patriarchy. Resistance is presented as unproblematically linked to the notion of 'agency,' a concept that has become the pre-eminent factor in contemporary Western feminist analysis. 'Agency' as simplistically referring to the notion of choice, suggests that those who possess the ability to 'choose' are liberated individuals, empowered and in control. The absence of 'agency' is thus presented as a problem that feminism must seek to rectify. As Pedwell argues, 'agency' is understood 'as something that has been *denied* to girls and women and is thus something that might be *given back* to them.'[73] She suggests that this understanding of the relationship between 'agency' and cross-cultural feminism obscures the 'power-imbued process'[74] of giving women a voice, and, particularly with regard to Jeffreys, it enforces the binary notion that make-up and veiling constitute a submission to patriarchy, contrasted with a refusal to take part in these practices that is associated with feminist

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[70] Julie Ancis, 'Western Beauty Practices: Searching for the Cause and Effect,' in Psychology of Women Quaterly, (September 2006), pp. 330-331, p.331.

[71] Carolyn Pedwell, 'The Limits of Cross-Cultural Analogy: Muslim Veiling and 'Western' Fashion and Beauty Practices,' in *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, ed. Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp.188-199, p.192.

[72] Ibid., p.198.

[73] Ibid., p.194.

[74] Ibid., p.197.

resistance. In *The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (2005), Saba Mahmood challenges this simplistic notion of agency suggesting instead that agency can be present 'not only in those acts that resist the norms but also in multiple ways in which one inhabits norms'.[75] Problematizing the notion of agency as simplistically synonymous with choice and the absence of, or resistance to, coercion is also the subject of *Gender, Agency and Coercion* (2013), edited by Sumi Madhok, Anne Phillips and Kalpana Wilson. Madhok et al 'refuse dichotomous representations of the western subject as agential and the non-western one as devoid of agency.'[76] However, they also caution against celebrating the presence of agency 'in unlikely locations' suggesting that '[w]hen, as is often the case, the delighted gaze rests primarily on ethnic-minority or non-western women, this cannot but suggest the expectation that their agency might otherwise be missing.'[77] Exposure of this assumption then 'has the effect of invoking and reinforcing rather than disrupting that binary.'[78]

As with the limits of cross-cultural analogies, explored by Pedwell, the risk of reproducing binaries while attempting to dispute them is also present in unquestioningly 'counterclaiming'[79] that agency is not solely the preserve of the West. This is undoubtedly problematic. However, although Madhok et al suggest that 'simple oppositions between global North and global South are almost universally repudiated, most notably perhaps in the feminist literature, but elsewhere too',[80] I aim to show that dominant media discussions of cross-cultural feminist issues still persist with the assumption that those from non-Western cultures lack the capacity for agency. Furthermore, rather than celebrate the 'discovery' of agency in 'unlikely places,' this thesis instead questions whether the relationship between feminism and agency is cause for celebration at all. As Rosalind Gill has asked 'why are autonomous choices so fetishized?'[81] Gill argues that '[o]ne of the problems with this focus on autonomous choices is that it remains complicit with, rather than critical of, postfeminist and neoliberal discourses that see individuals as entrepreneurial actors who are rational,

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[75] Saba Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p.15.
[76] Sumi Madhok, Anne Phillips, and Kalpana Wilson, ed. *Gender, Agency, And Coercion,* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p.3.
[77] Ibid., p.3.
[78] Ibid., p.3.
[79] Ibid., p.3.
[80] Ibid., p.3.
[81] Rosalind Gill, 'The Difficulties and Dilemmas of Agency and 'Choice' for Feminism,' in *European Journal of Women's Studies*, vol.14, (2007), pp.69-80, p.73.

calculating and self-regulating.'[82] These issues are also discussed in *Gender, Agency, and Coercion*, where the slippage between agency and autonomy is explored, as well as questions over the role that overemphasizing the importance of agency has in obscuring structural oppression. As Kalpana Wilson argues in her discussion of the role of agency in gender and development discourses, questioning the 'tendency to 'relabel' the effects of hegemony and inequality as 'choice''[83] has created a 'process through which the use of the concept of agency can act to obscure or marginalise questions of subordination'.[84] This is 'all the more evident when "agency" is invoked to describe "choices" made under structural constraints which mean that women are simply "choosing" survival.'[85] Although focused on gender development discourses, Wilson's assertions are also applicable to discussions of post-feminism in the West.

Although Ancis notes in regard to Jeffreys' analysis of harmful cultural practices, that women in the West are not necessarily choosing 'survival' when they 'choose' cosmetic surgery, these 'choices' can be seen as a strategy for survival in a culture that overwhelmingly values and rewards women based on physical appearance. This is discussed at length in chapter 4, which addresses how a focus on agency and the post-feminist rhetoric of 'choice' is invoked in order to support and justify cosmetic surgery, and specifically Female Genital Cosmetic Surgery. Conspicuously absent in any media discussion of Female Genital Cosmetic Surgery is Female Genital Cutting, which is commonly referred to as Female Genital Mutilation. In fact the word 'mutilation' specifically removes notions of choice. Although there are certainly limits to cross-cultural comparisons of FGCS and FGC, not least in relation to questions of harm and issues of consent, I seek to show not only how differently these two practices are treated in mainstream discussions in order to disrupt underlying essentialist assumptions about the global North and South, but also that the language used to inspire collective action against the practice of FGC only further obscures the reality of the procedure, thus hindering campaigns that seek to heighten awareness of FGC and challenge it. In exploring the impact of race, culture and location on the meanings attributed to these procedures, and how this meaning can shift depending on the context

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[82] Ibid., p.74.

[83] Kalpana Wilson, 'Agency as 'Smart Economics': Neoliberalism, Gender and Development,' in *Gender, Agency, And Coercion,* ed. Sumi Madhok, Anne Phillips, and Kalpana Wilson, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp.84-99, p.85.

[84] Ibid., p.86.

[85] Ibid., p.86.

within which they take place, my intention has not been to argue that FGCS and FGC are the same, but rather to draw attention to how their meaning is at times presented as being dependant on their assumed difference. As Pedwell has suggested, '[i]nstead of asking how "the victim of female genital mutilation" and "the cosmetic surgery consumer" are inherently similar, we might more fruitfully explore how these imagined subjects are, in part, constructed and defined in and through one another, [...].'[86]

Furthermore, although I recognize many of the concerns that Pedwell raises with regard to cross-cultural feminist analogies and comparisons, and have attempted to avoid as far as possible falling into overly simplified portrayals that ignore differences based on race, culture, class or location in favour of promoting a sameness that places gender at its centre, I still believe cross-cultural comparisons offer a valuable tool to address essentialist notions of culture and challenge assumptions of the 'post-feminist' West. Pedwell claims:

> [i]n the context of the 'death of multiculturalism' in the United Kingdom and ongoing debates about cultural integration and the importance of fostering a 'British identity', cross-cultural feminist analysis of embodied practices may be appropriated by both government and media to diffuse the discomfort that cultural and ethnic diversity seem to produce.[87]

However, in contrast, it is the contention of this thesis that the appropriation of feminist analysis by the government and media is utilized to increase tensions, rather than diffuse them, in order to justify aggressive foreign policy and promote assimilation over integration. Feminist rhetoric is invoked to suggest that the 'death of multiculturalism' is both necessary and beneficial to women. Multiculturalism is presented within the media as a threat to Western feminist gains and the increasing normalization of 'post-feminist' culture.

As is argued throughout this thesis, in cross-cultural debates, cultures outside of the West are presented as distinctly pre-feminist in order to discredit multiculturalism and simultaneously offer shape to the notion of a 'British identity.' As with FGCS and FGC, the idea of 'British values' seems increasingly defined by what is not 'British' rather than what is. Reports of David Cameron's 'war on multiculturalism'[88] make vague reference to the

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[86] Carolyn Pedwell, *Feminism, Culture and Embodied Practice: the Rhetorics of Comparison*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), p.84.

[87] Ibid., p.3.

[88] Oliver Wright, 'Cameron: My war on multiculturalism', in *The Independent*, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/cameron-my-war-on-multiculturalism-2205074.html [accessed January 20th 2014].

importance of schools teaching 'the country's common culture'[89] and stress the need for a 'clear sense of national identity, open to everyone.'[90] However, Cameron fails to articulate how this clear and shared sense of national identity may be manifest, or what this 'country's common culture' may entail, other than to stress that a respect for women's rights is at its root. By 'warning Muslim groups that if they fail to endorse women's rights or promote integration they will lose all government funding',[91] Cameron has created an 'us' and 'them' that takes for granted the assumption that 'our' 'common culture' promotes the rights of women. Drawing attention to the various claims that Cameron's term as Prime Minister has, in fact, had a negative impact on the advancement of equality and women's rights, is not simply to explore the hypocrisy of his pronouncements. Rather, his comments display the deep-seated 'belief' that a respect for women is at the heart of a 'British cultural identity,' furthering the notion that Britain is inherently post-feminist. It also reinforces the idea that feminism and multiculturalism are two competing ideologies. The issue of gender has become central, even to seemingly unrelated conversations around multiculturalism and integration. As Anne Phillips notes, 'advocates of compulsory language classes promoted them in explicitly gendered terms, claiming that they would be particularly valuable in freeing older women from domestic seclusion and their enforced dependence on male family members.'[92] Phillips suggests this shift in the thinking and rhetoric surrounding multiculturalism is particularly 'striking'[93] in the Netherlands, where 'a right to be taught one's mother tongue in primary schools, had been a notable part of public policy from the mid-1970s.'[94] As previously suggested, I would also argue that the importance of mastering the native language is conspicuously absent as a cause for concern when those immigrating are from the U.K.

The role that the creation of an 'us' and 'them' or 'othering' has in both establishing and enforcing the view of the West and Britain as post-feminist is also explored in chapter 5, which argues that reports of 'honour'-based violence, and attempts to distinguish this from other forms of domestic violence, are often presented in such a way as to suggest that the West is somehow 'post-violent'. Again, as McRobbie suggests, 'Our' young women are

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[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Anne Phillips, *Multiculturalism without Culture,*(Oxfordshire: Princeton University Press, 2009), p.6.
[93] Ibid., p.6.
[94] Ibid., p.6.

encouraged to conceive of themselves as grateful subjects of modern states and cultures which permit such freedoms unlike repressive or fundamentalist regimes.'[95] I am not suggesting that women in the West have made no gains, or that those from outside a particular culture should refrain from passing judgement or attempting to intervene in matters pertaining to women's equality until equality has been achieved within their own communities and cultures, not least because that would discount me from undertaking this research. Furthermore, even the concept of 'equality' is deeply problematic. As bell hooks rightly questions, '[s]ince men are not equals in a white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal class structure, which men do women want to be equal to?'[96] Rather, this research specifically addresses media representations of feminism and multiculturalism, exploring how presumed tensions between the two are often exploited in order to vilify one group and galvanise another. Moreover, as with my analysis of FGC, I argue that the language used to frame 'honour'-based violence as a problem pertaining to a particular culture or cultures, in fact inhibits interrogation, both from within and outside of these cultures, hindering prevention, rather than encouraging awareness and successful campaigns to end this. Also problematically, evidence of such 'cultural' violence against women is all too easily co-opted to support violence on a global scale.

Laura J. Shepherd's analysis of the language used by the Bush administration, post 9/11, illustrates 'the centrality of narratives of gender to the production of a legitimate narrative of war.'[97] As with Cameron's 'war on multiculturalism', Shepherd suggests that women's rights are central to justifying foreign invasions, such as the attacks on Afghanistan, post 9/11. However, this has also impacted on views of the role of women in the West. Women are constructed as 'Helpless victims'[98] in need of saving, both at home, from the threat of multiculturalism, or what Shepherd terms 'the enemy within,'[99] and abroad. Susan Faludi also convincingly argues that women and feminism have been placed at the heart of the 'war on terror,' from the invocation of women's rights as a justification for aggressive

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[95] Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change*, (London: Sage Publishing, 2009), p.27.

[96] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p.19.

[97] Laura J. Shepherd, 'Veiled References: Construction of Gender in the Bush Administration Discourse on the Attacks on Afghanistan post – 9/11', in *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, vol.8, Issue 1, (March 2006), pp.19-41, p.19.

[98] Ibid., p.25.

[99] Ibid., p.27.

foreign policies, to a reimaging of an idealised woman and 'domestic hearth'[100] in need of protection. Faludi claims that despite the fatalities of 9/11 being 'three-to-one male to female and that most of the female office workers at the World Trade Center (like their male counterparts) rescued themselves by walking down the stairs on their own two feet. The most showcased victims bore female faces.'[101] She suggests that this was a deliberate attempt to position what was 'an assault on the urban workplace'[102] as 'a threat to the domestic circle'[103] observing that the reporting of 9/11 and the subsequent rhetoric of the 'war on terror' was fashioned 'as if the highjackers had aimed their planes not at office towers and government buildings but at the white picket fences of the American domicile.'[104] This promoted a visceral response to 9/11, heightening the idea of an irreconcilable clash of cultures that challenged the root of Western values. At this root were some very basic assumptions about gender.

Faludi cites a *Washington Post* article, hailing the return of the alpha male,[105] and with this, the vulnerable woman. She suggests that Americans were not 'just asked to confront a real enemy'[106] they were 'enlisted in a symbolic war at home, a war to repair and restore a national myth.'[107] This was a myth that had been damaged in recent times, not only by the attacks on the World Trade Center, but by the relative success of feminism. Somewhat paradoxically, feminism is presented as a means of distinguishing the West from the East, where the notion of universal women's rights is offered as a reason to insist on a multicultural programme of assimilation, rather than integration. However, feminist gains are also presented as weakening the West at a time when, in order to protect life and liberty, it must be strong. As Faludi writes, from an American perspective, '[i]n some murky fashion, women's independence had become implicated in our nation's failure to protect itself.'[108] Shepherd suggests the solution offered by the Bush Administration was the 'Happy Shopper,' arguing that women were 'discursively permitted to mother, care, shop and support, all

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[100] Susan Faludi, *The Terror Dream: What 9/11 Revealed About America*, (London: Atlantic Books, 2008), p.5.
[101] Ibid., p.5.
[102] Ibid., p.7.
[103] Ibid., p.7.
[104] Ibid., p.6.
[105] Ibid., p.9.
[106] Ibid., p.13.
[107] Ibid., p.13.
[108] Ibid., p.21.

behaviours associated with a very traditionalist model of gender [...].'[109] Crucially Shepherd claims that these were 'allowable demonstrations of agency',[110] which suggests that as women were 'choosing' to embody a traditional gender model, their actions could still be considered as post-feminist. Shepherd also argues that this 'feminized passivity' could 'be seen as another mechanism for silencing dissent.'[111] Certainly women's voices who promoted this view of the post-feminist and enlightened West as in opposition to the uncivilised and barbaric East, enjoyed popular support, such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali, whose book, *Infidel* (2007), was a *New York Times* bestseller.

The writing of Ayaan Hirsi Ali, the former member of Dutch parliament who rose to international fame following the murder of film-maker, Theo van Gough, in 2004, has in part provided the catalyst for this project. Hirsi Ali had collaborated with Van Gough to create a short film titled, *Submission,* which detailed the mistreatment of women under Islam, featuring transparently veiled, naked women with scripture from the Quran written on their bodies. van Gough's body was found with a note pinned to it predicting that Hirsi Ali 'would be destroyed, the Netherlands would be destroyed, Europe would be destroyed, and finally the United States would fall before the might of Islam.'[112] Following this incident, which was claimed to have 'shattered Holland's liberal dream' and caused a 'nation that is known for its relaxed tolerance' to be 'gripped by tension, anger and insecurity',[113] Hirsi Ali provided the insider voice that was entitled, or permitted, to criticise Islam in a way that many apparently liberal Westerners felt they were not. As Deborah Scroggins writes in her book, *Wanted Women, Truth, Lies, and the War on Terror: The Lives of Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Aafia Siddiqui* (2012), Hirsi Ali's denouncement of Islam coincided 'with what many Dutch and other Westerns suspected about Muslims. And they were delighted to hear a feisty and attractive Muslim woman endorse their suspicions.'[114]

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[109] Laura J. Shepherd, 'Veiled References: Construction of Gender in the Bush Administration Discourse on the Attacks on Afghanistan post – 9/11', in *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, vol.8, Issue 1, (March 2006), pp.19-41, p.24.
[110] Ibid., p.24.
[111] Ibid., p.24.
[112] Deborah Scroggins, *Wanted Women, Truth, Lies, and the War on Terror: The Lives of Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Aafia Siddiqui,* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2012), p.xvi.
[113] Jason Burke, 'The murder that shattered Holland's liberal dream,' in *The Guardian,* http://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/nov/07/terrorism.religion [accessed 10th January 2014].
[114] Deborah Scroggins, *Wanted Women, Truth, Lies, and the War on Terror: The Lives of Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Aafia Siddiqui,* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2012), p175.

Hirsi Ali became the poster-girl for the war on terror, following the terrorist events of September 11th 2001. Her criticism of the treatment of women under Islam provided a justification for the foreign invasions that could be argued on the grounds of women's rights, rather than the less palatable quest for revenge or the re-establishing of a now presumed outdated colonial world order. Her privileged status as an 'insider,' due to being a former Muslim, who, born in Somalia, had been subjected to female circumcision and had fled to Holland to escape an arranged marriage, added the weight of authenticity to her narrative. She could not simply be dismissed as racist or Islamophobic. Instead, she was the embodiment of what the West could offer, a living success story of Western progress triumphing over the 'backwards' and 'barbaric' East. Furthermore, her focus on women's rights within Islam strengthened the gendering of both the 'war on terror' and the 'death of multiculturalism.' As Scroggins writes:

> [p]olls show that Muslims and Westerners disagree more about sex than about any other subject. Whereas Muslims see themselves as protecting women, Westerners see Muslims as oppressing women. Whereas Westerners feel they are liberating women, Muslims feel that Westerners exploit women for commercial gain. Ayaan was a Muslim who told the Dutch in no uncertain terms that they were right and the Muslims were wrong.[115]

Not only does Hirsi Ali confirm that those in the West are right for expressing concerns over the treatment of women in Islam, she implores the West to intervene further, expressing her concern that the West, and, in particular, Western feminists, are shying away from commenting on the injustices against women, that she believes Islam promotes. She asserts that:

> [i]f feminism means anything at all, women with power should be addressing their energies to help the girls and women who suffer the pain of genital mutilation, who are at risk of being murdered because of their Western lifestyle and ideas, who must ask for permission just to leave the house, who are treated no better than serfs, branded and mutilated, traded without regard to their wishes. If you are a true feminist, these women should be your first priority.[116]

Hirsi Ali's attack on Islam, and specifically women's abject position within the religion, is in part characterized by her assumption that *all* Muslim women need and want to be liberated, regardless of whether or not they are aware of this. This assumption that women 'need' to be liberated despite not articulating this desire themselves is not, however, just limited to

[115] Ibid., p.180.
[116] Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Nomad: A Personal Journey Through the Clash of Civilizations*, (London: Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, 2010), p.230.

women's positions within religion. Again, referring to *Beauty and Misogyny: Harmful Cultural Practices in the West*, Jeffreys takes a similar position, criticizing the liberal feminist view that beauty practices are about 'women's individual choice' or are a space for 'women's creative expression'.[117] Instead she argues that beauty practices are 'a most important aspect of women's oppression.'[118] Comparably, Hirsi Ali argues against the idea that any women choose to follow an Islamic lifestyle, instead seeing them as coerced into this 'choice.' Both suggest that these practices are inherently misogynistic and oppressive and are unable, or unwilling, to conceive of the possibility that in certain circumstances each could become an act of resistance or rebellion.

Hirsi Ali's analysis of the struggle facing Muslim women, and the possible solutions that she suggests, are not unproblematic. Her critique, although predominantly focused on what she sees as the problems with Islam, also often encompasses wider social and cultural issues of class, immigration and education. Whilst highly critical of Muslim faith schools where Hirsi Ali claims that, 'kids are brainwashed into a way of life that diminishes their chances of success […],' she goes on to state that, 'if any sort of school can be worse than a Muslim school it is these in deprived inner-city areas.'[119] However, it is Hirsi Ali's contentious and often controversial writings on the position of women in Islam and her criticism of how people in the West respond to these issues, as well as the possible problems that arise from the solutions she suggests, that make her so interesting and central to this research. Furthermore, her insistence on the relatively unproblematic position of feminism in the West provides a catalyst for examining the assumptions that this rests on, particularly in relation to cross-cultural feminism and notions of 'post-feminism,' as we acknowledge the arrival of the fourth wave.

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[117] Sheila Jeffreys, *Beauty and Misogyny: Harmful Cultural Practices in the West*, (East Sussex: Routledge, 2005), p.2.
[118] Ibid., p.2.
[119] Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Nomad: A Personal Journey Through the Clash of Civilizations*, (London: Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, 2010), p.21.

Chapter 1
Multiculturalism and Feminism: Creating Tensions or Providing Opportunities?

Issues and tensions around the relationship between feminism and multiculturalism bring many key fourth-wave feminist concerns into sharp focus. These include: acknowledging the importance of intersectionality in order to better represent our increasingly diverse communities; addressing global feminist issues that are made more evident through the internet and social media; questioning our ever changing political landscape that paradoxically both champions the rights of women and undermines them; and the importance of creating theory that encourages praxis rather than paralysis. Although arguments about intersectionality and tensions between theory and practice have been concerning feminists since at least the second-wave movement, as communities become increasingly more global, the landscapes of these arguments shift. Any discussion of the tensions between multiculturalism and feminism should attempt to acknowledge the nuances of both 'isms' in order to avoid portraying the issues as two monoliths vying for favor. As Anne Phillips states in *Multiculturalism without Culture* (2007), 'since both deal with compelling issues of inequality, it could not be appropriate to declare one more fundamental than the other.'[1] However, in her later book, *Gender and Culture* (2010), Phillips asserts 'the notion that gender equality is in conflict with multiculturalism is now a staple of public as well as academic debate.'[2]

In her somewhat contested essay 'Is Multiculturalism Bad For Women?', Susan Moller Okin explores the tensions between feminism and multiculturalism and the problems that she argues may arise from the privileging of group rights over the rights of the individual, or vice-versa. She seeks to address the question of 'what should be done when claims of minority cultures or religions clash with the norm of gender equality that is at least formally endorsed by liberal states […]?'[3] Okin argues that 'we – especially those of us who consider ourselves progressive and opposed to all forms of oppression – have been too quick to assume that feminism and multiculturalism are both good things which are easily

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[1] Anne Phillips, *Multiculturalism without Culture*, (Oxfordshire: Princeton University Press, 2007) p.3.
[2] Anne Phillips, *Gender and Culture*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010) p.1.
[3] Susan Moller Okin, 'Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?' in *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?*, Susan Moller Okin, ed Joshua Cohen, Matthew Howard and Martha C. Nussbaum, (Chichester, West Sussex: Princeton University Press, 1999), p.9.

reconciled.'[4] Phillips, to an extent, shows some sympathy for Okin's position, suggesting that:

when claims are made on behalf of cultures, they should be carefully interrogated to see who is going to benefit, and that the "requirements of the culture will often turn out to be the interests of the more powerful men […] is a view almost any feminist could endorse.[5]

However, Phillips acknowledges that, in the framing of her argument, Okin has come to be 'regarded as representing a hegemonic discourse that considered non-Western cultures as almost by definition patriarchal.'[6] Furthermore, Okin's analysis can all too easily be co-opted into the current backlash against multiculturalism. As Phillips notes:

[a]gainst the backdrop […] of increasing domestic worries about the economic and social integration of ethnocultural minorities, and rising world tensions over terrorism, the failure of the peace process in the Middle East, and the invasion of Iraq […]. Multiculturalism became the scapegoat for an extraordinary array of political and social evils […].[7]

An awareness of the positioning of multiculturalism as a scapegoat for social ills, following 9/11 and 7/7 is, I would argue, essential in any analysis of the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism, particularly when presumed tensions between the two can be seen to promote the adoption of an 'us' and 'them' attitude.

Speaking in 2011, David Cameron focused on the failure of state multiculturalism and called for what he termed, 'muscular liberalism',[8] adding to this already established backlash. As an article in *The Observer* newspaper states:

David Cameron's speech attacking multiculturalism may seem to have come out of a clear blue sky, but its genesis can be traced back to long before he became prime minister. Indeed, in its tone and content it shares many similarities with a key speech made by Tony Blair in 2005, shortly after the London bombings.[9]

Cameron also makes reference to the tensions between women's rights and multiculturalism in order to support his position. Various events have led up to this shift in view of multiculturalism as something which had previously been seen as at worse benign, now being

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[4] Ibid., p.10.

[5] Anne Phillips, *Multiculturalism without Culture*, (Oxfordshire: Princeton University Press 2007), pp.1-2.

[6] Ibid., p.2.

[7] Ibid., p.3.

[8] David Cameron, *The Independent,* http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/cameron-my-war-on-multiculturalism-2205074.html [accessed 20th February 2013].

[9] Jaime Doward, 'David Cameron's attack on multiculturalism divides coalition' in *The Observer* *http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2011/feb/05/david-cameron-attack-multiculturalism-coalition* [accessed 20th February 2013].

talked of in terms of its 'failings.' Phillips states that 'recently, there has been much talk of the death of multiculturalism, the bigotries of multiculturalism [...]' suggesting that the 'events of September 11, 2001, undoubtedly played a part in this.'[10] In this context it is possible to see how feminist debates around the tensions between women's rights and multiculturalism can be utilized to support a political position that was perhaps unintended, at least by feminists. There is, as Phillips observes, a certain degree of irony or opportunism in seeing 'the implausible blossoming of support for gender equality in societies that find it difficult to deliver even on long-established promises like equal pay.'[11] Drawing attention to the possible misuse of feminist rhetoric, however, is not to dissuade feminists from having these arguably essential debates and raising clearly important and timely questions; it is rather to urge acknowledgement and understanding of the wider social and economic framework within which discussions are inevitably situated.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty also argues for the importance of appreciating the political and social impact of feminist scholarship. In *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity* (2003), Mohanty states:

> [feminist scholarship] is a directly political and discursive practice in that is purposeful and ideological. It is best seen as a mode of intervention into particular hegemonic discourses (e.g., traditional anthropology, sociology, and literary criticism); it is a political praxis that counters and resists the totalizing imperative of age old "legitimate" and "scientific" bodies of knowledge.[12]

Mohanty suggests that acknowledging that the process of feminist scholarship and the production of feminist theory are political acts should encourage an awareness of 'the significance and status of Western feminist writings on women in the Third world'.[13] This should also include an awareness of the impact on women of a different racial, sexual, cultural or class background. In arguing for the production of theory to be seen as political praxis, Mohanty highlights the need for responsibility in the production of knowledge. For Mohanty, feminist writings and discourse that fail to acknowledge this responsibility, and the impact they may have, become a colonizing force, creating an image of the singular, Third world women that is always oppressed and always 'other'. This is not only reductive but also static and ahistorical. Mohanty suggests that to move away from the production of this kind

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[10] Anne Phillips, *Multiculturalism without Culture*, (Oxfordshire: Princeton University Press 2007), p.5.

[11] Anne Phillips, *Gender and Culture*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), p.1.

[12] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity,* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2003), p.19.

[13] Ibid., P.19.

of discourse, Western feminism must acknowledge the 'particular world balance of power within which any analysis of culture, ideology, and socioeconomic conditions necessarily has to be situated.'[14] As is evident throughout this thesis, the background of Islamophobia, as well as rising tensions over immigration and concerns caused by the financial downturn, not only influences the direction of feminist discussions and analysis, but also how this analysis is received and utilized.

The criticism that feminism is, or at least has been seen as, the prerogative of white, middle class women, who have assumed a universal interpretation of female oppression that often negates nuances of race and class, is well established. Within the book *The Dynamics of 'Race' and Gender: Some Feminist Interventions* (1994), Mary Maynard comments, 'it hardly needs stating that second-wave Western feminism has come under sustained criticism for its universalistic, homogenized and 'white' assumptions about women [...].'[15] Part of what is problematic with Okin's analysis of the difficulties and tensions between feminism and multiculturalism is that she seemingly sets her own experience as a white, highly-educated, Western woman, as the measure by which to judge other women's experiences. As Mohanty argues, 'any discourse that sets up its own authorial subjects as the implicit referent, that is, the yardstick by which to encode and represent cultural others'[16] produces a form of ethnocentric universalism. Conversely, although Okin seems to promote the idea that women can be grouped together 'as a category of analysis'[17] due to their shared experience of 'oppression,' Okin's discourse also serves to strengthen 'assumptions about Western women as secular, liberated and having control over their own lives.'[18] This is placed in direct contrast to the experiences of those in the Third World or women from differing cultural backgrounds living in the West. This dichotomy is paradoxical; perpetuating the image of the Third World woman as always 'other,' and thus distinct and separate from Western women, whilst assuming a unified understanding of oppression. hooks has also written extensively on the problems of a homogenized view of female oppression, citing that even the use of the word oppression is problematic as it presents what she views as the oversimplified assertion that all women are oppressed. hooks argues that, 'this assertion implies that women share a

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[14] Ibid., p.20.
[15] Haleh Afshar and Mary Maynard, eds, *The Dynamics of 'Race' and Gender: Some Feminist Interventions*, (London: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 1994), p.9.
[16] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity,* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2003), p.21.
[17] Ibid., p.22.
[18] Ibid., p.42.

common lot, that factors like class, race, religion, sexual preference, etc. do not create a diversity of experience that determines the extent to which sexism will be an oppressive force in the lives of individual women.'[19] Instead, hooks suggests that 'exploitation and discrimination are words that more accurately describe the lot of women collectively in the United States.'[20] By acknowledging the differing levels of exploitation and types of discrimination women face, hooks seeks to resist an idea of feminist theory that has itself become a form of 'hegemonic dominance.'[21]

However, the perception of feminism as a form of hegemonic dominance cannot simply be aligned with 'Western feminists' and can arguably be found in Ayaan Hirsi Ali's controversial and polemical writing. Hirsi Ali's criticism that Western feminists avoid challenging the injustices against women that she believes Islam promotes extends to the idea that Western feminists are not defending Muslim women in the West, let alone reaching out to those living in predominantly Muslim countries. Hirsi Ali is deeply critical of 'cultural' practices such as FGC and forced marriages that she specifically associates with Islam. Okin also cites multiple examples of injustices against women that she sees minority cultures or religious groups enforcing, or at least endorsing. She writes about polygamy - something she claims the French government has accommodated - leading to overcrowding, 'immense hostility, resentment, even violence both among the wives and against each other's children.'[22] She also lists clitoridectomy, child marriages, and the control of resources and property ownership, all 'aimed at bringing women's sexuality and reproductive capabilities under men's control.'[23] With regard to polygamy, Okin claims that the French government accommodates this through granting 'special *group* rights or privileges'[24] to minority cultures that are 'not available to the rest of the population.'[25] Thus what is presented by Okin as unquestionably bad for women, is attributed to the process of multiculturalism.

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[19] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p.5.
[20] Ibid., p.5.
[21] Ibid., p.10.
[22] Susan Moller Okin, 'Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?' in *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?,* Susan Moller Okin, ed Joshua Cohen, Matthew Howard and Martha C. Nussbaum,(Chichester, West Sussex: Princeton University Press, 1999), p.10.
[23] Ibid., p.14.
[24] Ibid., p.11.
[25] Ibid., p.11.

Although Okin acknowledges that multiculturalism is hard to define or 'pin down',[26] she states that the aspect that concerns her is 'the claim, made in the context of basically liberal democracies, that minority cultures or ways of life are not sufficiently protected by the practice of ensuring the individual rights of their members, […].'[27] Okin sees this claim as in direct opposition with the 'basic liberal value of individual freedom, which entails that group rights should not trump the individual rights of its members'.[28] Furthermore, she questions who gets to articulate what is in the best interests of the group and what their beliefs may be, arguing that it is often powerful men within in the group. This is despite the fact that the beliefs and interests articulated, and thus often protected, fall within the realms of 'personal law' and so as a result arguably have a greater impact on the women of the group. Okin again lists examples such as 'the laws of marriage, divorce, child custody, division and control of family property, and inheritance.'[29] Due to this, Okin argues that 'under such conditions, group rights are potentially, and in many cases actually, antifeminist.'[30]

However, other theorists have argued against Okin's, sometimes simplistic, portrayal of cultures, and the practices that she associates with them as being either good or bad. In her essay, 'My Culture Made Me Do it,' written as a response to Okin's, 'Is Multiculturalism Bad For Women?' and published in the book of the same title, Bonnie Honig questions the implications of presenting these practices as cultural without context. She states:

> denuding veiling, polygamy, clitoridectomy, of all their context, signification, and meaning, Okin sees such practices merely as symptoms of patriarchal projects that aim to clothe female abjection in the increasingly socially and politically acceptable guise of 'culture''.[31]

What is problematic about this is the ease with which these kinds of examples, listed without context and aligned with 'culture,' can be used to promote ideas of difference or cultures outside of the West as fundamentally 'backward' or 'other'. As Honig warns:

> feminists ought to be careful lest they participate in the recent rise of nationalist xenophobia by projecting a rightly feared backlash –whose proponents are mostly

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[26] Ibid., p.10.
[27] Ibid., p.10.
[28] Ibid., p.11.
[29] Ibid., p.13.
[30] Ibid., p.12.
[31] Bonnie Honig, 'My Culture Made Me Do It' in *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?,* Susan Moller Okin, ed Joshua Cohen, Matthew Howard and Martha C. Nussbaum,(Chichester, West Sussex: Princeton University Press, 1999),p.35.

native-born American – onto foreigners who come from somewhere else and bring their foreign, (supposedly) 'backward' cultures with them.[32]

Again, although Honig suggests that the proponents of this backlash, who promote the idea of other, non-Western, cultures as backwards, are mostly native-born Americans, echoes of this attitude can also be found in Hirsi Ali's writing, herself a 'foreigner' from a supposedly 'backward' culture.

In, *Nomad: A Personal Journey Through the Clash of Civilizations* (2010), Hirsi Ali compares Western culture, which she describes as having 'roots [that] drink from the rational sources of the Enlightenment' with Islamic culture that she suggests operate 'like ivy on their trunks, an alien and possibly lethal growth'.[33] Arguably, the intimation that Islamic culture is a parasite on 'Enlightened' Western culture is going beyond the representation of other cultures as 'backwards.' As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, this attitude has however gained Hirsi Ali support from various sources, perhaps not commonly known for their championing of women's rights and gender equality. Leila Ahmed has suggested that the events of 9/11 helped bolster Hirsi Ali's popularity, commenting that Hirsi Ali's book, *Caged Virgin* (2004) gained such a wide readership due to the fact that, 'in the aftermath of 9/11 the very subject of women in Islam would become a topic of intense public interest and even come to be regarded as a matter of national import.'[34] Hirsi Ali also appeared as a speaker at events organized by David Horowitz, a 'neo-conservative',[35] who sponsored Islamo-Fascist Awareness Week. 'Islamo-Fascist Awareness Week consisted of talks and teach-ins on Islamo-fascism, and it prominently featured the subject of the "oppression of women in Islam"'.[36] Ahmed points to how many of the speakers at these events were not previously renowned for their support of women, in fact, quite the opposite. She quotes Katha Pollitt as writing at the time:

> these are people who have made careers out of attacking the mildest updates on American women's roles, whether it's working mothers, birth control or even, […] the right to vote! In the zillions of words for which Horowitz is responsible … there is

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[32] Ibid., p.36.
[33] Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Nomad: A Personal Journey Through the Clash of Civilizations*, (London: Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, 2010), p.19.
[34] Leila Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution: the veil's resurgence, from the Middle East to America*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), p.14.
[35] Ibid., p.220.
[36] Ibid., p.221.

virtually no evidence of concern for the rights, liberties, opportunities or well-being of any women on earth, except for Muslims.'[37]

This example can serve to reinforce Honig's warning that feminists must be wary lest their concerns are co-opted by those pursuing other agendas, highlighting the need for an awareness of the context in which feminists are writing and producing knowledge.

Honig also questions Okin's apparent lack of awareness or acknowledgement of Muslim feminists, stating that, 'they do exist but are obscured by Okin's liberal feminist lens, through which liberal brands of equality and individualism are equated to feminism'.[38] As Honig points out, many Muslim feminists actually 'see veiling as an empowering practice'[39] but by removing the act of veiling from both a religious and social context that shifts with time and place, the nuances of this act are lost. As Azizah Y. Al-Hibri argues in her essay, 'Is Western Patriarchal Feminism Good for Third World/Minority Women?' – a title that neatly turns the premise of Okin's essay on its head – 'a true feminist call to reform in Muslim countries or among Muslim immigrants must respect their religious and cultural sentiments, while recognizing the sanctity of the first and flexibility of the second.'[40] Honig also challenges Okin's presentation of polygamy as being viewed as simply bad for women, writing that 'the institution of monogamy, which Okin presents as unambiguously preferable to polygamy from a feminist perspective, famously isolates women from each other and privatizes them.'[41] Western feminists, such as Germaine Greer, have also highlighted the tensions, pressures and isolation brought about by monogamy and the nuclear family, suggesting instead that forms of communal living, with shared childcare arrangements, could actually help ease the pressure on women and improve their emotional and socioeconomic position. With the responsibility for childcare shared amongst a group, arguably, women would be freer to pursue careers.

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[37] Katha Pollitt 'David Horrowitz, Feminist?' in Nation, November 1, 2007 in Leila Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution: the veil's resurgence, from the Middle East to America,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), p.221.
[38] Bonnie Honig, 'My Culture Made Me Do It' in *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?,* Susan Moller Okin, ed Joshua Cohen, Matthew Howard and Martha C. Nussbaum,(Chichester, West Sussex: Princeton University Press, 1999), p.37.
[39] Ibid., p.37.
[40] Azizah Y. Al-Hibri, 'Is Western Patriarchal Feminism Good for Third World / Minority Women?' in *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?,* Susan Moller Okin, ed Joshua Cohen, Matthew Howard and Martha C. Nussbaum,(Chichester, West Sussex: Princeton University Press, 1999), p.43.
[41] Bonnie Honig, 'My Culture Made Me Do It' in *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?,* Susan Moller Okin, ed Joshua Cohen, Matthew Howard and Martha C. Nussbaum, (Chichester, West Sussex: Princeton University Press, 1999), p.38.

Despite not exploring the multiple perspectives of Muslim feminists in her essay, Okin does acknowledge the possibility of change coming from within cultures rather than being projected on to cultures, stating that preferably a culture would be 'encouraged to alter itself so as to reinforce the equality of women'.[42] However, beyond suggesting that cultures should alter themselves in order to become less patriarchal, Okin goes as far as to suggest that women may 'be much better off if the culture into which they were born were […] to become extinct […].'[43] For Okin, altering a culture could, in part, be achieved by ensuring that women have a larger role in articulating the needs and beliefs of their cultures when negotiating any group rights. Otherwise, she asserts, women's interests 'may be harmed rather than promoted by the granting of such rights.'[44] However, in seeking to further women's involvement in the negotiation of group rights in order to promote gender equality, Okin suggests prioritizing the voices of younger women, since, she argues, 'older women are often co-opted into enforcing gender inequality.'[45] Okin presents a less organic view of change from within, and certainly a less democratic one, instead choosing only to champion or support the voices of women whose ideas of culture and rights match her own. Her assumptions about the role of older women reinforcing gender inequalities within cultures raise some interesting issues, particularly with regard to the problematic idea of 'choice.' However, despite her longstanding record of critiquing patriarchal attitudes in the West, within her work on multiculturalism at least, she seemingly fails to apply the same critical lens to her own culture. Instead, there is the assumption that, as highlighted by Honig, 'Western liberal regimes are simply and plainly "less patriarchal" than other regimes, rather than differently so, perhaps worse in some respects and better in others.'[46] Of course this kind of measured analysis also meets with fierce criticism, and is often accused of cultural relativism.

In her article 'The Silence of the Feminists', Pamela Bone attributed what she saw as the lack of action or silence on the part of Western feminists in regard to 'human rights

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[42] Susan Moller Okin, 'Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?' in *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?,* Susan Moller Okin, ed Joshua Cohen, Matthew Howard and Martha C. Nussbaum, (Chichester, West Sussex: Princeton University Press, 1999), p.23.
[43] Ibid., p.22.
[44] Ibid., p.24.
[45] Ibid., p.24.
[46] Bonnie Honig, 'My Culture Made Me Do It' in *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?,* Susan Moller Okin, ed Joshua Cohen, Matthew Howard and Martha C. Nussbaum,(Chichester, West Sussex: Princeton University Press, 1999), p.38.

abuses carried out in the name of Islam'[47] to 'an overdeveloped sense of tolerance or cultural relativism.'[48] Bone states that Germaine Greer defended the act of female genital cutting 'on the grounds that Western women put rings and studs through their labia.'[49] However, Bone argues that 'a rich Western woman can choose the lengths to which she will go to make herself attractive to men (or herself); a child in a poor, backward country cannot.'[50] Again this assumes an entirely uncomplicated relationship with notions of 'choice' for women in the West, despite the hint at a level of coercion that may be involved; notably, the idea of the woman seeking to make herself attractive for herself is only secondary. This argument also removes all context from the act of female genital cutting. Bone does not acknowledge that this is an act of violence perpetrated against women by women. Nor does she explore the various social and economic factors that may influence such 'choices.' Although the comparison Bone makes is between the 'choices' made by a rich –and thus supposedly free and enlightened – woman, and a poor, backward child, in the case of the child, the 'choice' was most likely made by her mother. As Bone assumes the motives of the rich Western woman were to make herself more attractive to men, it can as easily be assumed that the motives of the mother were the same; to make her daughter more attractive to men by conforming to social or cultural norms in the hope of securing a good marriage. This is not a defense of female genital cutting, or a suggestion that women identified with one culture cannot or should not comment on another, it is rather a call to develop a more nuanced conversation that does not condemn people whose cultural practices differ from our own as 'backwards,' or vilify feminists who seek to apply the same critical lens to their own cultures as they do to others. As Honig asserts, 'for the sake of a future solidarity of women as feminists, the question of what constitutes gender (in)equality must be kept disturbingly open to perpetual reinterrogation.'[51] This will in part rely on keeping these debates, and the lines of communication between feminists from across cultures, open, as well as 'the willingness of Western feminists to hold their own practices up to the same critical scrutiny they apply to others […].'[52]

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[47] Pamela Bone, 'The Silence of the Feminists' in *The Age*, February 4th, 2005.
http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2005/02/03/1107409981815.html [accessed 21st December 2012].
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Bonnie Honig, 'My Culture Made Me Do It' in *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?,* Susan Moller Okin, ed Joshua Cohen, Matthew Howard and Martha C. Nussbaum, (Chichester, West Sussex: Princeton University Press, 1999), p.40.
[52] Ibid., p.40.

Although challenged for the apparent lack of critical analysis aimed at Western culture in her essay, Okin does acknowledge, to an extent, the discrepancy between formally endorsed attitudes towards gender equality in the West, and the realities of practice. However, in his essay, 'Liberalism's Sacred Cow,' again written in response to Okin, Homi K. Bhabha questions whether she has gone far enough in acknowledging and deconstructing these discrepancies. Like others, Bhabha questions the lack of context provided by Okin, stating:

> put "patriarchy" in the dock by all means, but put it in a relevant context […]. "Patriarchy" in India, for instance, intersects with poverty, caste, illiteracy; patriarchy in liberal America is shored up, among other things, by racism, the gun culture, desultory welfare provisions […].[53]

This lack of context, for Bhabha, promotes the idea that 'Okin's casts a gaze on "non-Western" peoples that comes resolutely from above and elsewhere.'[54] By ignoring the context surrounding the issues she explores, Okin presents a view of culture as static and unchanging, despite her assertion that the portrayal of cultures as monoliths, which focuses more on 'the differences between and among groups to differences within them,'[55] is in fact part of the problem. Nonetheless, Okin's seems to replicate this attitude, creating a discourse that ironically 'shares something of the patronizing and stereotyping attitudes of that patriarchal perspective.'[56]

Universal claims about the essential and unchanging nature of cultures can be seen as presenting what Uma Narayan terms as a 'Package Picture of Cultures'.[57] Narayan asserts:

> [p]revalent essentialist modes of thinking about cultures depend on a problematic picture of what cultures are like, […]. This view understands cultures on the model of neatly wrapped packages, sealed off from each other, possessing sharply defined edges or contours, and having distinct contents that differ from those of other "cultural packages."[58]

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[53] Homi K. Bhabha, 'Liberalism's Sacred Cow', in *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?,* Susan Moller Okin, ed Joshua Cohen, Matthew Howard and Martha C. Nussbaum, (Chichester, West Sussex: Princeton University Press, 1999), p.81.

[54] Ibid., p.82.

[55] Susan Moller Okin, 'Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?' in *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?,* Susan Moller Okin, ed Joshua Cohen, Matthew Howard and Martha C. Nussbaum, (Chichester, West Sussex: Princeton University Press, 1999), p.12.

[56] Homi K. Bhabha, 'Liberalism's Sacred Cow', in *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?,* Susan Moller Okin, ed Joshua Cohen, Matthew Howard and Martha C. Nussbaum, (Chichester, West Sussex: Princeton University Press, 1999), p.82.

[57] Uma Narayan, 'Undoing the "Package Picture" of Cultures' *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society,* vol.25, no. 4 (2000) pp.1083-1086 p.1084.

[58] Ibid., p.1084.

Narayan argues against this view of cultures, instead suggesting 'these packages are more badly wrapped and their contents more jumbled than is often assumed […].'[59] In part, Narayan suggests that this essentialist view of cultures is a result of global feminism and the need to acknowledge the cultural differences among women. However, similarly to Carolyn Pedwell, cited in the introduction to this research, Narayan asserts, 'feminist efforts to avoid gender essentialism sometimes result in pictures of cultural difference that constitute […] "cultural essentialism."'[60] In an attempt to avoid universalizing about gender and the experiences of women across cultures, emphasis has been placed on the perceived differences between Western and non-Western cultures. This emphasis on the differences between cultures can often lead to obscuring the diversity within cultures. It is also often hierarchal, assuming Western culture as the paradigmatic example that others should seek to emulate or aspire to. This is arguably the case with Okin's analysis of feminism and multiculturalism.

Though hinted at in Okin's essay, but never fully explored, it is also possible to question whether Western culture actually embodies or practices the commitments to equality that it seeks to purport. As Phillips writes:

> [s]ince women in the most developed societies continue to suffer from inequalities of pay and employment, from gross violations of their bodily integrity through rape and domestic violence, and a persistent devaluation of their sex as reflected in cultural and political representation, the implied contrast with majority cultural practice is deeply disingenuous.[61]

However, this should not be read as Phillips advocating for withdrawing from any form of cross-cultural or global feminist discussion. In fact, Phillips states, '[a]n equality that depends on others ignoring or overlooking key features of our identity is not an acceptable option. It has to be possible to be both different and equal.'[62] In an attempt to avoid cultural essentialism or the 'Package Picture of Cultures,' Narayan suggests the approach of questioning your own relationship with the culture to which you have been assigned. Asking what you may have 'in common with the millions of people who would be assigned to the same cultural package'[63] both encourages an appreciation of the diversity within cultures and the possibilities of commonalities between cultures. It also highlights the probability that you

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[59] Ibid., p.1084.
[60] Uma Narayan, 'Essence of Culture and a Sense of History: A Feminist Critique of Cultural Essentialism' *Hypatia,* vol.13, no.2 (Spring 1998) pp.86-106, p.87.
[61] Anne Phillips, *Gender and Culture*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), p.25.
[62] Anne Phillips, *Gender and Culture*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), p.20.
[63] Uma Narayan, 'Undoing the "Package Picture" of Cultures' *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society,* vol.25, no. 4 (2000) pp.1083-1086 p.1085.

may be assigned to, or identify with, multiple or seemingly conflicting cultures. As with the shift from 'I am' to 'I advocate' feminism, put forward by bell hooks, understanding the ability to inhabit multiple and sometimes conflicting cultures opens up the possibility for the type of hybridity that challenges essentialist notions of both gender and culture. In this way the aims of feminism and multiculturalism can be seen as compatible: that they both accept and appreciate difference whilst arguing for equality.

Phillips also comments on the compatibility of feminism and multiculturalism, citing not just the idea that they share the common aim of addressing inequality, but also that 'they share a common structure.'[64] Phillips argues that, 'in each case, the failure to recognize people as equals seems to be bound up in some way with the inability to accept difference.'[65] However, acknowledging and accepting difference should not equate to reproducing static interpretations of the 'self' and 'other' in the form of 'cultural diversity', as defined by Bhabha in his essay, 'Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences.' Bhabha argues that:

> [c]ultural diversity is the recognition of pre-given cultural 'contents' and customs, held in a time-frame of relativism; it gives rise to anodyne liberal notions of multiculturalism, cultural exchange, or the culture of humanity. Cultural diversity is also the representation of a radical rhetoric of the separation of totalized cultures that live unsullied by the intertextuality of their historical locations, safe in the Utopianism of a mythic memory of a unique collective identity.[66]

Bhabha's implicit criticism of a multiculturalism based on these static interpretations of culture is clear. The understanding of a multiculturalism that is 'anodyne' would also arguably be incompatible with feminisms aim for radical transformation and disruption to the status quo.

However, representations of multiculturalism that recognize the performative elements of culture and identity –what Bhabha terms 'enunciation,'[67]- create a space for an understanding of multiculturalism that is continually shifting. Zadie Smith's novel, *White Teeth* (2000), provides a view of multiculturalism that both celebrates the plurality of cultures and challenges essentialist assumptions. Irene Pérez Fernández argues that Smith presents 'a

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[64] Ibid., p.21.
[65] Ibid., p.21.
[66] Homi K. Bhabha, 'Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences' in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader,* ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, (Oxford: Routledge, 2006), p.155.
[67] Ibid., p.157.

view of Britain as inherently hybrid,'[68] challenging static notions of 'East' and 'West.' Smith's novel tackles issues raised by immigration through the lives of first, second and third generation immigrants, showing how these issues continually shift and evolve. By exploring the negotiations that these characters make between cultures, national and local identities, religious identities, and family ties, Smith creates characters that embody the idea of multiculturalism as a dynamic process. They are presented as similar to Bhabha's description of the 'liberatory people' in the work of Fanon, who 'initiate the productive instability of revolutionary cultural change [and] are themselves the bearers of hybrid identity.'[69] Smith presents a perspective whereby culture is intrinsically open to contestation and reform, thus representing a view of multiculturalism that is entirely compatible with feminism. By allowing for culture to be dynamic, Smith's characters are able to embrace elements of feminism without abandoning their 'culture' or ignoring their past. As Bhabha suggests, 'the changed political and historical site of enunciation transforms the meanings of colonial inheritance […].'[70] Fernández further argues that *White Teeth* reinforces 'the view that social difference(s) derived from, or associated with, British past history of imperialism and postcolonialism are the shared legacy of all British citizens, rather than a specific concern of those who are 'non-white.''[71] This promotes an understanding of multiculturalism that is wholly inclusive, celebrating differences and the possibilities these present for change, rather than seeing it as a form of defence or protection for diversity.

However, insistence on paying attention to the importance of various political, historical and national contexts in cross-cultural discussions and research should not encourage the kind of cultural relativism that can be seen to stifle any action or comment. On the contrary, as Phillips states, 'cultural relativism is not a useful ally for feminism […].'[72] She defines cultural relativism as 'the belief that norms of justice are relative to the society in which they are formed, and that it is inappropriate to take the norms that emerge within one

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[68] Irene Pérez Fernández, '*Representing Third Spaces, Fluid Identities and Contested Spaces in Contemporary British Literature' Atlantis: Journal of the Spanish Association of Anglo-American Studies,* vol.31, no.2, (December 2009), pp.143-160, p.146.
[69] Homi K. Bhabha, 'Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences' in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader,* ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, (Oxford: Routledge, 2006) p.157.
[70] Ibid., p.157.
[71] Irene Pérez Fernández, '*Representing Third Spaces, Fluid Identities and Contested Spaces in Contemporary British Literature' Atlantis: Journal of the Spanish Association of Anglo-American Studies,* vol.31, no.2, (December 2009), pp.143-160, p.146.
[72] Anne Phillips, *Gender and Culture*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), p.18.

society as the measure against which to assess the practice of others […].'[73] Although much of the criticism aimed at Okin's 'Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?' can be seen as fitting with Phillips' understanding of cultural relativism, and thus perhaps not advancing a feminist argument, part of what is problematic about Okin's essay is not just that it seems to project a 'Western' view of equality onto cultures that are portrayed as 'other', but that it presents cultures as stable, establishing a clear binary opposition between 'Western' and 'Others' that is seemingly timeless and eternal.

Despite Phillips' skepticism about the possibility of a productive relationship between feminism and cultural relativism, she does stress the need for an understanding of context and location in cross-cultural feminist debates. Phillips describes cultural relativism as grasping 'at a truth about the contextual nature of principles of justice,'[74] however, this becomes problematic when 'it does so in a way that seriously overstates the incommensurability of the discourses that arise in contemporary societies, and wrongly represents the difference between cultures as a difference between hermetically sealed, internally self-consistent wholes.'[75] Phillips also addresses the relationship between cultural relativism and universalism, pointing to the importance of cultural relativism in challenging universalisms that can lead to the kind of 'Package Picture of Cultures' described by Narayan. As Phillips asserts:

> [p]rinciples of justice are always formed in a particular historical context, and often reflect the preoccupations of more powerful groups. This does not prevent such principles from having a universal application, but it does mean they must always be open to contestation, reformation and change.[76]

With this, Phillips seems to suggest the idea of a third way, between the two polarized ideologies of cultural relativism and universalism, whereby each can influence the other to ensure that universal principles of justice and equality are continually open for discussion and reform, but that practice is not paralyzed by relativism. She highlights what she describes as 'the shaky basis on which supposedly universal principles get formed'[77] but also asserts the importance of certain universal principles in guiding and informing action. For example, Phillips argues that in 'the messy world of real politics' there are 'certain harms that are

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[73] Ibid., p.30.
[74] Ibid., p.17.
[75] Ibid., p.17.
[76] Ibid., p.30.
[77] Ibid., pp.34-35.

sufficiently grievous to override worries about legitimacy of any one person's understanding, and do not allow for indefinite postponement until full consultation has occurred.'[78]

Narayan also questions the basis that some universal claims and principles are founded on, suggesting that the discourse around these claims not only helps to substantiate them, but also has a role in their creation. Narayan states:

> [w]ith both gender essentialism and cultural essentialism, discourses about "difference" often operate to conceal their role in the production and reproduction of such "differences," presenting these differences as something pre-given and prediscursively "real" that the discourses of difference merely describe rather than help construct and perpetuate.[79]

Narayan suggests this process can be seen as a continuation of colonialism, replicating and endorsing 'problematic and colonialist assumptions about the cultural differences between "Western culture" and "Non western cultures" […].'[80] However, Mohanty argues that criticism for 'these presuppositions or implicit principles holds for anyone who uses these methods,'[81] not just those writing from within 'Western' culture. This opens up the discussion to involve a critique of methods and the framing of analysis, rather than focusing on the right to comment on a culture or experience outside of your own.

The debate over whether being a cultural 'insider' should be of primary importance in commenting on 'cultural' practices is also raised by Linda M. G. Zerilli. Zerilli suggests 'the question of whether first-hand experience is the condition of judgment is crucial, for it is here that the scare of relativism gets its force.'[82] Zerilli argues that 'relativism is a false problem that leads us to misunderstand what we do when we judge politically.'[83] Instead of seeing the position of 'outsider' as inevitably leading to the kind of problematic view that Bhabha ascribes to Okin, a gaze 'that comes resolutely from above and elsewhere,'[84] Zerilli suggests that occupying this position critically can have a positive impact. She describes the

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[78] Ibid., p.35.

[79] Uma Narayan, 'Essence of Culture and a Sense of History: A Feminist Critique of Cultural Essentialism' *Hypatia,* vol.13, no.2 (Spring 1998), pp.86-106, p.88.

[80] Ibid., p.87.

[81] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity,* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2003), p.21.

[82] Lind M. G. Zerilli, 'Towards a Feminist Theory of Judgement,' *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol.34, no.2, (Winter 2009) pp. 295-317, p.310.

[83] Ibid., p.314.

[84] Homi K. Bhabha, 'Liberalism's Sacred Cow', in *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?,* Susan Moller Okin, ed Joshua Cohen, Matthew Howard and Martha C. Nussbaum, (Chichester, West Sussex: Princeton University Press, 1999), p.81.

possibilities for an 'outsideness [that] works both ways' suggesting that 'just as we raise questions for a foreign culture (or people) that it does not raise for itself, so that foreign culture (or people) raises questions for us – if we allow it to do so.'[85] It is of course important not to assume that there will be no voices of dissent coming from within a culture, however, as Phillips argues, 'we should not […] conclude that there is nothing to be said about abuses of women's rights until these abuses have been challenged from the inside.'[86] Both Phillips and Zerilli stress the benefits of a dialogue that includes internal and external critics for challenging universalism and keeping debates open. It is important to emphasize the idea of dialogue in this process, whereby cultures can learn from and question each other, rather than seeing feminism as a finished product in the West that other cultures can benefit from. Similarly to Honig's assertions of the need for Western feminists to be prepared to apply the same levels of scrutiny to their own cultural practices as they do to others, Zerrlli suggests: 'outsideness as a condition of judging, then, entails a willingness to allow the encounter with others to raise questions about our own norms and practices.'[87] When the need to avoid essentialism is stressed, this should apply to both one's own, and other cultures to avoid the presentation of speaking from a falsely unified or universal viewpoint.

Zerilli questions the development of what she describes as a new form of universalism that, she argues, is present in the work of Martha Nussbaum and others. Nussbaum challenges what she sees as a cultural relativist approach, instead arguing in defense of the idea of universal values. She states that 'many people […] confuse relativism with the toleration of diversity, and find relativism attractive on the ground that it shows respect for others.'[88] However, Nussbaum asserts that often the cultures being shown respect under the guise of celebrating or appreciating diversity, in fact have little respect for diversity themselves. She suggests that what is actually promoted is tradition rather than tolerance and 'by making each tradition the last word, we deprive ourselves of any more general norm of tolerance or respect that could help us limit the intolerance of cultures.'[89] Nussbaum argues against the 'good of diversity' when diversity means accepting cultural practices that harm people. She discusses

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[85] Lind M. G. Zerilli, 'Towards a Feminist Theory of Judgement,' *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol.34, no.2, (Winter 2009) pp. 295-317, p.314.

[86] Anne Phillips, *Gender and Culture*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010) p.30.

[87] Lind M. G. Zerilli, 'Towards a Feminist Theory of Judgement,' *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol.34, no.2, (Winter 2009) pp. 295-317, p.314.

[88] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.49.

[89] Ibid., p.49.

the analogy between preserving languages, that she describes as having 'worth and beauty, and it's a bad thing, diminishing the expressive resources of human life generally,' with the idea that 'each cultural system has a distinctive beauty, and that it would be an impoverished world if everyone took on the value system of America.'[90] However, Nussbaum asserts that 'we could think that Cornish or Breton should be preserved, without thinking the same about domestic violence [...] or genital mutilation.'[91] Instead, she argues, that we must ask 'whether the cultural values in question are worth preserving.'[92] The analogy presented then appears as somewhat of a straw-man that Nussbaum has created on behalf of an imaginary objector, serving to make her argument seem grounded in 'common sense' or universal understandings of harm, rather than addressing the issues of who gets to decide which values are worth preserving and on what grounds these decisions are made.

Nussbaum stresses the idea that universal values normally attributed to the West are in fact evident across cultures, due precisely to the hybrid nature of these cultures and the huge amount of diversity found within them. She argues that the 'ideas of feminism, of democracy, of egalitarian welfarism, are now "inside" every known society'[93] and asks, 'why should we follow the local ideas, rather than the best ideas we can find?'[94] Zerilli, however, questions whether these 'best ideas' are 'as truly neutral and universal rather than Western and thus particular'[95] as Nussbaum suggests. Although Zerilli celebrates the 'open space for thinking about a genuinely international practice of feminist critique' presented by Nussbaum, she also highlights the importance of interrogating 'these committed new universalists' defense of cultural hybridity.'[96]Zerilli cautions, 'if old universalism simply identified the universal with a form of progress that is Western, this new universalism denies its origins in the West all the better to evade the criticisms that were made of its classic form.'[97] To presents these universals as neutral, or existing within all cultures, Zerilli suggests, undermines the idea of local values offering the chance for progressive change. Rather than adapting or learning from other cultures, or viewing differences as a positive catalyst for change, the focus remains safely on what is familiar and universals remain stubbornly fixed. As Zerilli argues,

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[90] Ibid., p.50.
[91] Ibid., p.50.
[92] Ibid., p.50.
[93] Ibid., p.49.
[94] Ibid., p.49.
[95] Lind M. G. Zerilli, 'Towards a Feminist Theory of Judgement,' *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol.34, no.2, (Winter 2009) pp. 295-317, p.300.
[96] Ibid., p.301.
[97] Ibid., p.302.

'that which is not already universal (the best ideas) but marked, rather, as culturally particular (local ideas) appears unworthy of our critical attention, that is, as a potential interrogation of what we hold to be the best or properly universal ideas.'[98]

Although Nussbaum's presentation of cultures as hybrid and diverse challenges essentialist notions, Zerilli argues, the idea that universal values are inherent in all cultures, 'underestimates the kind of political work required.'[99]Instead, Zerilli suggests the importance of 'cultural translation' in order to establish values that can be understood or agreed on across cultures. This process of translation not only makes space for ideas or values that can be seen as local rather than universal, it also allows for the idea that what are considered the 'best ideas' or universals can change. As Zerilli states, 'it is to treat the local or particular as a potential source of ever new iterations of universality, where the very idea of the universal will not be decided once and for all but will always remain open to further political interrogation.'[100]The idea of cultural translation can then be seen as similar to Bhabha's conception of enunciation, each emphasizes the possibilities of changes within cultural identities and the performative elements of enunciation of iteration. The importance of cultures or cultural identities being open to change is central to the assertion that multiculturalism and feminism are compatible rather than in competition. Just as feminism has sought to challenge essentialist notions of sex and gender, essentialist notions of cultures must also be confronted. This includes acknowledging that there are perhaps as many understandings and approaches to multiculturalism as there are feminisms, some clearly more compatible than others.

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[98] Ibid., p.303.
[99] Ibid.' P.302.
[100] Ibid., p.304.

Chapter 2
Whose Feminism is it anyway? The Problems and Possibilities of Intersectionality

The concept of 'intersectionality' is broadly used within feminist theory to acknowledge how both the multiplicity of identities, and experiences of structural inequalities such as those caused by race, religion, sexuality or class, are interconnected and all contribute to the experience of oppression. Originally credited to Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, whose work focused predominantly on black feminist legal theory, 'intersectionality was intended to address the fact that the experiences and struggles of women of colour fell between the cracks of both feminist and anti-racist discourse.'[1] Intersectionality attempts to understand and explore the nuances of oppression and how certain members of oppressed groups may in fact be granted more privileges within that group than others. For example, it is hardly contentious to accept that a white heterosexual woman's experience of oppression may be very different to that of a woman of colour or lesbian, despite them all experiencing some form of oppression or discrimination related to their gender. In current usage, the concept of intersectionality is often invoked to seek or promote the idea of inclusive feminism(s) that are moving away from the perception of feminism as a white middle class movement and seeking to acknowledge difference.

However, as I have suggested in the introduction to this research, 'intersectional feminism' is also frequently being claimed as a political identity that is cast as in opposition to 'white feminism' even when adopted by white women. Perhaps then, one of the more challenging aspects of understanding and pursuing intersectional feminism is that it raises the possibility that certain members within an oppressed group may themselves be guilty of oppressing others, leading to the exploration of often unchecked or unacknowledged privileges. Although these privileges have predominantly been associated with 'race' or class, increasingly in contemporary discussions, the structural benefits associated with being heterosexual, cis-gendered or able-bodied are also being explored. Arguably, these privileges, if left unexamined, lead to oppressive practices within the feminist movement itself. However, whilst the principles behind the concept of 'checking your privilege,' or being aware of where you are writing from and how you may be positioning others within your

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[1] Kathy Davis, 'Intersectionality as buzzword: A sociology of science perspective on what makes a feminist theory successful,' in *Feminist Theory,* v.9, (2008), pp.67-85, p.68.

work or actions are admirable, this 'call out' can also be misused to silence people, rather than encourage a more thoughtful or nuanced discussion.

Although the term is credited to Crenshaw, recognizing that different women have differing levels of privilege predates the concept of intersectionality. In her essay, 'Simone de Beauvoir and the Politics of Privilege,' Sonia Kruks refers to a collection of essays de Beauvoir wrote titled *Privileges*, published in 1955. In part, Kruks' essay focuses on epistemic privilege, defining this as 'conferring on specific groups or individuals, and to the harmful exclusion of others, the power exclusively to define knowledge and truth.'[2] However, Kruks notes that despite it being 'generally accepted that privilege of all kinds is systemic or structural,'[3] feminist analysis of privilege often focuses on the individual. Kruks suggests:

> [w]hen feminists' own privilege is the issue, the discourse on privilege generally shifts away from structural (and poststructural) analysis, "inward" toward a discourse of personal self-discovery, confession, and guilt, and thence to the moral imperative to engage in a project of self-transformation […].[4]

The tendency for discussions around the issues of privilege to focus on the individual, rather than the structural, is certainly prevalent within contemporary debates taking place in online feminist communities.

To an extent this shift from the structural to the individual can be seen as logical in a movement that stresses the importance of the personal as political. However, it can also lead to the analysis of privilege being reduced to personal attacks that are divisive and do little to challenge the roots of privilege or the structures that support or reinforce it. Of course acknowledging one's own privilege is an important first step in understanding and analyzing the structures in society that determine and maintain systems of privilege, and thus oppression. Developing an awareness of these privileges also addresses the issue of acting in what de Beauvoir terms 'bad faith,' avoiding self-deception about one's own role in maintaining and benefitting from structural privileges. However, guilt over often-unsolicited positions of privilege should not be allowed, or worse, encouraged, to paralyze action. As Kruks comments, 'guilt as an emotion may well be an important moment of an initial

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[2] Sonia Kruks, 'Simone de Beauvoir and the Politics of Privilege,' in *Hypatia*, vol.20, no.1, (Winter 2005), pp.178-205, p.181.
[3] Ibid., p.181.
[4] Ibid., p.181.

"conversion" process, in which we become aware of our privilege, but it may become quite crippling as a basis for effective political action.'[5] Thus, despite originating through good intentions, this 'call out' culture, which, as this chapter will address, is particularly prevalent in feminist interactions online and through social media, can also limit debates and practice.

Although presented as a relatively new or radical perspective within feminist debates, various second and third-wave feminists have also encouraged engaging in the analysis of privilege. As Kruk's article highlights, de Beauvoir was addressing the issue of privilege in 1955. In attempting to challenge and question the perception of feminism as a movement solely for the white middle classes, an intersectional approach has been taken to discussing gender and oppression, despite this often not being explicitly labeled as 'intersectional.' Theorists and authors such as bell hooks, Hazel Carby and Alice Walker have dedicated much time and intellectual effort in encouraging an awareness of the intersectional factors that can and do impact on issues of gender and oppression, such as race and class. As stated in the previous chapter, hooks problematizes using the word oppression at all, stressing the homogenizing effect this has on conveying women's experiences, linked to the idea of those with privilege speaking for and over others by representing their own experiences of 'oppression' as universal. Instead hooks suggests a more nuanced understanding where 'being oppressed means the absence of choices.'[6] She writes:

> [p]rivileged feminists have largely been unable to speak to, with, and for diverse groups of women because they either do not understand fully the interrelatedness of sex, race, and class oppression or refuse to take this interrelatedness seriously.[7]

Leila Ahmed and Chandra Talpade Mohanty have also advanced the importance of establishing and promoting intersectional feminism(s) – although again often not explicitly using the term – exploring the impact of various other forms of institutionalized oppression or dominance such as colonialism, capitalism and religion. More recently the focus of intersectionality has shifted to address questions raised by multiculturalism and, specifically post 9/11, Islamophobia, that co-opts issues surrounding Muslim women's rights and bodies, such as the practice of veiling, into wider debates about perceived problems with Islam.

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[5] Ibid., p.184.
[6] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory From Margin to Center*, (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p.5.
[7] Ibid., p.15.

As communities become increasingly global, both in terms of the rise in immigration and multiculturalism, as well as access to global media and news through the internet, the need for intersectionality within feminism becomes more pronounced. However, the debate over how to practice intersectional feminism has also become at times, particularly contentious and fraught. Much third-wave, or indeed fourth-wave, feminist debate now takes place online, via social media, chat rooms and blogs. Often this encourages immediate responses to various feminist issues raised by the media or changes in government policy. The utilization of the internet and social media has helped create a vibrant and lively space for feminist debates that can be both extremely current and often relatively open and inclusive. However, the somewhat utopian vision of an online feminism that allows space for a multiplicity of voices to engage in debate without fear of being silenced or discriminated against is, at times, more of a fiction than a reality.[8]

The call to 'check your privilege' when engaging in internet discussions or the criticism that activists or authors of blogs and newspaper articles have failed to check their privilege, is now a common occurrence online. Writing on a recent and heated debate that took place on *Twitter,* involving feminists from different backgrounds with differing levels of 'privilege', *Guardian* columnist, Zoe Williams posed the question, '[a]re you too white, rich, able-bodied and straight to be a feminist?'[9] Predominantly in support of this 'call out' culture that is frequently presented in media and internet based discussions as a short-hand for intersectional feminism, Williams suggests that although 'being told to check your privilege […] is insidious. […] there are times when you should do exactly that.'[10] However, she also warns about the dangers of adopting a position of cultural relativism that prohibits anyone from commenting on events that take place outside of their own experience or cultural specificity. Williams suggests that:

> on a purely pragmatic level […]. If only the truly marginalised can speak as feminists, that depletes our numbers […]. And if people "with a platform" are disqualified for being part of the power structure, that leaves us without a platform.[11]

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[8] Questions over the benefits offered to feminists by online communities and activism are underlying throughout this thesis and are addressed specifically in the final chapter.

[9] Zoe Williams, 'Are you too white, rich, able-bodied and straight to be a feminist?' in *The Guardian*, http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/apr/18/are-you-too-white-rich-straight-to-be-feminist [accessed 18th April 2013].

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

Although this is of course true, the accusation often leveled at white, Western feminists with a platform is not that they shouldn't be allowed a platform, but rather that they are *misusing* their platform in order to promote a singular view of feminism. This perception of feminism can also be seen to 'deplete our numbers,' not least by marginalizing and excluding women whose experiences do not fit with those expressed by feminists with a prominent media presence. Williams' 'pragmatic' approach then seems to brush over many of the issues raised when attempting to create and practice intersectional feminisms, only addressing whether those with privilege should or should not speak on behalf of other women, rather than addressing how the platform of privilege can or should be utilized.

Former Conservative MP, Louise Mensch, has also recently addressed intersectional feminism in *The Guardian*, calling for what she describes as, 'reality-based feminism',[12] pitting this against an intersectional approach. Mensch argues that feminists should be less concerned with addressing issues raised by race and class, and should instead be focusing their attention on gaining access to the still predominantly white and male dominant group. She derides what she describes as 'intersectional bollocks',[13] suggesting that intersectional feminism leads only to 'debates about middle-class privilege, hand-wringing over a good education […], and otherwise intelligent women backing out of debates and sitting around frenziedly checking their privilege.'[14] Mensch claims this is a feminism that 'does nothing. It accomplishes nothing. It changes nothing.'[15] Instead she advocates for a 'reality-based feminism – where you achieve, try to earn lots of money, run for office, campaign for measurable goals […].'[16] Although, as Kruks has implied, an intersectional approach that leads to guilt ridden paralysis, rather than a change in feminist practice or the production of theory, is clearly not desirable, Mensch's 'reality based' feminism presents a very particular and partial view of reality; namely that of her own. In fact, for many feminists, ignoring issues raised by race or class would be tantamount to denying reality, rather than acknowledging it.

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[12] Louise Mensch, 'How about some reality-based feminism?' in *The Guardian*, http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/may/30/reality-based-feminism-louise-mensch [accessed 3rd June 2013], p.3.
[13] Ibid., p.1.
[14] Ibid., p.3.
[15] Ibid., p.3.
[16] Ibid., p.3.

Mensch associates her vision of 'reality-based' feminism with American feminism, however, she fails to acknowledge in her article that intersectionality also has its roots in American feminism, and was born out of dissatisfaction with the type of feminism to which she aspires. Thus, feminism for Mensch, is still very much a movement to further the position of white, middle-class women. It is seen as a tool to help her achieve her goals and realize her own aspirations, rather than as a social and political movement that seeks to benefit all women. Within this article Mensch can be seen as emulating Marilyn Frye's 'arrogant perceiver' discussed in her book, *The politics of reality: Essays in feminist theory* (1983). Frye's arrogant perceiver is described as 'guilty of seeing with arrogant eyes, eyes that skillfully organize the world and everything in it with reference to the arrogant perceiver's desires and interests.'[17] Despite Frye normally attributing these arrogant eyes to men, with regard to race privilege, Frye asserts that women can also act as arrogant perceivers in an attempt to maintain a relationship with the dominant group. Thus, rather than adopt a position of awareness of her own privilege and the advantages that may have been granted to her since birth, due to her race, class, sexuality or able-bodiedness, Mensch asserts that she has 'no intention of checking her privilege for anyone.'[18] Her conclusion, 'I earned it',[19] demonstrates her deep misunderstanding of the debates surrounding the concept of privilege checking. As was mentioned earlier with reference to Kruks, the term privilege was intended to refer to structural or systematic privileges. Thus the privileges that Mensch is being asked to check are precisely those that have not been earned.

Mensch presents privilege checking as solely serving to silence women or to exclude them from certain debates. She cites the example of journalist and activist, Laurie Penny, who changed her position on an issue of racism in a recent *Twitter* exchange when challenged by a woman of colour who opposed her view. In Mensch's words, 'instead of defending her position, Penny caved'.[20] Mensch recounts this exchange in entirely negative terms, claiming Penny was being denied her right to an opinion on racism because she is white. However, Penny's response to Mensch's article presents a different perspective. Penny defends her decision to change her position as part of a learning process rather than a silencing one. She

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[17] Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*, (California: The Crossing Press, 1983), p.59.
[18] Louise Mensch, 'How about some reality-based feminism?' in *The Guardian*, http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/may/30/reality-based-feminism-louise-mensch [accessed 3rd June 2013], p.4.
[19] Ibid., p.4.
[20] Ibid., p.2.

argues 'that somebody might change their mind based on new, better information, rather than "defending their position" come what may, […].'[21] This suggests that privilege checking can represent a positive opportunity for feminists, and, particularly within cross-cultural discussions, allow debates to develop as they absorb new information, rather than become more polarized in their positions. Crucially, this view on the call to 'check your privilege' implies the possibility that something that is often portrayed as causing a split or rift within feminisms may actually be utilized to bring about greater solidarity and understanding.

However, like the debates surrounding intersectional feminism and white privilege within feminisms, the fear that acknowledging certain privileges will lead to silence, exclusion and paralysis is also not new. Frye writes:

> [t]he reasoning is that racism is so systematic and so impossible to escape, that one is simply trapped. On one level this is perfectly true and must always be taken into account. Taken as the whole and final truth, it is also unbearably and dangerously dismal.[22]

Frye suggests a more complex and nuanced view of whiteness and white supremacy that is not simply or purely associated with white skin, advocating an approach that acknowledges the racism found within feminisms, but, like Kruks who followed her, seeks to move beyond solely expressing white guilt. Frye asserts that 'white supremacy is *not* a law of nature'[23] and so it is possible for white women, and white people, to set themselves against it, in the same way she suggests that men can 'set themselves against masculinity.'[24] Although Frye acknowledges the difficulties in this, and arguably the impossibility of ever truly standing outside of your race or gender, by focusing on the suggestion that both racial and gender inequality are upheld by social structures and not laws of nature, Frye makes space for action and change that she describes as, providing a 'counsel for hope.'[25]

The complexity of these issues is the focus of Mariana Ortega's journal article, 'Being Lovingly, Knowingly Ignorant: White Feminism and Women of Color.' However, Frye's offer of hope is in contrast to Ortega's concept of 'loving, knowing, ignorance.' Ortega is

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[21] Laurie Penny, 'Louise Mensch, take a lesson on privilege from the internet' in *The Guardian*, http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/may/31/louise-mensch-privilege-internet [accessed 3rd June 2013].
[22] Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*, (California: The Crossing Press, 1983), p.126.
[23] Ibid., p.126.
[24] Ibid., p. 127.
[25] Ibid., p.127.

particularly damning of white feminists and the failures of third-wave feminism, suggesting that the inclusion of the voices of women of colour is a 'seal that must be stamped in Third Wave feminist work, […].'[26] She presents a picture of the white feminist, that 'despite her well intentions, turns women of color into something that can be used to further her own desires.'[27] Ortega critiques the way white women engage with women of colour within feminist discourse and activism, developing the concept of feminists being lovingly, knowingly ignorant.

Predominantly building on the work of Frye, Ortega links what she describes as 'loving, knowing ignorance – an ignorance of the thought and experience of women of color that is accompanied by both alleged love for and alleged knowledge about them',[28] with Frye's notion of arrogant perception. Ortega also develops Frye's notion of 'the loving perceiver' or 'loving eye,' an idea that she understands to suggest a:

> loving perceiver [that] does not consume the object of perception. Rather than completely simplifying that which is perceived, the loving eye is careful to see its complexities and to understand the boundaries between the loving perceiver and that which is perceived.[29]

However, in developing her concept of 'loving, knowing ignorance' Ortega stresses that 'loving' must at least in part be understood in an ironic sense.

Unlike Frye's arrogant perceivers, whom Ortega suggests don't 'even care to know about the object of perception',[30] those who are 'lovingly, knowingly ignorant' may attempt to 'look and listen' but fail to 'check and question.'[31] Ortega asserts:

> [t]hus we may find the feminist who wants to perceive women of color in their own terms, does not want to homogenize them, does not want to be coercive with them, does not want to use them but who, despite her well intentions, turns women of color into something that can be used to further her own desires.[32]

This somewhat negative position on the interaction between white feminists and women of colour implies that striving for a cross-cultural feminism that seeks to avoid replicating hierarchies or structures of oppression, is practically impossible.

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[26] Mariana Ortega, 'Being Lovingly, Knowingly Ignorant: White Feminism and Women of Color' in *Hypatia* 'Feminist Epistemologies of Ignorance' Vol. 21, no.3, (Summer 2006), pp.56-74, p.69.
[27] Ibid., p.61.
[28] Ibid., p.57.
[29] Ibid., p.60.
[30] Ibid., p.61.
[31] Ibid., p.61.
[32] Ibid., p.61.

Despite Ortega's critique of the well-meaning yet patronizing and oppressive white feminist that presents a rather bleak view of the possibilities for cross-cultural, intersectional feminism, other writers have presented more humorous – although perhaps equally as damning – examples of loving, knowing ignorance. Returning to Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, the Chalfen family can be seen as an example of loving, knowing ignorance that although seeking to engage with second generation immigrants, Irie and Millat, these experiences simply reinforce their own existing assumptions about black or Asian culture in London. The white middle-class Chalfen's sense of identity is so strong within *White Teeth* that it becomes a concept or theory branded as 'Chalfenism.' Their family dialogue is peppered with in-jokes and references to how 'Chalfenist' they are. However, despite their assurances and outwardly worldly appearance, they are an insular group and because of this 'Chalfenism' is rarely challenged. Smith stresses that '[t]he Chalfens had no friends. They interacted mainly with the Chalfen extended family (the *good genes* which were so often referred to: two scientists, one mathematician, three psychiatrists and a young cousin working for the Labour party).'[33] Their embrace of Irie and Millat into their family is thus both an act of curiosity, and even with reference to Ortega's ironic view of 'loving,' an act of charity, it is also an attempt at assimilation. Rather than genuinely engage with Irie and Millat, their presence is primarily used to reaffirm the superiority of 'Chalfenism,' not to challenge it. The Chalfen's present a model of multiculturalism that promotes the tolerating of difference as a badge of smug, liberal honour. It is a benign, one-way process that assumes those who are 'different' or 'other' should be grateful to a gracious host. Of course, the Chalfens are themselves the descendants of Jewish immigrants, a fact that serves to gently challenge the assumed permanence and stability of their place, presenting 'Chalfenism' as a dynamic process, despite the assumptions of the Chalfens.

Smith describes the palpable boredom suffered by Joyce Chalfen seeing 'Chalfenism and all its principles reflecting itself infinitely'[34] in the faces of her family at the dinner table. The arrival of Irie and Millat into the Chalfen's kitchen may relieve the boredom, but it fails to really challenge Chalfenism and all its assumptions, despite Millat's efforts. In a scene that conveys both elements of colonialism and orientalism, Joyce, referring to herself as 'Mother Chalfen,' describes Irie and Millat as 'very exotic,' going on to question 'Where are you

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[33] Zadie Smith, *White Teeth,* (Penguin Books: London, 2001), p.314.
[34] Ibid., p.314.

from, if you don't mind me asking? 'Willesden,' said Irie and Millat simultaneously.'[35] In an exchange that paradoxically betrays her ignorance, yet also conveys her unquestioned sense of superiority, Joyce persists with 'Yes, yes of course, but where *originally*?' 'Oh,' said Millat, putting on what he called a bud-bud-ding-ding accent. 'You are meaning where from am I *originally*.' Joyce looked confused. 'Yes, *originally*.'[36] Despite Joyce's confusion, she quickly attempts to reestablishes her authority, commenting on Millat and Irie's relationship, making assumptions about Muslim practices based on an article she read in the *Times.* Commenting on Millat's relationship status, she muses, '[h]is parents probably have something arranged for him, no? The headmaster told me he was a Muslim boy. I suppose he should be thankful he's not a girl, though, hmm? Remember that *Times* article […]?'[37] Although the Chalfen's demonstrate a willingness to engage with Irie and Millat, this 'loving' engagement only serves to further shore-up existing prejudices. Joyce's dependency on *The Times* as a source of reference displays her reliance on the epistemic privilege that defines others in relation to 'knowable' stereotypes, rather than through personal engagement, or acknowledging their own assertions. Millat's adoption of a 'bud-bud-ding-ding' accent intended to mock, instead becomes a source of comfort to Joyce, reaffirming her expectations.

Again, displaying her reliance on stereotypes and inability to 'check' or listen, Joyce enthuses about the joys of monogamy and how beneficial her relationship with her husband is for their children, assuming that this is not something Irie, as the child of an inter-racial relationship, will have experienced. Joyce returns to the safety of a position of epistemic privilege stating, 'you read a lot about how Afro-Caribbeans seem to find it hard to establish long-term relationships.'[38] This is accepted as fact instead of interrogated through the lived experience of Irie, with Joyce adding the patronizing rhetorical question of, 'that's terribly sad, isn't it?'[39] The Chalfens display this loving, knowing ignorance, described by Ortega as 'an ignorance of the thought and experience of women of color that is accompanied by both alleged love for and alleged knowledge about them.'[40] However, despite subtly challenging, or even at times encouraging the reader to mock the Chalfens, Smith does not condemn them

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[35] Ibid., p.319.
[36] Ibid., p.319.
[37] Ibid., p.320.
[38] Ibid., p.322.
[39] Ibid., p.322.
[40] Mariana Ortega, 'Being Lovingly, Knowingly Ignorant: White Feminism and Women of Color,' in *Hypatia* 'Feminist Epistemologies of Ignorance' Vol. 21, no.3, (Summer 2006), pp.56-74, p.57.

entirely or suggest that they are incapable of change. The Chalfens are not used to undermine multiculturalism but rather Smith subtly undermines the strength and assurance of Chalfenism in order to strengthen the fluid and hybrid vision of multiculturalism that *White Teeth* promotes.

In fact, the challenge to Chalfenism does not come from engaging with the 'other,' in the form of Irie or Millat, but rather from within. Joshua Chalfen rejects his parents' ideals, announcing 'I'm sick of it! Sick to the back fucking teeth of it!', and denounces his parents as 'hypocrites'.[41] The downfall of 'Chalfenism' is thus presented not as due to the pretensions to 'loving' that mask an arrogant perception: instead it is that it is never knowingly ignorant. Talking of his father, Joshua states 'he thinks he *owns* reasonableness! How do you deal with people like that?'[42] The Chalfen's failure is then in the inability or refusal to adapt by applying the same level of intellectual effort and critique inwardly, as they do to those outside of their group. As Ortega suggests 'checking and questioning are necessary if the perceiver is to avoid making up a reality that reinforces his or her worldview […].'[43] Instead of checking and questioning, the Chalfens adopt an 'arrogant eye.' They are presented as a parody of canonical tradition, attempting to reinforce their position as the bearers of epistemic privilege whilst continually being shown to be losing their grip. Smith's critique of the Chalfens, however, cannot simply be reduced to their 'race,' particularly as previously mentioned, their being Jewish challenges such a simplistic reading, or to their whiteness. Millat and Irie also challenge their parents' static views of culture, creating a dynamic and shifting space where cultures can be continually redefined. *White Teeth* presents a view where nothing is fixed and all cultures are open to change and interrogation. As Alsana, Millat's mother asserts, 'either everything is sacred or nothing is.'[44] This questions the notion of multiculturalism as protecting certain 'traditions' or cultural practices in the promotion of accepting cultural diversity, challenging the idea that some elements of cultures should be fixed, or presumed as 'sacred.'

Smith creates a view of multiculturalism that is, although at times fraught, ultimately celebratory. Published in 2000, and thus before 9/11 and the subsequent 'war on terror,'

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[41] Zadie Smith, *White Teeth,* (Penguin Books: London, 2001), p.403.
[42] Ibid., p.405.
[43] Mariana Ortega, 'Being Lovingly, Knowingly Ignorant: White Feminism and Women of Color,' in *Hypatia* 'Feminist Epistemologies of Ignorance' Vol. 21, no.3, (Summer 2006), pp.56-74, p.61.
[44] Zadie Smith, *White Teeth,* (Penguin Books: London, 2001), p.237.

White Teeth presents the possibilities of multiculturalism, that, as with the Chalfens, may illustrate the limitations of engaging with multiculturalism when viewed as a static acceptance of difference. Certainly, it does not suggest that those who are 'other' pose a threat. In fact, the characters all manage eventually to embrace their hybrid identities to an extent, creating new national identities that are presented as all somehow inherently British. By allowing for cultures to be dynamic, in a position similar to that of Homi Bhabha, as mentioned in the previous chapter, who argues for the promotion of the acceptance of cultural difference, rather than a static toleration of cultural diversity, Smith creates a space for national identities to be fluid, allowing for multiple cultural influences.

That is not to say that acknowledging or embodying hybrid identities is not problematic. In her essay, 'What Should White People Do?,' Linda Martin Alcoff addresses the issues that arise from deconstructing white identities in an attempt to move towards an anti-racist position that goes beyond self-criticism. Alcoff questions 'what is it to acknowledge one's whiteness?' and asks if it is 'possible to feel okay about being white?'[45] Alcoff acknowledges the difficulties of attempting to ignore or distance oneself from white history, not just because this 'colorblindness' is in fact further evidence of white privilege. As Alcoff writes, 'part of white privilege has been precisely whites' ability to ignore the ways white racial identity has benefitted them.'[46] However, she also stresses the importance of maintaining a positive connection to one's identity, arguing an individual 'needs to feel a connection to community, to history, and to a human project larger than his or her own life.'[47] This is also true for multicultural and multiracial identities. Much of the tension in *White Teeth* arises from the difficult balancing act of acknowledging separate cultural histories, and maintaining a positive relationship with cultural identity, whilst looking beyond to shared futures.

Alcoff stresses the complexity of white identity that she suggests is 'both homogenous and fractured.'[48] White skin alone is not enough to grant you the full privilege of whiteness. Alcoff asserts, 'Jews, Irish, Italians, and other southern Europeans were sometimes excluded from whiteness and at other times enjoyed a halfway status as almost white, but not quite

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[45] Linda Martin Alcoff, 'What Should White People Do?' in *Border Crossings: Multicultural and Postcolonial Feminist Challenges to Philosophy (Part 2),* vol.13 no.3, (Summer 1998), pp.6-26, p.8.
[46] Ibid., p.8.
[47] Ibid., p.8.
[48] Ibid., p.9.

[…].'[49] Intersectional feminist analysis can also be utilized to stress the fractured nature of white identity, highlighting the importance of factors such as gender, class and sexuality. Alcoff stresses, however, 'in much feminist literature the normative, dominant subject position is described in detail as a white, heterosexual, middle-class, able-bodied male.'[50] This returns to the question of equality, asking who feminists are seeking equality with? Alcoff suggests, 'the demand for equality has implicitly and practically meant the demand for equality with white men (a demand for equality with, say, *puertorriqueños* would hardly mean liberation).'[51] As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, this sentiment is echoed by bell hooks who questions, '[s]ince men are not equals in a white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal class structure, which men do women want to be equal to?'[52]

In response to this question, Alcoff, like Ortega, refers to the work of Frye. Alcoff explores Frye's notion that 'white feminists should be disloyal to whiteness.'[53] She questions how and if this is possible, stressing the importance of avoiding any attempts at promoting the kind of colorblindness that devalues, or worse, attempts to erase, racial identities. Instead, Alcoff advocates a greater awareness and acknowledgement of the nuances of white identity and, particularly, white history. As with the multiracial and hybrid characters celebrated by Smith in *White Teeth*, 'white representations must then be similarly dialectical, […].'[54] This involves 'retrieving from obscurity the history of white antiracism even while providing a detailed account of colonialism and its many cultural effects.'[55] It also includes acknowledging the various factors that impact on the benefits provided by whiteness, such as the gender, class, sexuality and able-bodiedness of an individual. This again stresses the importance of an intersectional feminist approach, both in working across cultural boundaries and in one's own community.

Acknowledging multiple and fractured identities in all cultures and communities helps address the problematic 'Package Picture of Cultures',[56] as discussed by Uma Narayan.

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[49] Ibid., p.9.

[50] Ibid., p.10.

[51] Ibid., p.11.

[52] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p.19.

[53] Linda Martin Alcoff, 'What Should White People Do?' in *Border Crossings: Multicultural and Postcolonial Feminist Challenges to Philosophy (Part 2),* vol.13 no.3, (Summer 1998), pp.6-26, p.11.

[54] Ibid., p.25.

[55] Ibid., p.25.

[56] Uma Narayan, 'Undoing the "Package Picture" of Cultures' *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society,* vol.25, no. 4, (2000), pp. 1083-1086, p.1084.

However, this is not to argue that we are all so different from one another that no similarities or consensus can ever be found, but rather that our differences and similarities are often not as sharply separated by the perceived boundaries of culture as may sometimes be assumed. Narayan writes:

> I would argue that there seems to be considerable resemblance, at least at a certain level of abstraction, between the issues addressed by Third-World feminists and those addressed by Western feminists, it is a result not of faddish mimicry but of the fact that women's inequality and mistreatment are, unfortunately, ubiquitous features of many "Western" and "non-Western" cultural contexts, even as their manifestations in specific contexts display important differences of detail.[57]

Although Narayan asserts the importance of acknowledging differences of detail that may be culturally specific, exploring culture as a 'context' allows for a much more fluid interpretation, making space for cultural contexts to shift depending on time and place.

Alcoff notes the impact that class may have as a contextual factor on forming or asserting racial identity. Furthering her assertions about the importance of maintaining or establishing a positive identity, Alcoff suggests, 'white supremacy may be all that poor whites have to hold on to in order to maintain a sense of self-love.'[58] She argues that their dependence on the idea of white supremacy 'may often operate precisely because they themselves are oppressed'.[59] This could equally apply to Smith's characters, the Chalfens, who, as second and third generation immigrants, cling tightly to their notion of 'Chalfenism' as a constant that reinforces their feeling of superiority. Similarly, Frye suggests that white women may resist relinquishing their hold on the privileges afforded to them by their whiteness for fear of being forever left out of the dominant group. Frye writes, 'since white women are almost white men, being white, at least, and sometimes more-or-less honorary men, we can cling to the hope of true membership in the dominant and powerful group […].'[60] Despite the notion that class, and the subsequent oppression or limiting of choices that an individual may experience due to their class, may well encourage poor whites to hold on to the various privileges their whiteness might offer them, it would certainly be misleading to suggest that racism, and specifically racism that is supported at a structural level, is not evident in all classes of our society.

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[57] Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism,* (London: Routledge, 1997), p.17

[58] Linda Martin Alcoff, 'What Should White People Do?' in *Border Crossings: Multicultural and Postcolonial Feminist Challenges to Philosophy (Part 2),* vol.13 no.3, (Summer 1998), pp.6-26, p.18.

[59] Ibid., p.18.

[60] Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*, (California: The Crossing Press, 1983), p.121.

Ortega advises returning to the work of Maria Lugones in order to avoid 'loving, knowing ignorance.' Lugones' essay, 'Playfulness, "World"-Traveling, and Loving Perception,' again builds on the work of Frye, however, her use of 'loving' is perhaps more hopeful than Ortega's and Frye's. Lugones describes arrogant perception as 'a failure of love',[61] and suggests developing a deeper understanding of those that are 'other' by identifying with them through the process of 'playful "world"-travel.'[62] Although she asserts that this process of "world"-travelling is something that takes place for women of colour in the US anyway and out of necessity, Lugones argues that 'the hostility of these "worlds" and the compulsory nature of the "travelling" have obscured […] the enormous value of this aspect of our living and its connection to loving.'[63] In an attempt to resituate "World"-travelling and emphasize the benefits of this process, Lugones advocates the importance of accentuating the playfulness and establishing a way of loving that does not equate love with servitude, which Frye suggests, love so often is when linked with arrogant perception.

Lugones explores the concept of love as a form of abuse that requires, and is reliant on, servitude, through her relationship with her mother. She describes her 'failure' to love her mother as in part based on her failure to accept this form of loving, stating 'there is something obviously wrong with the love that I was taught and something right with my failure to love my mother in this way.'[64] However, Lugones also acknowledges the problems that arose from this 'failure,' writing, '[i]t involved an abandoning of my mother while I longed not to abandon her. I wanted to love my mother, though, given what I was taught, "love" could not be the right word for what I longed.'[65] The problem, for Lugones, lay not in the desire to identify with her mother, or with someone who is 'other,' but with 'identifying with a victim of enslavement.'[66] Her desire to distance herself from this enslavement led to an inability to love her mother and identify with her. Lugones notes that she saw herself as 'separate from her, a different sort of being, not quite the same species.'[67] Crucially, this separateness or

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[61] Maria Lugones, 'Playfulness, "World"-Travelling, and Loving Perception' in *Hypatia*, Vol.2, no.2, (Summer 1987), pp. 3-19, p.4.
[62] Ibid., p.5.
[63] Ibid., p.3.
[64] Ibid., p.6.
[65] Ibid., p.6.
[66] Ibid., p.6.
[67] Ibid., p.6.

distance meant that Lugones 'could not welcome her [mother's] world.'[68] This lack of love, that is described as 'not a fault, but a lack',[69] leads Lugones to the conclusion that 'love has to be rethought, made anew.'[70] In applying this to relations between women of colour and white women, Lugones suggests that this failure or lack of love is not just based on the understanding of love as servitude, as described by Frye, but also 'the failure to identify with another woman, the failure to see oneself in other women who are quite different from oneself.'[71]

Although this suggests the positive possibilities of recognizing oneself in the 'other' – as Narayan argues there are many commonalities of experience across cultures and continents – in order to avoid 'loving' in the sense of the arrogant perceiver or partaking in the production of knowledge about the 'other,' one should not be afraid to acknowledge and even celebrate difference. Identifying with someone who is 'other,' or "world"-travelling, then becomes a mutual process of recognition where the other's reality or concept of self cannot be ignored, rather than a process of projecting one's own identity onto someone who is not the same. As Lugones argues, 'only through this travelling to her "world" could I identify with her because only then could I cease to ignore her and to be excluded and separate from her.'[72] Lugones also emphasizes "world"-travelling as a process that is mutually beneficial, enabling the traveler to learn as much about themselves, as they do the 'other.' By traveling to another's "world" we can see '*what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes*.'[73]

However, Ortega warns about "world"-travelling being adopted as 'simply a theoretical notion that helps the white feminist place her work on the map of Third Wave feminism',[74] suggesting that then 'it merely reinforces loving, knowing ignorance.'[75] She stresses the need for "world"-travelling that involves 'learning about the person's culture in a less superficial manner than simply eating her food.'[76] Instead Ortega advocates, 'learning her language,

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[68] Ibid., p.6.
[69] Ibid., p.7.
[70] Ibid., p.7.
[71] Ibid., p.7.
[72] Ibid., p.8.
[73] Ibid., p.17.
[74] Mariana Ortega, 'Being Lovingly, Knowingly Ignorant: White Feminism and Women of Color,' in *Hypatia* 'Feminist Epistemologies of Ignorance' Vol. 21, no.3, (Summer 2006), pp.56-74, p.69.
[75] Ibid., p.69.
[76] Ibid., p.70.

living in her environment, trying to understand issues from her perspective […].'[77] Although Ortega highlights the problems associated with a superficial engagement with "world"-travelling, what she describes would seem to be a failure of love, in Lugones' terms, on the part of white feminists, and thus not a genuine engagement with the process. Ortega's view also assumes rigid boundaries between women of colour and white feminists in terms of language and living environments that have increasingly been broken down or diffused in multicultural societies. In order to avoid the problems suggested by Ortega, "world"-travelling must clearly involve a genuine willingness to try and view issues from the perspective of the 'other', and importantly in terms of white feminism and privilege, to attempt to see one's self from this perspective. Ortega questions the willingness of white feminists to engage truly in this process. However, if the importance and interdependent nature of "world"-travelling stressed by Lugones is acknowledged, then the process becomes less of a choice for feminists and more of a necessity. As Lugones emphatically asserts:

> [w]e are fully dependent on each other for the possibility of being understood and without this understanding we are not intelligible, we do not make sense, we are not solid, visible, integrated, we are lacking. So travelling to each other's "worlds" would enable us to *be* through *loving* each other.[78]

Ortega's critique presents white feminists as 'the guardians of the doors of feminism'[79] and argues that they fear 'their very being would be at stake'[80] if they gave up this position. However, Lugones highlights the risks associated with white feminists maintaining this position as gatekeepers, suggesting that the failure to engage genuinely with this process of "world"-travelling would itself seem to threaten the very being of women, and risk presenting a feminism that is unintelligible and lacking.

Of course the criticism that feminism is unintelligible and lacking is often made, not least by feminists themselves, and paradoxically the type of feminism that Lugones' process of "world"-travelling can be seen to promote is the same as Louise Mensch dismissed as 'intersectional bollocks'[81] that 'does nothing.'[82] Conversely, the 'reality based' feminism

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[77] Ibid., p.70.

[78] Maria Lugones, 'Playfulness, "World"-Travelling, and Loving Perception' in *Hypatia*, Vol.2, no.2, (Summer 1987), pp.3-19, p.8.

[79] Mariana Ortega, 'Being Lovingly, Knowingly Ignorant: White Feminism and Women of Color' in *Hypatia* 'Feminist Epistemologies of Ignorance' Vol. 21, no.3, (Summer 2006), pp.56-74, pp.70-71.

[80] Ibid., p.71.

[81] Louise Mensch, 'How about some reality-based feminism?' in *The Guardian,* http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/may/30/reality-based-feminism-louise-mensch [accessed 3rd June 2013], p.2.

advocated by Mensch is arguably equally unintelligible and lacking to women who may not share her aspirations or 'reality.' Mensch then can be seen as acting as a guardian at the door of feminism, seeking to define which issues feminists should concern themselves with, and by doing this, which feminists should be included in her view of 'reality'-based feminism. Although this would seemingly promote the importance of understanding feminism in terms of the multiplicity of feminisms, this does not negate the importance of feminists travelling between feminisms. In fact, Mensch's disagreement with fellow white feminist, Penny, highlights how nuanced white feminism is and how the boundaries between "worlds" may not necessarily be drawn along the clear lines of place, environment, race, or language, but can also include often less visible differences created by class or political persuasion. "World"-travelling then becomes a project that can benefit all feminists, moving beyond its original remit of providing understanding across racial, cultural and ethnic lines to promoting understanding across multiple fractions within feminism(s).

Ortega's concern that "world"-travelling could be seen as an exclusively theoretical tool for white feminists wishing to pay lip service to the ethics of third wave feminism, can in part be negated by insisting on the importance of genuine engagement with the loving elements of this process. The opportunity is also provided by "world"-travelling to learn about one's self rather than simply engaging in the production of knowledge about the 'other.' However, Ortega's concern should not lead to the conclusion that feminist practice should be privileged over engaging theoretically with these issues, or suggest that practice can necessarily operate without theory. Recent feminist activism that has attempted to operate across cultures, such as Femen's topless jihad, can in fact be criticised for its lack of theoretical framework and failure to acknowledge the problems associated with attempting to establish universal ideas of equality and freedom across cultures. Femen's position promotes a vision of gender equality that is rooted in sexual liberation and freedom, seeking to reclaim nakedness as a woman's right, however, it pays little attention to other understandings of liberation. Furthermore, Femen's 'International Topless Jihad Day' was certainly met with mixed views from feminists, both 'white' and 'Third-world.' A counter group, Muslim Women Against Femen (MWAF), was launched and quickly gained popularity over social media sites such as *Facebook* and *Twitter*, using the hashtag, #Muslimahpride. Their campaign featured photos of numerous Muslim women holding signs that displayed slogans

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[82] Ibid., p.3.

such as, 'Nudity DOES NOT liberate me and I DO NOT need saving' and 'Shame on you Femen, hijab is my right.'[83] However, support for this project was not simply confined to Muslim feminists, with the campaign gaining acknowledgement from across cultures.

Femen launched their topless jihad in response to death threats that one of their Tunisian members, Amina Tyler, received after posting pictures of herself topless with 'my body is mine, nobody's honor'[84] written in Arabic across her chest. This was later translated by Femen and the image was adapted and published saying 'Fuck your morals'.[85] Femen's response included protesting topless outside Mosques, with Islamic crescents painted over their breasts, adopting positions of mock prayer, and burning the Islamic flag. Their actions angered many Muslim feminists, including reportedly, Amina Tyler, in whose defence the topless jihad was launched. Tyler is quoted as denouncing their actions, saying 'they burned the Islamic flag in front of a mosque in Paris. I am against it.'[86] However, although Tyler distances herself from some of their actions she still asserts her support for Femen and maintains 'I will be one of them until I'm 80.'[87]

In an open letter to Femen, published on their Facebook page and disseminated widely across the internet, MWAF, accuse Femen of colonialism and promoting an explicitly singular form of Western feminism and liberation. They write:

> [w]e understand it's really hard for a lot of you white colonial "feminists" to believe, but – SHOCKER! – Muslim women and women of colour can come up with their own autonomy, and fight back as well! And speak out for themselves! Who knew?[88]

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[83] Sara C Nelson, 'Muslim Women Against Femen: Facebook Group Takes On Activists In Wake Of Amina Tyler Topless Jihad (PICTURES)' in *The Huffington Post*, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/04/05/muslim-women-against-femen-facebook-topless-jihad-pictures-amina-tyler_n_3021495.html [accessed 13th 2013], p.1.

[84] Hajer Naili, 'Femen's Islam-Bashing Disregards Muslim Feminism,' in *Womens enews* http://womensenews.org/story/religion/130409/femens-islam-bashing-disregards-muslim-feminism [accessed 13th June 2013], p.1.

[85] Bim Adewunmi, 'The inconsistency of Femen's imperialist "one size fits all" attitude,' in *Newstatesman* http://www.newstatesman.com/bim-adewunmi/2013/04/inconsistency-femens-imperialist-one-size-fits-all-attitude [accessed 13th July 2013], p.1.

[86] Hajer Naili, 'Femen's Islam-Bashing Disregards Muslim Feminism,' in *Womens enews* http://womensenews.org/story/religion/130409/femens-islam-bashing-disregards-muslim-feminism [accessed 13th June 2013], p.2.

[87] Ibid., p.2.

[88] Muslim Women Against Femen, 'An open letter to FEMEN,' on *BEMA Birmingham Ethnic Minorities Association*, http://bemaonline.wordpress.com/2013/04/14/an-open-letter-to-femen-2/ [accessed 13th June 2013] p.1.

They go on to say that they are sick of 'colonial, racist rubbish disguised as "women's liberation"' and are 'tired of hearing from women of privilege perpetuating the stereotype that Muslim women, women of colour and women from the Global South are submissive, helpless and in need of western "progress."'[89] Although MWAF's critique of Femen's actions raises justifiable concern over what has been described as Femen's 'imperialist, "one size fits all" attitude',[90] the question remains over how Femen should have responded to the death threats received by one of their members in the name of Islam. After advocating that women bare their breasts in defiance of patriarchy, and insisting that this included all religions not specifically Islam, remaining silent instead of showing support for one of their members could have been perceived as cultural relativism. However, what is missing from their action is any kind of acknowledgment of Muslim feminism or an understanding of the possibility of equating the hijab and covering with liberation. There is also a lack of awareness, or refusal to address the intersectional factors that influence women's lives, prioritizing the issue of gender over race or religion. This leads to what journalist, Bim Adewunmi, refers to as 'a deafening inconsistency in their own ideology.'[91] Adewunmi argues that they seem to be saying, '"Your bodies are your own – do with them what you will! Except you over there in the headscarf. You should be topless."'[92] This inconsistency can in part be linked to a lack of a strong theoretical position or awareness of the multiplicity of feminist thought and the longstanding nature of many of these debates, informing Femen's actions. As their leader, Inna Shevchenko,[93] writes, 'Femen is a huge experiment. […] We cannot tell you of our upcoming plans, or what the final result of our struggle will be […].'[94]

In response to MWAF's open letter, Shevchenko writes, 'I don't deny that there are Muslim women who will say they are free and the hijab is their choice and right.'[95] However,

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[89] Ibid., p.1.

[90] Bim Adewunmi, 'The inconsistency of Femen's imperialist "one size fits all" attitude' in *Newstatesman* http://www.newstatesman.com/bim-adewunmi/2013/04/inconsistency-femens-imperialist-one-size-fits-all-attitude [accessed July 13th 2013], p.2.

[91] Ibid., p.2.

[92] Ibid., p.2.

[93] After writing this chapter, evidence emerged that questioned whether Inna Shevchenko was in fact the leader of Femen, or whether the group were actually lead by a man, Victor Svyatski. The conclusion of this thesis addresses this revelation, and the implications it has for this research.

[94] Inna Shevchenko, 'We are Femen, the naked shock troops of feminism,' in *The Guardian,* http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/apr/10/femen-naked-shock-troops-of-feminism [accessed 12th June 2013], p.3.

[95] Inna Shevchenko, 'Topless in the Country of Hijab?' in *The Huffington Post,* http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/inna-shevchenko/femen-topless-in-the-country-of-hijab_b_3034211.html [accessed 12th June 2013], p.1.

despite this possibly conciliatory remark Shevchenko then goes on to question Muslim women's autonomy, declaring, '[s]o, sisters, (I prefer to talk to women anyway, even knowing that behind them are bearded men with knives).'[96] She also dismisses the issue of 'race' in relation to women's oppression and rights, arguing 'women are the modern slaves and it's never a question of colour of skin.'[97] Shevchenko's 'colour-blind' approach to feminism seems indicative of the privileged position critics have accused Femen of taking, and certainly Shevchenko seems to prioritize the idea of women's shared experience of oppression over acknowledging difference. Indeed, she expressly asserts universal aims, stressing that 'the idea of freedom doesn't have anything to do with nationality or colour of skin'[98] and insists that Femen will 'keep fighting for all of us, for our right to freedom.'[99] However, problematically, this seemingly does not include religious freedom. Shevchenko describes her vision of a secular world with 'religions that are only in your houses or churches and don't appear in other places'[100] and dismisses Allah or Jesus as 'fantasies' that would be ignored 'if those fantasies did not affect human rights.'[101] She declares that her imagined reality would be a world 'without 9/11, without witch-hunts, without 7/7, a world without suicide bombers and without the Taliban [...].'[102] As well as clearly equating religion with terrorism, Shevchenko also implies that secular societies are unquestionably good, or at least better, for women. Again this fails to take into account Muslim feminists, and specifically those arguing against the discrimination they are now facing with regard to veiling under the banner of secularism and women's liberation in France.[103]

Although Shevchenko is clear about what her envisioned world would be without, she is less clear about what it will include and seems unconcerned that by equating all religion with acts of terrorism and extreme fundamentalism she may be alienating the very 'sisters' she is reaching out to. Femen's critique of the subjugation of Muslim women, and Shevchenko's explicit linking of Islam with acts of terror, can also be seen to feed into the

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[96] Ibid., p.1.
[97] Ibid., p.1.
[98] Ibid., p.2.
[99] Ibid., p.2.
[100] Ibid., p.2.
[101] Ibid., p.2.
[102] Ibid., p.2.
[103] This issue is discussed in greater depth in the following chapter.

rhetoric of Islamophobia. Shevchenko describes a world 'without crusades'[104] yet ironically MWAF describe Femen's actions as a 'crusade for global women's liberation'[105] that in a climate of Islamophobia is 'EXTREMELY DANGEROUS.'[106] As Hajer Naili, asserts, 'the group's reckless Islamophobia is impossible to deny after this [...] broadside attack on symbols of Islamic culture.'[107] Naili goes on to state that 'this crude attack on the Muslim world uses woman as a shield. But it does nothing to seriously address the problems of religious extremism that restricts women in all societies.'[108] There is, of course, the risk that Femen's actions may be co-opted to support Islamophobic positions and attitudes, perpetuating the perception of the downtrodden Muslim woman and the tyrannical Muslim man, and Femen certainly do not help to challenge this stereotype. However, as Shevchenko explicitly states, Femen is against all religions, not just Islam. She cites the example of Femen activists being labeled 'Christianphobes' by 'anti-gay Catholics.'[109] What is telling then is not Femen's overt Islamophobia, but rather their lack of concern for the impact that their actions may have for Muslim women and feminists across the globe. They present a singular view of feminism that fails to take into account the important intersections of race, culture and religion, preferring to focus only on gender, and in doing so their actions demonstrate a lack of awareness of the nuances of difference and the importance of acknowledging women's lived experiences.

However, MWAF's linking of Shevchenko's position with Western colonialism is also problematic, demonstrating a lack of attention to nuance and difference in Western culture and history. Shevchenko was born in Ukraine, where Femen was started initially as a response to trafficking women for the sex trade, so she claims a cultural history that varies dramatically from a standardized view of Western ideas of democracy and enlightenment, usually associated with Europe and America. As Shevchenko asserts, 'being born in post

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[104] Inna Shevchenko, 'Topless in the Country of Hijab?' in *The Huffington Post,* http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/inna-shevchenko/femen-topless-in-the-country-of-hijab_b_3034211.html [accessed 12th June 2013], p.2.

[105] Muslim Women Against Femen, 'An open letter to FEMEN,' on *BEMA Birmingham Ethnic Minorities Association*, http://bemaonline.wordpress.com/2013/04/14/an-open-letter-to-femen-2/ [accessed 13th June 2013], p.1.

[106] Ibid., p.1.

[107] Hajer Naili, 'Femen's Islam-Bashing Disregards Muslim Feminism,' in *Womens enews* http://womensenews.org/story/religion/130409/femens-islam-bashing-disregards-muslim-feminism [accessed 13th June 2013], p.2.

[108] Ibid., p.2.

[109] Inna Shevchenko, 'Topless in the Country of Hijab?' in *The Huffington Post,* http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/inna-shevchenko/femen-topless-in-the-country-of-hijab_b_3034211.html [accessed 12th June 2013], p.2.

USSR country (Ukraine) I know exactly that it's a common trait of dictatorial countries to promote the official position of the government pretending that it's backed by the people.'[110] However, it is unclear whether Shevchenko is seeking commonality with woman under what she sees as the dictatorship of Islam, linking that to living in post-USSR Ukraine, or questioning women's ability to choose to veil, based on their location. With regard to responding to Muslim Women Against Femen, the open letter was written by Muslim feminists living in Birmingham, thus implying that for Shevchenko, regardless of location or context, veiling is always a symptom of patriarchal oppression, rather than, in some instances an act of resistance or rebellion.

Paradoxically, both Femen and Muslim Women Against Femen seem to replicate the very attitudes and behaviors they seek to critique. In Lugones' terms, no attempt at "world"-travelling is made in an effort to engage with the 'other' or to critically examine one's own position from the perspective of the other. Each accuses the other of homogenizing women's experiences in an attempt to promote their own particular view of freedom and liberation. Whilst Muslim Women Against Femen insist, 'we don't have to conform to your customs of protest to emancipate ourselves',[111] Shevchenko argues, 'you can put on as many scarves as you want if you are free tomorrow to take it off [...] but don't deny millions of your sisters who have fear behind their scarves, [...].'[112] These polarized positions show little interest in understanding the nuances of each other's perspective. Femen's position of recognizing Muslim women as their sisters is a product of projecting their own universal views of women onto Muslim women, rather than actually identifying with them as Lugones advocates. Lugones' theory of 'playful "world"-travelling' suggests that the problem is not the desire to identify with someone that is 'other,' or in this case Femen's desire to recognize Muslim women as sisters, but rather that Femen are identifying with Muslim women as 'victim[s] of enslavement'[113] and the 'love' they are attempting to show their 'sisters' is actually a product

[110] Inna Shevchenko, 'Topless in the Country of Hijab?' in *The Huffington Post* http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/inna-shevchenko/femen-topless-in-the-country-of-hijab_b_3034211.html [accessed 12th June 2013], p.2.
[111] Muslim Women Against Femen, 'An open letter to FEMEN,' on *BEMA Birmingham Ethnic Minorities Association*, http://bemaonline.wordpress.com/2013/04/14/an-open-letter-to-femen-2/ [accessed 13th June 2013], p.1.
[112] Inna Shevchenko, 'Topless in the Country of Hijab?' in *The Huffington Post,* http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/inna-shevchenko/femen-topless-in-the-country-of-hijab_b_3034211.html [accessed 12th June 2013], p.2.
[113] Maria Lugones, 'Playfulness, "World"-Travelling, and Loving Perception,' in *Hypatia*, Vol.2, no.2, (Summer 1987), pp.3-19, p.6.

of arrogant perception. Rather than freeing Muslim women, Femen's topless jihad further enslaves them, positioning them as pawns in their war on patriarchy, instead of seeing them as autonomous comrades, despite her call to see them 'on the battle lines.'[114] As Shevchenko comments, '[t]hey write on their posters that they don't need liberation but in their eyes it's written "help me."'[115] Shevchenko's disbelief in the autonomy of Muslim women can clearly be seen as an example of Frye's arrogant perception and the practice of Ortega's loving, knowing ignorance. Although she asserts her love for her Muslim sisters, it manifests itself as a patronizing and paternal love that silences Muslim women's voices and assumes it knows best.

Shevchenko's attitude towards Muslim women protesting against Femen's topless jihad encapsulates the type of feminism of which Ortega is so wary. However, as I have suggested, criticism of Femen's actions is not due to the group prioritizing theory over practice, one of the possible risks Ortega associates with cross-cultural third wave feminism,[116] but, in fact, can be seen as in part due to a lack of attention to theory. Taken at its most basic, Femen's aim to challenge patriarchy through 'feminine rebellion'[117] and confront those who are 'constantly oppressing women, covering them, disrespecting them, raping them, beating them, whether they are religious or not',[118] represents a strong commitment to established feminist values. However, their assertion that this challenge can take place by protesting with their 'bare breasts alone'[119] is more problematic. Despite this method generating mass media attention, often the aim of their exposure is lost or all too easily deflected. Shevchenko describes protesting against President Putin, where Femen

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[114] Inna Shevchenko, 'Topless in the Country of Hijab?' in *The Huffington Post*, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/inna-shevchenko/femen-topless-in-the-country-of-hijab_b_3034211.html [accessed 12th June 2013], p.2.

[115] Sara C Nelson, 'Muslim Women Against Femen: Facebook Group Takes On Activists In Wake Of Amina Tyler Topless Jihad (PICTURES)' in *The Huffington Post*, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/04/05/muslim-women-against-femen-facebook-topless-jihad-pictures-amina-tyler_n_3021495.html [accessed July 13th 2013], p.1.

[116] Mariana Ortega, 'Being Lovingly, Knowingly Ignorant: White Feminism and Women of Color' in *Hypatia* 'Feminist Epistemologies of Ignorance' Vol. 21, no.3, (Summer 2006), pp.56-74, p.69.

[117] Inna Shevchenko, 'We are Femen, the naked shock troops of feminism,' in *The Guardian*, http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/apr/10/femen-naked-shock-troops-of-feminism [accessed 12th June 2013], p.2.

[118] Inna Shevchenko, 'Topless in the Country of Hijab?' in *The Huffington Post*, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/inna-shevchenko/femen-topless-in-the-country-of-hijab_b_3034211.html [accessed 12th June 2013], p.1.

[119] Inna Shevchenko, 'We are Femen, the naked shock troops of feminism' in *The Guardian*, http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/apr/10/femen-naked-shock-troops-of-feminism [accessed 12th June 2013], p.3.

members bared their breasts and shouted 'Fuck you, dictator!'[120] Although Shevchenko

seems to regard this as a victory for Femen, she records Putin's response as 'I didn't have

time to see if they looked good or not, whether they were blondes or not.'[121] This can hardly

be thought to be the response of a man who has been jolted into thinking seriously about

gender oppression and inequalities. Shevchenko asserts, 'we are transforming female sexual

subordination into aggression,'[122] although she acknowledges the 'potential to be treated as

sex objects.'[123] Despite this, Shevchenko believes that Femen are taking their 'sexuality into

our own hands, turning it against our enemy.'[124] However, Putin's response and the ease with

which Femen's protest can be brushed aside by playing to established misogynistic

stereotypes and beauty norms would seem to undermine the effectiveness of Femen's

methods.

Femen's championing of aggressive sexuality as the only way to challenge patriarchy

presents a narrow and exclusive view of feminism that excludes many women, who for

myriad reasons, whether they be religious, cultural, or personal, may not feel comfortable

protesting topless. This, coupled with their dismissive attitude to the autonomy of feminists

practicing different forms of protest, makes their position as global feminists that seek to

establish universal principles particularly problematic. Susan Moller Okin suggests that:

> the movements for women's human rights [...] in many countries, are much helped by
> the international support they have been increasingly gaining and by the continued, if
> careful, criticism of women's rights violations from feminists outside the cultural
> context, as well as those within.[125]

Crucially, Okin is advocating 'careful' critique from feminists operating outside of the

specific cultural context being examined, as well as highlighting the importance of including

the existing voices of feminists who are 'within' that specific cultural context – although as

earlier reference to Okin's work has already established, Okin herself has been criticized for a

lack of careful attention to nuance within her own work on feminist issues across cultures.

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[120] Ibid., p.2.

[121] Ibid., p.2.

[122] Ibid., p.2.

[123] Ibid., p.2.

[124] Ibid., p.2.

[125] Susan Moller Okin, 'Feminism, Women's Human Rights, and Cultural Differences,' in *Decentering the Center: Philosophy for a Multicultural, Postcolonial, and Feminist world*, ed. Uma Narayan and Sandra Harding, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), p.42.

Particularly relevant to Femen's activism in relation to Muslim women is Okin's assertion that 'women who are struggling against culturally or religiously sanctioned violations against women's rights most commonly say [...][it] is essential to be carefully listened to; to have the opportunities to engage in deliberation [...].'[126] Shevchenko's assertion that Muslim women are saying 'help me' with their eyes, despite their insistence that the hijab is in fact their choice, represents an obstruction to careful listening and a refusal to involve women from within the culture being critiqued in discussions about their needs. Okin also recommends that Western feminists should offer 'the kind of intellectual and political support [...] that does not assault other cultures, but takes care to acknowledge their many valuable or neutral aspects while it criticizes those aspects that are harmful to women and girls.'[127] Femen's appropriation of the Islamic word jihad in their topless jihad protests and their self-declared 'war on Islam' clearly fails to acknowledge any valuable or neutral aspects of Islamic culture. Instead, they equate all of Islam with a lack of respect to women and women's rights.

However, the criticisms I have leveled at Femen's methods should not be taken to enforce a blanket position of cultural relativism that dissuades feminists from attempting to operate across cultures. Rather, they suggest the importance of returning to feminist scholarship in order to put into practice pre-existing theory. Many of the aims for international and cross cultural feminism that Okin advocates can be achieved through a genuine engagement with Lugones previously mentioned theory of playful "world"-travelling. This theory itself is an example of building upon previously established ideas by returning to the earlier work of Frye. Ortega also recommends a process of 'archaeology' suggesting:

> [r]evisiting past cures, examining why they did not work, practicing loving "world"-travelling, and being aware of the newer, deeper places in which privilege hides may help us stay true to Third Wave feminism's commitment to be inclusive of the work and concerns of women of color.[128]

Despite Ortega's reservations about third-wave feminism adopting an overly theoretical position, Femen's 'experimental' attitude and the problems that this causes in establishing a consistent and inclusive ideology, clearly highlights the need for a feminist approach that

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[126] Ibid., p.42.
[127] Ibid., p.42.
[128] Mariana Ortega, 'Being Lovingly, Knowingly Ignorant: White Feminism and Women of Color,' in *Hypatia* 'Feminist Epistemologies of Ignorance' Vol. 21, no.3, (Summer 2006), pp.56-74, p.70.

values both theory and practice. Thus, although Frye was writing in 1983, the ideas she discusses and issues she raised are still clearly relevant and contentious within current feminist debates.

In moving forward into the fourth wave, returning to some of the issues raised by Alcoff in challenging homogenous views of whiteness could also help challenge the critique of Femen as simply being part of an established, Western colonial movement, to instead promote the acknowledgement of Femen's own cultural specificity. However, if Femen were to challenge or be disloyal to their whiteness in the way Alcoff suggests, they would first have to acknowledge the certain privileges their whiteness affords them. Paradoxically, this privilege is in fact what they cultivate and attempt to exploit in their topless protests. The majority of Femen members and certainly those shown on the group's own website, conform to very narrow, standardized beauty norms well established in the West. They embrace the media attention that their predominantly white, slim appeal grants them, but despite their assertions to the contrary, seem to do little to challenge or subvert any privileges associated with this aesthetic.

Muslim Women Against Femen's open letter can be read as an extended call to 'check your privilege' and, in many ways, heeding this call could benefit Femen's position, helping them to create a more inclusive version of feminism. However, the emphatic statement 'we don't need you'[129] also highlights the shortcomings of a call to check your privilege that, rather than furthering a discussion, can be seen as shutting down a debate and policing its boundaries by attempting to dictate who can and cannot comment on certain issues. When used in this way, privilege checking only serves to polarize positions and promote the importance of difference over attempting to establish a politics of solidarity. Instead, approaching the conflict between Femen and Muslim Women Against Femen through Lugones' theory of "world"-travelling illuminates the possibility that each group has a very real need for the other. Until they have seen themselves through each other's eyes, each will present a form of feminism that is unintelligible, at least to the other. In Lugones' terms, there is a lack of 'love.'

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[129] Muslim Women Against Femen, 'An open letter to FEMEN,' on *BEMA Birmingham Ethnic Minorities Association*, http://bemaonline.wordpress.com/2013/04/14/an-open-letter-to-femen-2/ [accessed 13th June 2013], p.1.

Finally, returning to Ortega's use of Frye in developing her theory of being 'lovingly, knowingly ignorant,' yet choosing to subvert her meaning slightly, does perhaps offer a more positive view of the possibilities, rather than just the pitfalls, of intersectional feminism. If 'lovingly' is taken to imply an open willingness on the part of all feminists to embrace those who are 'other,' and 'knowingly ignorant' an awareness of the gaps in one's own knowledge, and a willingness to learn from and engage with the 'other' without consuming their identity to shore up your own, then the idea of being 'lovingly, knowingly ignorant' becomes the ideal in feminist practice, rather than a critique of white feminisms failings. That is not to suggest that white feminists avoid addressing the specific privileges that their 'whiteness' affords them, but as Ortega suggests, they must avoid simply representing a reality that they have in fact invented and has more to do with their own 'desires and expectations than with the actual state of affairs.'[130] With regard to Femen, and indeed Mensch, failure to do this leaves them looking suspiciously like the white feminists guarding the gates that Ortega warns of.

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[130] Mariana Ortega, 'Being Lovingly, Knowingly Ignorant: White Feminism and Women of Color,' in *Hypatia* 'Feminist Epistemologies of Ignorance' Vol. 21, no.3, (Summer 2006) pp.56-74, p.62.

Chapter 3

Perceptions of Liberation: Looking Beyond the Veil

Despite the dominant Western perception of veiled Muslim women as 'the quintessential symbol of patriarchal oppression,'[1] an image that is prevalent in much of the world media, there are a multitude of ways of interpreting women's decisions to veil or not to veil, and the state's decision to either enforce or outlaw this practice. The perpetuation of an often quite one-dimensional and 'Orientalist' view of veiling, portrayed by the Western media, can arguably have been seen to increase since the events of 9/11. This not only has a reductive and homogenizing effect on Muslim women's identity, presenting them as a unified group, united by the assumption of their shared oppression, it also places them on the frontline of the 'clash of the civilizations' as the visual embodiment of the 'other'.

Post-9/11, Muslim women's right or choice to veil has been the subject of protracted and heated debate, with the issues raised ranging from appeals to the supposedly universal aims of women's rights, to worries about the veil limiting communication in daily life. Veiling has also been challenged under the guise of public safety with *The Daily Mail* announcing, 'an urgent review has been ordered into Canada's airport security after a video posted on YouTube showed two fully veiled women boarding a plane to London without showing their faces.'[2] Suggesting the importance of context and social situation, Rosalind C. Gill has highlighted how perceptions of veiling have shifted, and also drawn attention to the impact of the events of 9/11. She argues that it is important not to overlook 'the specificity of the cultural representation of the veiled woman in a post-9/11 context marked by virulent racism and Islamophobia. In this context, wearing a headscarf […] makes one a potential target for racist/Islamaphobic attack.'[3] As suggested in the previous chapters of this thesis with regard to the debates surrounding the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism, feminists' critiques of veiling also risk being co-opted into wider political debates that do not necessarily have feminist aims at their centre.

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[1] Wayne Martino and Goli M. Rezai-Rashti, 'The politics of veiling, gender and the Muslim subject: on the limits and possibilities of anti-racist education in the aftermath of September 11,' in *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*; Vol. 29, No. 3, (September 2008), pp.417-431, p.420.

[2] 'Airline security probe after veiled women board Heathrow-bound flight without showing their faces' in *The Daily Mail,* (4th August 2010), http:///www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1299914/Airline-security-probe-veiled-women-board-Heathrow-bound-flight-showing-faces.html [accessed 2nd September, 2013].

[3] Rosalind C. Gill, 'The Difficulties and Dilemmas of Agency and 'Choice' for Feminism,' in *European Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol. 14, (London: Sage Publications, 2007), pp.69-80, p.71.

In their paper, 'The politics of veiling, gender and the Muslim subject: on the limits and possibilities of anti-racist education in the aftermath of September 11,' Wayne Martino and Goli Rezai-Rashti state that the 'political enterprise of Orientalism, [...] has intensified in the post-September 11 aftermath of the demonization of Islam and the Muslim subject.'[4] However, by linking the demonization of Islam with the concept of orientalism, a term coined by Edward Said in his seminal text *Orientalism* (1978), that describes a long and established process of the West creating and perpetuating ideas and assumptions about the Orient, Martino and Rezai-Rashti also allude to the longevity of this type of discourse. As Myra Macdonald asserts in her article, 'Muslim Women and the Veil,' 'there is nothing new in Western preoccupation with the image of the veiled Muslim women.'[5]

The politics of veiling, and the discourses that surrounds this, can been seen to shift throughout various historical and socio-political contexts, creating and encapsulating a multitude of meanings, but with a consistent – or persistent – strand of post-enlightenment Western ideology. This casts the West as the home of rational, reasoned thought and the bearers of modernity, while the East is assumed as static, at best traditional and at worst, backwards. In 1978, Said wrote of how the Orient has been, and continues to be, viewed as the exotic 'other' with images presented in literature of the 'Oriental clichés: harems, princes, princesses, slaves, veils, dancing girls'.[6] Although this titillating picture perhaps suggests a more positive, if fetishized, view of the East, Said's work highlights the complex power relations at play in the process of Orientalism. He describes a 'kind of intellectual *authority* over the Orient within Western culture'[7] that suggests the presence of epistemic privilege, as discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis. The process of Orientalism is not simply a way of exploring or understanding the Orient or 'other;' it is a way of claiming or dominating the Orient through knowledge that is not so much discovered as created. In this way Orientalism can be seen as part of the process of colonialism, where the fictionalized Orient becomes the basis for a multitude of assumptions or stereotypes.

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[4] Wayne Martino and Goli M. Rezai-Rashti, 'The politics of veiling, gender and the Muslim subject: on the limits and possibilities of anti-racist education in the aftermath of September 11,' in *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*; Vol. 29, No. 3, (September 2008), pp.417-431, p.420.

[5] Myra Macdonald, 'Muslim Women and the Veil', in *Feminist Media Studies*; vol.6, No. 1, (2006), pp.7-23, p.8

[6] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (London: Penguin Books ,1995), p.190.

[7] Ibid., p.19.

Said draws attention to the association 'between the Orient and the freedom of licentious sex',[8] suggesting that this vision of the Orient was sold to the West, where, he argues, 'sex had been institutionalized [...] so the Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe.'[9] These sexual experiences could take place entirely in the realms of fantasy, through the fictionalised images of Eastern women, presented in nineteenth-century literature. As Said asserts, '[i]n time "Oriental sex" was as standard a commodity as any other available in the mass culture, with the result that readers and writers could have it if they wished without necessarily going to the Orient.'[10] The highly sexualised vision of Eastern women, created and distributed through nineteenth-century literature, and earlier in the eighteenth-century through works such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's, *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, and Daniel Defoe's *Roxana,* is of course very different to the image of Eastern women portrayed in contemporary Western media and literature and subsequently consumed by mass culture.

The veil is now more often associated with terror than titillation, both by those advocating the rights of the women who are assumed to be repressed behind it, such as the previously discussed group, Femen, and by groups such as the English Defence League who promote the fear of the Islamification of the West. In each discourse, however, it is still possible to see the process of Orientalism at work, where the image of the Eastern women, and by extension the East, is created, rather than explored, and then consumed by the West. Although the discourse around the East, and Eastern women, has shifted to encompass a new perception of Eastern women, in part as a reflection of the West's changing concerns and priorities, following the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and 7/7, as well as global position, the depiction is still predominantly one-sided. The perception of Eastern women is still perpetuated in the West, excluding the voices of those women it purports to represent. Said illustrates this point through analysis of the French novelist, Flaubert: 'Flaubert's encounter with an Egyptian courtesan produced a widely influential model of the Oriental women; she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history. He spoke for and represented her.'[11] Despite the shift from the image of the sexually free, desirable, and available Eastern women, where the veil is portrayed as a garment used to entice curiosity, to

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[8] Ibid., p.190.
[9] Ibid., p.190.
[10] Ibid., p.190.
[11] Ibid., p.6.

the repressed and oppressed women hiding or denying her sexual self beneath layers of fabric, each representation still bears the mark of Orientalism.

The decision by the French government to introduce legislation banning the wearing of the burqua in public spaces, and the wearing of headscarves in public schools, can be seen to shift the boundaries of the debate on the veil, from principally involving issues of gender equality to encompassing issues of the right to religious freedom and expression. In this situation, contrary to the perception of the veil as a symbol of oppression, veiling can instead be seen as a tool for resistance, used by Muslim women seeking to promote and maintain their religious identity in secular society. Ajay Singh Chaudhary points to how much of the rhetoric against the veil focuses on promoting the neutrality of secular society. In this way, anti-veiling is presented as a neutral position that seeks to protect 'universal' women's rights. As Chaudhary stresses, statements against the veil often 'take as given fact[s] that veiling is oppressive to women and that public religious practice is dangerous to society.'[12] This 'neutral' position can, in fact, be seen to have a particularly Western slant that has its roots in theories of enlightenment and liberalism.

Notably, in the context of secularism, the veil is now associated with religious expression, rather than cultural or economic, bringing it into conflict with French notions of the secular state. By viewing the veil as an expression of religious belief and ignoring the various other factors that may influence women who choose to veil, the French government can create an argument against veiling that relies on the pre-existing importance placed by the French on secularism. Chaudhary suggests that:

> France [...] intent on banning veiling and removing religion from public space may be justified in a legal sense, but that justification may be defensible only by a reference to specific French historical tradition and subjectivity, as opposed to the kind of liberal universalism and emancipator project which the law seeks to promote [...].[13]

Secularism can be seen as a central tenet of French culture and society; the first article of the French constitution affirms 'the secularity of the Republic, and it was formally stated in the Law of 9 December 1905 separating churches and state.'[14] Thus, although the veil is

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[12] Ajay Singh Chaudhary, '"The Simulacra of Morality": Islamic Veiling, Religious Politics and the Limits of Liberalism,' in *Dialectical Anthropology*, Vol. 29, (2005), pp.349-372, p.358.

[13] Ibid., p.354.

[14] Sabine Berghahn, Gül Çorbacioğlu, Petra Rostock and Maria Eleonora Sanna, 'In the Name of Laïcité and Neutrality: Prohibitive regulations of the veil in France, Germany and Turkey' in *Politics, Religion and Gender: Framing and regulating the veil,* ed. by Sieglinde Rosenberger and Birgit Sauer, (Oxon: Routledge, 2012) p.151.

presented as a barrier to the 'universal' aims of women's rights, the decision to ban the burqua in public spaces in France can be seen as taking a particularly French stance.

France also operates under the ideals of a 'liberal democracy,' often associated with 'European values.'[15] As Sawitri Saharso suggests, 'when liberal morality is claimed as European, it is because in all European countries the legitimacy of the state is derived from it, and public institutions must be organized in accordance with liberal principles.'[16] Thus the decision to ban the burqua must also appeal to liberal, as well as secular principles. This reintroduces objections to veiling based on liberty and gender equality, although of course, attempting to reconcile legislation over how women dress with principles of liberalism is not at all straightforward, and the promotion of banning veiling as a protection of women's rights often relies heavily on dismissing women who choose to veil as operating under a false consciousness. This advocates the somewhat paradoxical position of forcing a particular perception of freedom on to Muslim women. In response to this paradoxical position, Iranian-born French cartoonist, illustrator and film maker, Marjane Satrapi, suggests that it is possible to disapprove of both the veil and the ban on veiling. Satrapi's autobiographical graphic novel, *Persepolis* (2001), charts her childhood in Iran, growing up during the Islamic revolution. The first chapter of *Persepolis,* titled 'The Veil' focuses on the introduction of the veil as compulsory with Satrapi commenting, '[t]hen came 1980: the year it became obligatory to wear the veil at school. We didn't really like to wear the veil, especially since we didn't understand why we had to.'[17]

Nonetheless, despite the negative experience of being forced to veil at school, in a later article published in *The Guardian*, Satrapi argues against the introduction of a ban forcing girls not to veil, commenting, 'I am absolutely opposed to the veil. Forcing women to put a piece of material on their head is an act of violence, [...]. But I also think that to forbid girls from wearing the veil [...] is every bit as repressive.'[18] In part, Satrapi warns against the dangers of banning anything, suggesting that the young women affected by this are 'adolescents, and when you are adolescent if you are told you cannot do something, you will

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[15] Sawitri Saharso, 'The veil as a case of value diversity and European values,' in *Politics, Religion and Gender: Framing and regulating the veil,* ed. by Sieglinde Rosenberger and Birgit Sauer, (Oxon: Routledge, 2012), p.205.
[16] Ibid., p.205.
[17] Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis*, (London: Vintage, 2008), p.3.
[18] Marjane Satrapi, 'Veiled Threat' in *The Guardian* http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2003/dec/12/gender.uk [accessed on July 17th 2013] p.2.

surely do it.'[19] Her concern being that banning the veil or burqua could make it a 'symbol of rebellion' leading women who wear the veil 'to believe that they are asserting their freedom, not their oppression.'[20] Thus, despite Satrapi highlighting that forbidding veiling is simply the flipside of enforcing veiling, rather than an act of liberation, like Femen, she reinforces the notion that Muslim women who claim veiling as their choice are operating under a false consciousness.

Although Satrapi is suspicious of any rhetoric associating veiling with women's liberation, she is equally damning of feminists who have campaigned for the ban, raising questions about the values of Western feminists. Satrapi suggests that:

> [t]he western woman is so entranced by the idea that her emancipation comes from the miniskirt that she is convinced that if you have something on your head you are nothing. The women who are forced to wear the veil, and the women who are portrayed naked to sell everything from car tyres to orange juice, are both facing a form of oppression.[21]

Moreover, Satrapi suggests that the debates surround the veil are in fact a distraction from confronting the real issues facing Muslims in France. She argues that 'the problem is not the veil, it is their exclusion from society.'[22] So, veiling becomes a way for marginalized people to claim an identity. With regard to women's rights, Satrapi asks, 'if tomorrow we take off the veil, will the problems of which it is a symbol be solved? Will these women suddenly become equal and emancipated?'[23] Unless you believe the battle for women's rights to be won in the West, then the answer is probably no.

However, criticism of veiling is not just the preserve of secular governments or Western feminist groups such as Femen. Critique can also be found from those who, like Satrapi, can claim 'insider' knowledge of Islamic culture, such as, Ayaan Hirsi Ali. In her polemical text *Nomad: A Personal Journey Through the Clash of Civilizations*, Hirsi Ali frequently refers to the 'threat'[24] that Islam poses to the West and her particular understanding of Western culture. Like Femen, Hirsi Ali also supports the assumption that women are constricted and repressed behind the veil, stating that 'the extent of self-loathing

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[19] Ibid., p.2.
[20] Ibid., p.2.
[21] Ibid., p.2.
[22] Ibid.,p.2.
[23] Ibid., p.3.
[24] Ayann Hirsi Ali, *Nomad: A Personal Journey Through the Clash of Civilizations*, (London: Simon & Schuster Ltd, 2010), p.243.

that this [wearing the niqaab] expresses is impossible to exaggerate […].'[25] She goes on to question how long Western societies can continue to tolerate a way of life that she describes as an 'alien and possibly lethal growth'.[26] Hirsi Ali's focus on the West's ability to tolerate Islam places these discussions within the context of multiculturalism, by making it a question about Islam in the West, rather than about practices that take place elsewhere. This question also perhaps unintentionally highlights that the debate about veiling is often as much about how veiling is perceived by those in the West, as concern for the rights of women who veil. The debates surrounding veiling then become as much about imposing Western values and perceptions of women's liberation – often foregrounding a rather narrow view of sexual liberation that promotes the idea of the powerfully, hyper-sexualised feminine – as they are about understanding and allowing women the right to choose to veil.

As with Femen, and to an extent, Satrapi, Hirsi Ali bases much of her argument on the assumption that no women actually chose to wear the veil. They are either forcibly coerced by their father, husbands, wider family or social expectations, or else they are operating under a false sense of autonomy, too indoctrinated by their religious beliefs to make any 'real' choice. While the issues of religious indoctrination and free will are obviously important factors in any debate on veiling, Hirsi Ali presents a false dichotomy between those operating under the restrictions of religious indoctrination, and the agency that she assumes all women in the West are able to exercise. In this way, Hirsi Ali's work can be read as promoting a post-feminist subtext, assuming that at least for Western women, the battle for equality has already been won. For Hirsi Ali, the challenge to Western feminism is now the liberation of Muslim women, which, in her terms, equates to the assimilation of Muslim women into Western, middle class culture. An example of 'repressed' Muslim women living in the United Kingdom that is offered by Hirsi Ali is her half sister, Sahra. Questioning Sahra's aspirations to become a lawyer, whilst maintaining her Muslim identity and continuing to wear the veil, Hirsi Ali asks how it could be possible when women lawyers in England are 'chic and powerfully feminine.'[27] Not only does this seem to imply that a prerequisite for becoming a lawyer in England is to be 'chic' and 'powerfully feminine', rather than years of study and a law degree, it also appears to celebrate these prerequisites as the advantages of equality. Hirsi Ali's assertions about the liberated position of Western women, and her assessment of what

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[25] Ibid., p.19.
[26] Ibid., p.19.
[27] Ibid., p.19.

this liberation entails is rather reminiscent of Louise Mensch's brand of 'reality based' feminism, advocating the ideal of the powerful and successful individual woman rather than the advancement of women as a group.

Of course not all feminists agree with this assessment of the position of Western women. Returning to *Beauty and Misogyny: Harmful Cultural Practices in the West* (2005), Sheila Jeffreys presents a wholly different view of the freedoms enjoyed by Western women. Jeffreys argues that although makeup and veiling are often presented as being at opposite ends of the spectrum with regard to women's freedom and choices, 'in both cases there is considerable evidence of the pressures arising from male dominance that cause the behaviours.'[28] In fact, Jeffreys suggests that, 'makeup and the veil may both reveal women's lack of entitlement.'[29] Arguably women don't actually choose to wear restrictive clothing, shoes that damage their posture and feet, make-up and G-strings. Instead, in a consumer-driven culture that seems to value beauty above all else, Western women are also simply doing what is expected of them. Also addressing the issues of agency, 'choice' and coercion with regard fashion, Gill states that 'in the 10-year period between the mid-1990s and the mid-2000s, low slung hipster jeans, exposing the familiar 'whaleback' (visible G-string) and a pierced belly button became almost mandatory-wear for many groups of young women.'[30] In this instance then, it is fashion rather than religion that can be seen as a coercive force in influencing women's 'choices' about dress.

However, in their article 'Headscarves and Porno-Chic: Disciplining Girls' Bodies in the European Multicultural Society,' Linda Duits and Liesbet van Zoonen argue that within debates that surround women's supposedly controversial clothing, whether referring to garments such as headscarves or G-strings, 'girls are denied their agency and autonomy.'[31] By juxtaposing these two very different examples of women's dress, Duits and van Zoonen claim to unite 'hitherto disconnected debates [...] because they facilitate a deconstruction of

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[28] Sheila Jeffreys, *Beauty and Misogyny: Harmful Cultural Practices in the West*, (East Sussex: Routledge, 2005), p.38.

[29] Ibid., p.38.

[30] Rosalind C. Gill, 'The Difficulties and Dilemmas of Agency and 'Choice' for Feminism,' in *European Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol. 14, (London: Sage Publications, 2007), pp.69-80, p.71.

[31] Linda Duits and Liesbet van Zoonen, 'Headscarves and Porno-Chic: Disciplining Girls' Bodies in the European Multicultural Society,' in *European Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol.13 (London: Sage Publications, 2006), pp.103-117, p.104.

the gendered subtexts in contemporary social tensions about dress.'[32] They seek to demonstrate that 'women's sexuality and girls' bodies in particular have become the metonymic location for many a contemporary social dilemma,'[33] but further to this they also highlight how differently theses two debates are viewed in terms of where they are placed, both socially and academically. Duits and van Zoonen claim that, when concerning the headscarf, debates are mainly centred on 'the multicultural society', whereas debates about 'porno-chic' are seen as the concern of 'feminism and public morality'.[34] They also draw attention to how differently issues of dress are viewed with regard to gender, namely that men's choices are considered autonomous, political acts 'which therefore falls under the public regime of constitutional freedom of speech,'[35] whereas women's choices are seen in a cultural context. 'As a result, women and their clothes can be subjected to intervention, whereas men's styles are not made liable to regulation.'[36] However, despite their claim to originality, their argument could be read as an inversion of Jefferys, published the year before, whereby each is uniting seemingly very different practices concerning women's dress, yet where Jefferys has focused on coercion, Druits and van Zoonen have sought to establish agency.

Central to Duits' and van Zoonen's article is the issue of autonomy, and in particular, attempting to re-establish the idea that women are making conscious, autonomous decisions with regard to dress. They tackle 'both conservative and liberal discourses' that they believe 'end up denying the female subjects their agency and autonomy.'[37] Duits and van Zoonen point to how, by viewing the debate on porno-chic in terms of the discourse of decency yet excluding decency from the debate on headscarves in favour of a multicultural approach, feminists can take the seemingly paradoxical position of disapproving of both. However, by highlighting that what unites these two apparently different debates is a shared interest in the policing of the female body as sexualised, and in particular 'the regulation of girls' sexuality,'[38] Duits and van Zoonen show the almost impossible position young women find themselves in, Muslim or not, when trying to 'find a place somewhere in the middle of this decency continuum in order to satisfy the contradictory requirements of western modernity

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[32] Ibid., p.104.
[33] Ibid., p104.
[34] Ibid., p.104.
[35] Ibid., p.105.
[36] Ibid., p.105.
[37] Ibid., p.114.
[38] Ibid., p.111.

and feminism.'[39] Although from this perspective Jefferys' position on veiling and makeup can be seen to again deny women's agency in these choices, her argument does expose the problematic and often condescending view of groups such as Femen that are keen to stress their agency with regard to how they present themselves, while denying the agency of those who choose a different approach.

Despite their emphasis on the importance of defending female autonomy, Duits and van Zoonen acknowledge that at times this autonomy may be felt or perceived, rather than actual, or at best, limited. However, they stress that although many feminists would label the freedom to choose to wear a G-string as an illusion of women's liberation, 'for girls themselves, the discourse of autonomy is appealing and convincing, and they would refute the idea that they have all fallen victim to the shrewd manipulations of patriarchal capitalism.'[40] In 'The Difficulties and Dilemmas of Agency and 'Choice' for Feminism,' Gill responds to some of the issues raised by Duits' and van Zoonen's article. She seeks to 'problematize the terms 'agency', 'autonomy' and 'choice''[41] that are used throughout Duits' and van Zoonen's argument, and questions 'how well such terms serve contemporary feminism.'[42] Gill's critique warns of the danger of what she describes as the 'seductive [...] call to 'respect' girls' choices',[43] suggesting that this is the discourse of 'individualized, postfeminist, neoliberalism.'[44] Furthermore, she argues that the 'problem with the emphasis upon choice is that it appears to cast aside the last 20 years of social theory influenced by poststructuralism, postmodernism and psychoanalysis. Covertly, it reinstates precisely the model of the rational, deliberative, unified self that this work – much of it in women's studies – sought to interrogate.'[45] Similarly, Hirsi Ali's particular view of liberalism 'as the only reasonable comprehensive doctrine, and of personal autonomy as the only road to human flourishing, has been criticized for its illiberal implications.'[46] As is evident from Hirsi Ali's suggestion that veiling should be banned, or Islamic schools shut down, Hirsi Ali's liberalism celebrates personal autonomy as long as it is used to make choices she approves of.

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[39] Ibid., p.111.

[40] Ibid., p.112.

[41] Rosalind C. Gill, 'The Difficulties and Dilemmas of Agency and 'Choice' for Feminism,' in *European Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol. 14, (London: Sage Publications, 2007), pp.69-80, p.72.

[42] Ibid., p.72.

[43] Ibid., p.72.

[44] Ibid., p.79.

[45] Ibid., p.76.

[46] Baukje Prins, 'Sympathetic Distrust: Liberalism and the Sexual Autonomy of Women,' in *Social Theory and Practice*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (April 2008), p.245.

In opposition to Hirsi Ali, with regard to veiling and autonomy, Nancy Hirschmann states that 'many Muslim women not only participate voluntarily in veiling, but defend it as well, indeed claiming it as a mark of agency, cultural membership and resistance.'[47] This is a view also found in Leila Ahmed's *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America* (2011) that charts the political history of veiling, and Na'ima B. Robert's autobiographical book about her personal relationship with veiling following her conversion to Islam, *From My Sisters' Lips* (2005). Ahmed's book traces the history of veiling from the veils' virtual disappearance in the 1950s, when she says 'being unveiled and bareheaded had become the norm in the cities of Egypt, as well as those of other Muslim-majority societies,'[48] to its resurgence in both the Middle East and America. Although not an autobiographical text, Ahmed does cite how writing and researching the book shifted her personal perceptions of veiling. She comments on how 'the process of researching and writing itself seems to quietly work almost always to dissolve one's most settled assumptions and to challenge and unravel no less entrenched presuppositions.'[49] Ahmed identifies how, for her, veiling and the wearing of the hijab signified the presence of 'a particular and very political form of Islam.'[50] This was specifically linked to her experience of the Muslim Brotherhood, a group who, for Ahmed, induced 'the strong if vague impression [...] of people who bombed places'.[51] Despite these initial reactions, Ahmed comes to view the veil and its resurgence as part of the evolution of Islam, something that she believes, specifically in relation to Islam in America, involves the 'beginnings of demands for equal rights [...] in religious institutions.'[52] Crucially for Ahmed, these demands are coming from 'committed, believing Muslims'[53] rather than from those who are outside of the religion.

However, stereotypes about Muslims and veiling are also promoted, and arguably exploited, by some who can claim insider knowledge of Islam. The contrast between the supposedly backward, or static, East and the enlightened and liberated West is a theme prevalent in Hirsi Ali's writing and work, however, instead of challenging these stereotypical positions, Hirsi Ali can be seen to confirm them. In a critique of Hirsi Ali's short film,

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[47] Nancy J. Hirschmann, 'Western Feminism, Eastern Veiling, and the Question of Free Agency,' in Constellations, vol.5, no.3, (1998), pp.345-368, p.345.
[48] Leila Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), p.10.
[49] Ibid., p.15.
[50] Ibid., p.3.
[51] Ibid., p.3.
[52] Ibid., p.306.
[53] Ibid., p.306.

Submission, Iveta Jusová suggests that *Submission,* rather than confront the view of Orientalism, instead adopts this position, portraying the female subjects through an Orientalist lens. Jusová argues that 'both the film's use of the oriental veil theme and the camera's focus on the partially nude bodies of the actresses have a sensationalizing and titillating effect, and fall back onto, rather than undermining, the traditional Western fixation on the East as veiled and in need of veiling.'[54] *Submission* then promotes the image of the exotic and beautiful, yet silent Eastern woman, reminiscent of Flaubert's portrayal of the courtesan as discussed by Said, even while claiming to give her a voice through Hirsi Ali. Jusová asserts that 'the way in which Hirsi Ali articulated her position leaves little room for those Muslim women who would don the hijab, burka, jilbab, and other forms of covering voluntarily and bolsters the view – even today popular in the West – that all women who wear face or head covering do so because they have been forced to.'[55] Jusová further comments that 'underscoring how the *Qur'an* has been abused by conservative clerics and lay Muslim men is an important point indeed. However, Hirsi Ali's strategy does not acknowledge, in fact it entirely ignores, the long-term project of decentering and reinterpretation of the *Qur'an* that numerous Islamic feminists have been involved in.'[56] Moreover, this assumption about the essentialized natures of the East and West additionally marginalizes and ignores the voices of Muslim feminists, veiled or not, who seek to challenge patriarchy and inequality from within their religion.

In *From My Sisters' Lips*, Na'ima B. Robert recalls how she was initially 'appalled'[57] by the sight of women wearing the hijab or headscarf whilst on a trip to Egypt. However, an encounter with a woman wearing a hijab, whose beauty, for Robert, was accentuated by this, serves to challenge her initial reaction. Robert goes on to validate her change in perception by highlighting that the women's own justification for wearing the hijab was the desire to be judged for what she said rather than what she looked like. Of course, there is a certain amount of irony in the fact that Robert's initial assessment of the hijab was as something that accentuated beauty, rather than removed it from the equation. As Robert asserts, it was the woman's beauty that initially made her stop and interact with her. After describing how the hijab 'framed her face and then fell in folds over her neck and chest' and how 'it seemed [...]

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[54] Iveta Jusová, 'Hirsi Ali and van Gogh's Submission: Reinforcing the Islam vs. women binary,' in *Women's Studies International Forum*, 31, (2008), pp.148-155, p.151.
[55] Ibid., p.150.
[56] Ibid., p.152.
[57] Na'ima B. Robert, *From My Sisters' Lips*, (London: Bantam Books, 2005), p.23.

that her face was glowing and, somehow, in some way, the hijab only accentuated that',[58] Robert goes on to state 'I was so taken with that sight that I stopped to speak to her.'[59] Robert's change in attitude towards the veil then can be seen to have more to do with a shift in her perception of beauty, rather than a dismissal of the importance of beauty altogether.

Robert's book charts her conversion, or reversion as she terms it, to Islam and the decision to veil, as well as exploring these decisions through several of her Islamic 'sisters.' Although born in Leeds, Robert was raised in Zimbabwe where her parents attempted to teach her and her siblings about both their Zulu and Scottish heritage, encouraging her to negotiate her hybrid identity. Prior to her reversion to Islam, Robert comments on how she and her friends were 'totally comfortable with the notion of using our looks as leverage, of wielding power over men in this way.'[60] She describes a world where 'every woman knows the drill'.[61] Where woman dress provocatively for job interviews and 'if it's a man you're meeting, perhaps even show a bit of leg, laugh at his jokes, pout a bit to be taken out to lunch – that sort of thing.'[62] Despite Robert labelling this kind of behaviour as a display of feminine power, the notion that showing a bit of leg or laughing along with jokes is powerful is clearly questionable. In contrast to this description of 'powerful' behaviour, she describes her reversion to Islam as a process 'of surrender, of submission.'[63] However, perhaps paradoxically, Robert claims a strength that comes from this process of surrender and submission, asking what is it that makes 'a woman so strong she no longer strives to be noticed by men, no longer needs the admiring gaze to feel attractive, no longer puts herself on display when the rest of the world is doing just that?'[64] Her answer is Islam.

In fact, much of Robert's description of the provocatively dressed woman preparing for a job interview, is reminiscent of what Joan Riviere describes in her essay, 'Womanliness as a Masquerade', as the 'mask of womanliness' worn in order to avoid 'the retribution feared from men.'[65] Riviere suggests that quite apart from overt displays of femininity being used to court an 'admiring gaze', femininity actually operates as a mask that can divert attention

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[58] Ibid., p.24.

[59] Ibid., p.24.

[60] Na'ima B. Robert, *From My Sisters' Lips*, (London: Bantam Books, 2005), p.25.

[61] Ibid., p.25.

[62] Ibid., p.25.

[63] Ibid., p.54.

[64] Ibid., p.25.

[65] Joan Riviere 'Womanliness as a Masquerade,' in *Psychoanalysis and Woman: a reader,* ed. Shelley Saguaro (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 2000), p.70.

away from what could be seen as masculine attributes or ambitions. As Efrat Tseëlon argues, '[w]omen care about their appearance when there are important things at stake, when being judged, or when feeling unsure and anxious.'[66] When looked at as a mask adopted to avoid negative reprisals from men that can assuage anxiety and allow women to pursue 'masculine' pursuits without threatening the patriarchal status quo, perhaps ironically, overt femininity can be seen to operate in a similar way to veiling. Each is suggested as affording women some protection from the male gaze and assumptions made about their character, linked to them by gender roles enforced by patriarchy, although through markedly different approaches. Whereas one courts the male gaze and the other seeks to avoid it, each serve, to an extent, to pacify it.

Veiling may provide a solution, for Robert, to avoiding the male gaze and the pressures she associates with that, however, this solution does not interrogate the idea of a female gaze, or the investment women make in both looking and being looked at by other women. In *Ways of Seeing* (1972), John Berger comments, '[m]en look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves.'[67] Berger argues that the 'surveyor of woman in herself is male'[68] which would suggest that escaping the male gaze is not as simple as avoiding being seen by men. Whether women have their own gaze or subconsciously adopt the male gaze when looking at other women, they certainly take part in policing their own and each other's, bodies. Furthermore, Robert's assertion that veiling removes the need of 'the admiring [male] gaze to feel attractive' assumes a hetronormative position that fails to account for women who may be attracted to other women. On this basis, with regard to policing sexuality and desire, veiling also fails to 'protect' men from the admiring gaze of other men, or indeed women.

Although Robert is clear that, for her, veiling is empowering, she doesn't question the assumptions around gender roles, and sexuality, that veiling can be seen to enforce. Lama Abu Odeh also stresses the idea that the veil can be seen as a tool for women's empowerment, however, like Robert, her argument for this seems to rest on the acceptance of stereotypical ideas of gendered behaviour and heterosexual relationships. Abu Odeh suggests

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[66] Efrat Tseëlon, *The Masque of Femininity*, (London: Sage, 1995), p.55.
[67] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, (London: Penguin Books, 1972), p.47.
[68] Ibid., p.47.

that veiling provides liberation for women, allowing them to move about freely without fear of sexual harassment, or perhaps more crucially, without fear of being blamed for encouraging sexual harassment. She uses the example of women facing harassment whilst using public transport, writing:

> [a] woman's willingness to raise objections to [...] male intrusions is notably different when she is veiled. Her sense of 'untouchability' of her body is usually very strong in contrast to the woman who is not veiled. Whereas the latter would swallow the intrusions as inevitable and part of her daily life, trying to bypass them in all the subtle ways she can muster [...] the veiled woman [...] is more likely to confront the man with self-righteousness [...].[69]

Although Abu Odeh argues that in this instance the veil can be seen to empower or give confidence to the woman, she also acknowledges that, in part, this confidence comes from an assurance of how the other passengers on the bus will respond to a veiled woman being harassed. She suggests that, 'public reaction is usually more sympathetic to her, the men on the bus making comments such as, 'Muslim women should not be treated like that.''[70] Abu Odeh goes on to argue that 'public sexual harassment seems to reinforce the non-veiled woman's ambivalence about her body making her powerless in the face of unwelcome intrusions.'[71] Arguably it is not just sexual harassment that reinforces the unveiled Muslim woman's ambivalence but also the presence of veiled women whose actions, although perhaps unintentionally, can add to the policing of women's bodies by making them seem 'available' in comparison. This idea is returned to in greater depth later on in this chapter, particularly with reference to Miriam Cooke's notion of the 'Muslimwoman' and the issues this construction raises.

Despite Abu Odeh suggesting that the veil is a source of empowerment, when looked at from the perspective of avoiding what is presented as inevitable sexual harassment, it can also be seen as a sign of defeat, of accepting a status quo that presents men as predators and offers women the choice of playing the role of either the virgin or the whore. Under these conditions then, the choice of whether or not to veil becomes no choice at all. As Jeffreys asserts, 'the adoption of the veil can thus be seen to alleviate the harms suffered by women as

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[69] Lama Abu Odeh, 'Post-Colonial Feminism and the Veil: Thinking the Difference' in *Feminist Review,* Vol. 43, (Spring 1993), pp.26- 37, p.29.
[70] Ibid., p.29.
[71] Ibid., p.29.

a result of male dominance.'[72] However, to alleviate the harm suffered by women living under patriarchy is not the same as to challenge it. Although keen to align the veil with a feminist position by suggesting it as a tool for promoting practical feminist action, Abu Odeh also acknowledges the problems of veiling from an ideological feminist standpoint. Despite arguing that the veil can be seen 'to remedy the uncomfortable daily lives of single, young women, who are leaving the house seeking work and education'[73] she also claims that 'the veil as rhetoric assumes women should be ideally inconspicuous.'[74] Of course it is not just young or single women who veil or suffer sexual harassment. It is also important to note that the veil as a means of protection from harassment is context specific. As discussed in chapter 5 of this thesis, with reference to a recent report commissioned by Birmingham University, '"Maybe we are hated" the experience and impact of anti-Muslim hate on British Muslim women,' in non-majority Muslim countries, the veil can in fact single women out for abuse as a highly visible marker of Muslim identity. Furthermore, women do not even have to be physically present in order to be threatened with rape and violence or criticised for their appearance. Laurie Penny, writing on the prevalence of online misogyny states, 'any woman active online runs the risk of attracting [...] frantic hate-jerkers, or worse.'[75]

The possible tensions between the ideology of feminism and the rhetoric of the veil notwithstanding, Abu Odeh still stresses the potential of the veil as a feminist tool and the compatibility of veiling with feminism. A practical example of this potential can be found in the numerous veiled women athletes that took part in the 2012 Olympics. The 2012 London Olympics were the first to have women compete in all 26 sports on offer, with the image of the strong, veiled woman athlete contrasting heavily with the stereotypical, downtrodden Muslim woman so often presented in mainstream media. As Dr Emma Tarlo is quoted as saying, 'the importance of hijab-wearing athletes as role models should inspire many Muslim

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[72] Sheila Jeffreys, *Beauty and Misogyny: Harmful Cultural Practices in the West*, (East Sussex: Routledge, 2005), p.39.

[73] Lama Abu Odeh, 'Post-Colonial Feminism and the Veil: Thinking the Difference,' in *Feminist Review,* Vol. 43, (Spring 1993), pp.26- 37, p.33.

[74] Ibid., p.33.

[75] Laurie Penny, 'Take Back The Net: it's time to end the culture of online misogyny,' in *New Statesman,* http://www.newstatesman.com/laurie-penny/2013/01/laurie-penny-its-time-end-culture-online-misogyny [accessed 4th September 2013].

women and girls. [...] to have sportswomen the girls can relate to as role models is a positive thing.'[76]

Outside of international sporting events, the availability of Islamic sporting clothing such as the burqini has also had an impact on the lives of Muslim women and their ability to take part in activities that they may have previously felt were off limits for religious or cultural reasons. Pia Karlsson Minganti writes, 'dressed in hijab on their way to public baths, and in the burqini once diving the pool, many women do not see themselves in need of being secluded at home or guided by a male escort.'[77] Although the burqini may offer Muslim women the opportunity to participate in sports and have a more active life outside of the home without the presence of a male chaperone, public perception of the swimwear has been rather mixed. Minganti suggests that 'the opposition to the burqini is to a great extent focussed on it representing some sort of threat to common European norms and values.'[78] However, support for the burqini has also come from unlikely sources. Celebrity chef, Nigella Lawson, publically endorsed the burqini when photographed wearing one on an Australian beach. Initial reactions to the photographs ranged from shock to ridicule. One article, published in *The Telegraph*, wonders on Lawson's motivation for choosing to wear a burkini, questioning whether it was to avoid judgement of her 'voluptuous' figure, something the author, Olivia Bergin, somewhat judgementally attributes to her 'finger-licking, bowl-scraping' failure to 'count calories'.[79] Bergin concludes that 'it seems she has deflected one cause for mockery in place of another.'[80] The title of Bergin's piece, 'Nigella's Burkini fails to get the fashion 'seal' of approval,' also contains a thinly veiled jibe, with the suggestion that Lawson resembled a seal on the beach.

However, criticism of Lawson's choice of swimwear sparked a discussion of the assumed European expectations and attitudes towards women's clothing and choices that

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[76] Emma Tarlo, 'Sports hijabs help Muslim Women to Olympic success,' Jane Martinson in *The Guardian,* http://www.guardian.co.uk/sport/the-womens-blog-with-jane-martinson/2012/jul/23/sports-hijabs-muslim-women-olympics?INTCMP=ILCNETTX3487 [accessed July 17th 2013], p.3.

[77] Pia Karlsson Minganti, 'Burqinis, Bikinis and Bodies: Encounters in Public Pools in Italy and Sweden,' in *Islamic Fashion and Ant-fashion: New Perspectives from Europe and North America* ed., Annelies Moors and Emma Tarlo, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p.42.

[78] Ibid., p.34.

[79] Olivia Bergin, 'Nigella's Burkini fails to get the fashion 'seal' of approval,' in *The Telegraph*, http://fashion.telegraph.co.uk/news-features/tmg8459306/Nigella-Burkini-fails-to-get-fashion-seal-of-approval.html [accessed September 5th, 2013].

[80] Ibid.

Minganti suggests the burqini confronts. Writing in the *Guardian*, Madeline Bunting suggests that the root of the debate around Lawson's decision to wear a burqini, and France's ban on women veiling in public, 'is an obsession with women's bodies and how they should or shouldn't be displayed'.[81] Bunting's position is reminiscent to Druits' and van Zoonen's assertion that what unites debates over burqas and bikinis is the policing of female bodies. Bunting argues that 'on a beach, a woman is expected to expose her body' and that it is Lawson's 'refusal that has captured attention.'[82] Lawson's decision both to wear the burqini and avoid calorie counting, can be seen as an act of defiance in the context of Western culture that pushes various diets based on being 'beach ready' or emulating celebrities. In this situation the burqini offers all women the opportunity of opting out of what can be an uncomfortable experience, as well as allowing Muslim women the opportunity to opt into activities from which they may have previously felt excluded. As Barbara Ellen comments, 'I seriously considered whether I wanted a burkini and I bet quite a few other women out there [...] considered it too.'[83] For some the burqini could provide liberation from the tyranny of the normalised, and often impossible, beauty standards imposed on women. As Ellen asserts, 'by refusing to strip to what is essentially skimpy underwear, non-Muslim women such as Nigella are saying: "To hell with your fake tans, diets, 'bikini-readiness' and outright body fascism."'[84] This again suggests that covering or veiling can be as much about protest as submission, allowing for the possibility of aligning it with feminist principles in a way that goes beyond simply using it as a tool to avoid sexual harassment.

Robert also strives to promote the view of veiling and feminism as reconcilable, stating that *From My Sisters' Lips* was intended as a 'celebration'[85] of womanhood, sisterhood and Islam. She comments on her desire to challenge preconceived notions of Islam, and specifically of veiled Islamic women, whom she claims often 'remains faceless, nameless and voiceless – a non-person.'[86] Robert describes what she feels are the common assumptions made about these women, stating that:

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[81] Madeline Bunting, 'Nigella Lawson and the great burkini cover-up,' in *The Guardian*, http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2011/apr/23/nigella-lawson-burkini-bikini-swimming [accessed 5th September, 2013], p.2.
[82] Ibid., p.2.
[83] Barbara Ellen, 'Just for a moment, I wanted a burkini too,' in *The Guardian,* http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/apr/24/nigella-lawson-burkini-emma-watson [accessed 5th September, 2013], p.1.
[84] Ibid., p.2.
[85] Na'ima B. Robert, *From My Sisters' Lips*, (London: Bantam Books, 2005), p.16.
[86] Ibid., p.14.

> [w]ithout doubt, the assumption is that this poor woman was forced by her husband or family to dress as she does, that she is an uneducated immigrant who probably speaks little or no English or that, steeped in ignorance, she has yet to experience the delights of Western freedoms. She is, in essence, desperate to be liberated.[87]

Chandra Talpade Mohanty is also highly critical of the Western creation, or preoccupation, with what she terms as the image of the 'average third world woman'.[88] For Mohanty this encapsulates the idea of a woman who 'leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and being 'third world' (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-orientated, victimized, etc.).'[89] Mohanty also contrasts this image or representation with the 'implicit self-representation of Western women as educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions.'[90] This returns to the precarious position of feminist discourses that assume a neoliberal stance and by allowing these assumptions to go unchecked, reproduces the process of Orientalism.

However, challenging or subverting the traditional view of Orientalism can also be problematic. In her essay, 'Deploying the Muslimwoman,' Miriam Cooke comments on how the veiled Muslim woman is caught between the Islamists and the neo-Orientalists, arguing that 'at the same time that Islamists vie for control over women's bodies, neo-Orientalists bleat their compassion for the 'poor' Muslimwoman.'[91] Cooke uses the term 'Muslimwoman' to signify how the two words, Muslim and woman have been used together to create or evoke a single identity. She argues that the 'neologism Muslimwoman draws attention to the emergence of a new singular religious and gendered identification that overlays national, ethnic, cultural, historical, and even philosophical diversity.'[92] The usefulness of the term 'Muslimwoman' is debated amongst feminist scholars with Cooke's essay presented as part of a roundtable discussion titled 'Religion, Gender and the Muslimwoman.' In response to Cooke, Margot Badran writes about the questionable benefits of 'collapsing two components

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[87] Ibid., p.13.

[88] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses,' in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, (Oxford: Routledge, 2004), p.243.

[89] Ibid., p.243.

[90] Ibid., p.243.

[91] Miriam Cooke, 'Deploying the Muslimwoman, Roundtable Discussion: Religion, Gender and the Muslimwoman,' in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, vol.24, No.1 (2008), pp.91-119, p.93.

[92] Ibid., p.91.

of identity – religion and gender – into a singular identity.'[93] She argues that the 'Muslimwoman is a composite identity constructed, not by Muslim woman but by others, mainly neo-Orientalist Westerners and Islamists or proponents of political Islam.'[94] And that the Muslimwoman of 'their construction is veiled (typically wearing the *hijab*, a head cover, or infrequently, the *niqab*, which hides the face), compliant (with authorities in family and society), and protected (by men).'[95] However, as Badran asserts, even if the Muslimwoman is created by others, 'it is Muslim women who must *be* the Muslimwoman.'[96]

Badran notes how the Muslimwoman has been 'conjured as the symbol of degradation'[97] post-9/11, and yet conversely, the image of the Muslimwoman is held up as 'the cultural standard for the umma, or collective Muslim society worldwide.'[98] As Cooke highlights:

> [w]hereas before it was men who represented the umma, today the Muslimwoman stands for it. The religious and gendered exemplar confirms and highlights the morality of a God-fearing patriarchy where men protect and women are protected. In such a moral economy, women define the border between pure and polluted.[99]

However, this new found role for, or value placed on, the veiled Muslim woman, or at least on the image of a veiled Muslim woman, as previously suggested, can also have the effect of excluding Muslim woman who choose not to veil. As Fawzia Ahmed questions, 'will the unveiled Muslim woman have a say in the direction her group may take in either a Muslim-minority or Muslim-majority situation? […] will she be considered Muslim enough by her own Muslim 'sisters' to be taken seriously in matters that may concern her by those around her?'[100] Ahmed argues against the essentializing nature of the creation of the Muslimwoman as a singular identity, and unlike other Muslim feminists, suggests that the decision to veil should be seen only in the context of a personal choice and disassociated with the idea of 'strategy'.[101] Although neither Ahmed nor Abu Odeh suggest that veiling is the only way, or

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[93] Margot Badran, 'Between Muslim Woman and the Muslimwoman, Roundtable Discussion: Religion, Gender and the Muslimwoman,' in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, vol.24, No.1 (2008) pp.91-119, p.101.

[94] Ibid., p.101.

[95] Ibid., p.101.

[96] Ibid., p.101.

[97] Ibid., p.103.

[98] Miriam Cooke, 'Deploying the Muslimwoman, Roundtable Discussion: Religion, Gender and the Muslimwoman,' in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, vol.24, No.1 (2008) pp.91-119, p.92.

[99] Ibid., p.92.

[100] Fawzia Ahmed, 'Beyond the Hijab as Lodestone Roundtable Discussion: Religion, Gender and the Muslimwoman,' in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, vol.24, No.1 (2008) pp.91-119, p.99.

[101] Ibid., p.101.

indeed even the most successful way, to challenge perceptions, each recognises it as a strategy deployed by many Muslim women.

In her revised and rereleased book, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Muslim Society*, Fatema Mernissi suggests that the veil is a symbol or acknowledgement of the idea of an aggressively active female sexuality that is acknowledged in Muslim society. This is in contrast to the Western belief, as promulgated, not least, by Freudian theory, that female sexuality is passive. Mernissi compares the ideas of Imam Ghazali, and specifically the chapter on marriage in his book *The Revivification of Religious Sciences*, with what she describes as 'Freud's theory of sexuality in general'.[102] Mernissi argues that 'the implicit theory of female sexuality, as seen in Imam Ghazali's interpretation of the Koran, casts the woman as the hunter and the man as the passive victim.'[103] She contrasts this with 'the passive, frigid Freudian female'.[104] This vision of aggressive female sexuality is clearly in contradiction with Abu Odeh's assessment of veiling and the protection she proposes it offers women from the aggressive sexual advances of men. Returning to the conflict between Femen and Muslim Women Against Femen, Mernissi's suggestion that veiling is an acknowledgment of the powerful and overtly sexual nature of Muslim women adds a new dynamic to the conflict between the groups, offering ideological weight to Femen's assertion that their 'aggressive sexuality' alone, can help bring down the patriarchy. Femen's actions, when explored through what Mernissi describes as the 'implicit theory of female sexuality'[105] can be seen to pose a very real threat to patriarchal order, by unleashing 'women's destructive, all-absorbing power.'[106]

Mernissi's concept of the 'explicit theory' and 'implicit theory' of female sexuality, that she claims presents a contradiction that 'Muslim society is characterized by',[107] also helps to address some of the seemingly contradictory points that Abu Odeh raises on the issue of veiling. Mernissi describes the explicit theory as 'the prevailing contemporary belief that men are aggressive in their interaction with women',[108] however, the implicit theory, which

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[102] Fatema Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Muslim Society*, (London: Saqi Books, 2011), p.45.
[103] Ibid., p.43.
[104] Ibid., p.50.
[105] Ibid., p.42.
[106] Ibid., p.42.
[107] Ibid., p.42.
[108] Ibid., p.42.

Mernissi argues is more deeply imbedded in the Muslim psyche, is that of the all powerful women that 'must be controlled to prevent men from being distracted from their social and religious duties.'[109] Abu Odeh's example of women using public transport illustrates the way these two theories work in conjunction. She describes the woman choosing to veil in order to avoid what is described as the almost inevitable sexual harassment from predatory men, endorsing the explicit theory of female sexuality, where covering is for the protection of women. However, she also describes the reactions of the other passengers to a woman being sexually harassed that had chosen not to veil, where they may 'chide the woman for not dressing more properly, implying that if she did, such kind of harassment might not have occurred.'[110] In this instance, the implication is that the man simply could not control himself when in close proximity to an unveiled woman. This situation exposes the double bind women may find themselves in, whereby their strength and power is acknowledged, but only if they choose not to use it. These examples also raise the issue of what the supposed advantages of this power are. To be able to distract men to the point where they sexually harass or assault a woman would seem to be a dubious understanding of power at best. Although Femen provide an example of women expressly attempting to use their sexuality as a means to undermine and subvert patriarchal society, their success remains to be seen. Somewhat ironically though, Mernissi's concept of the acknowledgement of implicit female sexuality, at least in Muslim societies, provides a justification for Femen's belief in the destructive power of female sexuality that the group itself seems unable to articulate.

Regardless of whether veiling is viewed from the explicit or implicit theories of female sexuality that Mernissi proposes, female sexuality is always presented as something that needs to be controlled, either for women's safety or for the good of society. This apparent need to control female sexuality brings women's bodies into the frontline of debate, placing them as the location of both public and private morality as well as national or religious identity. As Abu Odeh asserts, 'their bodies seemed to be a battlefield where the cultural struggles of postcolonial societies were waged',[111]and I would suggest, continue to be fought. The significant tension between the supposedly enlightened and progressive West and the apparently conservative and traditional East can be seen to be played out on the smaller stage of women's bodies and their dress. Abu Odeh cites the veil as offering women an opportunity

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[109] Ibid., p.42.

[110] Lama Abu Odeh, 'Post-Colonial Feminism and the Veil: Thinking the Difference,' in *Feminist Review,* Vol. 43, (Spring 1993), pp.26- 37, p.29.

[111]Ibid., p.27.

to opt out of this precarious balancing act between tradition and modernity that she suggests was often the cause for fraught, internal 'family debate'. [112] Instead, she suggests that 'rather than being engaged in keeping the impossible balance of the 'attractive prude' or the 'seductive asexual', these women chose to 'complete' the covering of their bodies, and 'consummate' their separation from men.'[113] Again, in these circumstances veiling seems to become less of an empowered and political act, as suggested by Robert and, despite it allowing a degree of freedom that would perhaps otherwise be prohibited, not something easily associated with overtly feminist aims such as gender equality.

Abu Odeh's argument suggests that the decision to veil and cover themselves at least allows women to 'resolve' the 'ambivalence' they feel around their bodies, enabling them to shut down debates about their moral culpability. However, much of the rhetoric of veiling relies on protecting, rather than challenging, the view that women's dress and public morality are intrinsically linked. Any resolution of ambivalence can be seen to come from the acceptance that women *are* morally culpable when attacked, harassed or raped, if they were not veiled. When viewed in this way, veiling offers protection to some women, but it condemns many others. This brings the discussion back to Fawzia Ahmed's point that if veiled women are seen to be 'wearing a moral badge'[114] what does this suggest about what un-veiled women are wearing?

Despite this paradox, the rhetoric of the veil still holds powerful claims to offering religious freedom and emancipation for women, not least in situations or locations where the right to veil is being challenged or removed. As Ajay Singh Chaudhary comments:

> [the veil] is simultaneously, depending on the speaker, the cause or solution to the systematic oppression of women: it is either the sign of a civilization's advancement or its retardation; it is religious or cultural or political, or even economic. The one area in which there is consensus is that the veil is problematic.[115]

In the context of the right to veil being denied, or in the case of the UK, extensively debated, the decision to veil can be seen as akin to demanding a voice or recognition in a culture where one may otherwise be silenced or marginalized. As Annelies Moors and Emma Tarlo

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[112] Ibid., p.28.

[113] Ibid., p.28.

[114] Fawzia Ahmed, 'Beyond the Hijab as Lodestone Roundtable Discussion: Religion, Gender and the Muslimwoman,' in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, vol.24, No.1 (2008) pp. 91-119, p.100.

[115] Ajay Singh Chaudhary, '"The Simulacra of Morality": Islamic Veiling, Religious Politics and the Limits of Liberalism,' in *Dialectical Anthropology*, Vol. 29, (2005), pp.349-372, p.351.

suggest, although Muslim women's voices may often be lacking from public debates or discourses on veiling, 'it is through their corporeal presence that many young Muslim women find ways of presenting an alternative position to the public.'[116]

Moors and Tarlo also suggest that veiling, and Islamic dress in general, may help women resolve some of the ambivalence they feel around their bodies, although unlike Abu Odeh, they suggest that this has more to do with the expression of a hybrid and multicultural identity, than with avoiding moral culpability. Moors and Tarlo argue that in the West, post-9/11, there has been a shift towards expecting Muslims to assimilate into Western culture as a way of proving 'their loyalty to European nation-states and their central values, [...].'[117] Assimilation would, of course, involve abandoning the highly visible marker of Muslim identity: the veil. Although this would seem to be the case in some European countries (France is one example), Moors and Tarlo point to how the United Kingdom has taken a slightly different approach. They note that, 'by contrast, in the United Kingdom, policies of multiculturalism have left space for visible signs of ethnic and religious diversity to find expression in the public domain.'[118] This approach has left space for the development of more hybrid identities that allow the expression of various ethnic, cultural and religious values, leading some young Muslim women to take a distinctly 'fashionable,' and what could be considered, Western, approach to Islamic dress.

However, Moors and Tarlo stress that the idea of fashion as a Western phenomenon is deeply problematic and rooted in assumptions about 'the fashionable West and unfashionable rest'[119] which rely on 'the assumed secularity of fashion.'[120] Moors and Tarlo challenge assumptions surrounding Islamic dress and Muslim women's fashion, citing young Muslim women who are 'blogging about fashion, creating outfits from unexpected combinations and introducing new colours, patterns and silhouettes to the urban landscape'.[121] This reconceptualising of fashion requires the acknowledgement that fashion is often as much about conforming as it is about individual expression. Although this provides a much more

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[116] Annelies Moors and Emma Tarlo, 'Introduction: Islamic Fashion and Ant-fashion: New Perspectives from Europe and North America,' in *Islamic Fashion and Ant-fashion: New Perspectives from Europe and North America* ed., Annelies Moors and Emma Tarlo, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p.19.
[117] Ibid., p.17.
[118] Ibid., p.18.
[119] Ibid., p.13.
[120] Ibid., p.13.
[121] Ibid., p.19.

positive view on Islamic dress, questioning the perception of Muslim women as 'oppressed and out of sync with modernity',[122] it also questions the assumed 'freedom' of fashionable Westerners. Fashion becomes as much about a submission to following trends as the decision to veil is seen as a submission to religion.

Parisian graffiti artist, Princess Hijab, also highlights the incongruity between the supposedly liberated, and predominantly Western, half-naked women featured in advertising, and the oppressed Muslim women hidden behind the veil. Princess Hijab's graffiti takes the form of painting black veils on the many images of airbrushed and half-naked women that feature on billboards across Paris. Angelique Chrisafis comments, 'there can hardly be a more potent visual gag than scrawling graffitied veils on fashion ads.'[123] In an interview with Chrisafis, Princess Hijab asserts that she uses 'veiled women as a challenge'[124] but she also stresses that 'she believes no one way of dressing is either good or bad.'[125] Like Satrapi, Princess Hijab links the ban on the veil with the wider issues of immigration, multiculturalism and integration. She suggests that 'the burqa ban has given a global visibility to the issue of integration in France.'[126] Chrisafis remarks that, 'France has the largest Muslim population in Europe, but the prevailing anti-immigrant discourse, and what many view as the pointless burqa ban, has increased the feelings of marginalisation felt by young Muslims and minorities.'[127] Princess Hijab's work can then be seen to raise questions around Western attitudes towards certain values that are often taken for granted or presented as unproblematic. Saharso suggests that debates around veiling can and should provide the catalyst for people in the West to explore the values of liberalism, freedom and democracy that are regularly put forth as the cornerstones of Western civilisation, in order to accommodate an increasingly diverse and multicultural society. This would involve a rethinking of liberal ideals that are often much more locally specific than is acknowledged. As Saharso highlights, the current 'narrowness of the debate risks running into a rather illiberal liberalism'[128]

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[122] Ibid., p.20.

[123] Angelique Chrisafis, 'Cornered – Princess Hijab, Paris's elusive graffiti artist,' in *The Guardian*, http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2010/nov/11/princess-hijab-paris-graffiti-artist [accessed 18th July 2013], p.2.

[124] Ibid., p.3.

[125] Ibid., p.3.

[126] Ibid., p.4.

[127] Ibid., p.3.

[128] Sawitri Saharso, 'The veil as a case of value diversity and European values,' in *Politics, Religion and Gender: Framing and regulating the veil,* ed. by Sieglinde Rosenberger and Birgit Sauer, (Oxon: Routledge, 2012), p.214.

Princess Hijab's art also challenges what can be seen as the largely acceptable face of Western women's exploitation. As Mernissi comments, 'while Muslim exploitation of the female is cloaked under veils and hidden behind walls, Western exploitation has the bad taste of being bare and over-exposed.' [129] Similarly to Druits' and van Zoonen's article, Princess Hijab unites the debates surrounding agency and dress through a visual means, confronting viewers with the images of highly sexualised advertisements, daubed with black veils. These images also implicitly ask a variation of the question that Satrapi poses; without the veils were these women liberated? They challenge the ubiquitous, and thus normalised, images of highly sexualised women's bodies by presenting them with almost their antitheses, that of the veiled, and assumed chaste, Muslim women. Like Druits and van Zoonen, by linking the two images, Princess Hijab's work exposes the hidden judgements that frequently form the basis of discussion surrounding women's bodies and dress. These images ask the viewer to consider why one is acceptable and the other isn't? They force the refocusing of the debate to include a critical examination of Western culture and its social norms rather than allowing it to rest, perhaps more comfortably, on the perpetual 'other' of the 'unknowable' Muslim woman. This includes a geographical as well as ideological shift. As Western feminist debates move from being focussed on: how to 'help' the 'poor, Third world women' who were permanently 'elsewhere,' to: how to accommodate multiculturalism and balance the needs of minority cultures with the advancement of women's rights, the debates must now also include the critical examination of their own cultures and locations.

Gill advocates what she terms as 'critical respect', which 'involves attentive, respectful listening, [...] but does not abdicate the right to question or interrogate.' [130] By listening to women's individual experiences or accounts and then placing them in a wider socio-political context, Gill suggests that it is possible to go beyond simply presenting 'affirmative endorsements of girls' and young women's accounts of why they dress in a particular way' [131] and avoid the potential hazards of adding to the post-feminist, neoliberal discourse rather that critiquing it. Gill questions the absence of cultural context in Duits and van Zoonen's article, stating that although young women do make choices with regard to dress, they 'do not do so

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[129] Fatema Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Muslim Society*, (London: Saqi Books, 2011), p.183.

[130] Rosalind C. Gill, 'The Difficulties and Dilemmas of Agency and 'Choice' for Feminism,' in *European Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol. 14, (London: Sage Publications, 2007), pp.69-80, p.78.

[131] Ibid., p.78.

in conditions of their own making.'[132] She equates the lack of cultural context with a 'postfeminist subtext that no longer views women as oppressed, but rather as able to make free choices in the marketplace of consumer identities.'[133]

Hirschmann also stresses the importance of recognising various and differing cultural contexts. Hirschmann writes '[i]f feminism is dedicated to respect for women, and if women, like men, are located in various differing contexts, then the only way to respect women as individuals is to acknowledge and respect those contexts as shapers of the self.'[134] However, Hirschmann also acknowledges how, in an attempt to resist 'cultural imperialism'[135] and the possible colour-blindness of white Western feminism that overlooks 'nuances of gender equity and women's power in other cultures',[136] there is a risk of preserving a patriarchal culture that maintains 'male privilege at women's expense.'[137] This brings the discussion back to the possible tensions between multiculturalism and feminism, discussed by Okin. The concern that, in respecting the actions and choices of women in other cultures, feminists may find that they are in the paradoxical position of advocating women's rights whilst attempting to respect cultural practices that are often overtly patriarchal, is addressed chapter 2.

Perhaps, then, it is necessary to return to Gill's notion of 'critical respect' and the idea that it is possible to acknowledge women's multiplicity of experiences and assumptions about agency, however problematic these may be, whilst also exploring these experiences and assumptions within their wider, social context. This strikes a balance between the need to recognize the cultural specificity of an action with the importance of acknowledging women's own assertions of agency. Critical respect offers the opportunity to address the choices of individuals within the analysis of groups and larger social structures that may influence these choices. Maintaining focus on the social frameworks and contexts not only encourages a deeper analysis of the individual and what shapes them, it also provides a basis to challenge assumptions about the supposedly post-feminist, and, apparently, increasingly post-racist, West. Regarding cross-cultural feminism, this is especially important in order to attempt to avoid projecting a colonial or 'orientalist' gaze that unquestioningly accepts a

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[132] Ibid., p.72.
[133] Ibid., p.74.
[134] Nancy J. Hirschmann, 'Western Feminism, Eastern Veiling, and the Question of Free Agency,' in *Constellations*, Vol.5, No.3, (1998), pp.345-368, p.345.
[135] Ibid., p.345.
[136] Ibid., p.345.
[137] Ibid., p.345.

Western, neoliberal position which asserts individuals are all autonomous and rational actors, unconstrained by societal pressures or issues such as race or class. This is particularly problematic when juxtaposed with the assumption that those living outside of the West, or even outside of neoliberal principles, are inescapably oppressed by their culture and unable to express their individuality and autonomy due to the trappings of tradition.

 As Saharso exhorts: 'the arrival of new cultures in Europe could also be an opportunity to self-critically interrogate current European interpretations of the liberal tradition [...] let's not miss that opportunity.'[138]

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[138] Sawitri Saharso, 'The veil as a case of value diversity and European values' in *Politics, Religion and Gender: Framing and regulating the veil,* ed. by Sieglinde Rosenberger and Birgit Sauer, (Oxon: Routledge, 2012), p.214.

Chapter 4

Challenging Beauty: Positioning the Body Between Modification and Mutilation, Choice and Coercion

The rhetoric of beauty, and specifically the beauty industry, plays heavily to neoliberal notions of the liberated and autonomous individual that is seen to be 'choosing' to 'better' themselves. As discussed in the previous chapter, such 'choices' or calls of 'agency,' warrant considerable attention and questioning. The advancement of cosmetic surgery, and the increasing normalization of the decision to alter one's body means, individuals – and particularly women – are increasingly encouraged to believe that if they are in any way dissatisfied with their bodies, they can and should change them. Being beautiful is presented as not only a modern woman's right; it is also, to an extent, her duty. However, the right or duty to be beautiful often comes at a heavy price, both financially and emotionally, not to mention physically. The various products one 'needs' in order to achieve and maintain the standards of beauty can come at a considerable cost, as can the emotional and physical toll of continuous dieting, or constant comparisons to idealised visions of beauty and women's bodies that invariably leave 'normal' women found wanting. Writing in *The Whole Woman (*1999), Germaine Greer claims, 'every woman knows that, regardless of all her other achievements, she is a failure if she is not beautiful.'[1] Even those women that can be considered beautiful by the narrow Western standards promoted by the media, advertising and the fetishizing of celebrity culture, are never quite beautiful enough, or are at constant risk of becoming viewed as less beautiful, either through failure to keep up with these strict regimes of dieting or waxing, or for succumbing to the inevitable process of aging.

Debates over whether women actually choose to alter their appearances, or are in fact coerced to do so by the weight of social expectation have occupied feminists for decades. However, beauty practices are arguably becoming increasingly extreme, popular and normalized. As Rebecca Herzig asserts in her recent paper on genital waxing and hair removal, 'the choice to engage, month after month, in such a painful, time-consuming and environmentally unsound procedure is fascinating [...].'[2] Although discussions over beauty

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[1] Germaine Greer, *The Whole Woman,* (London: Anchor, 2000), p.23.
[2] Rebecca Herzig, 'The Political Economy of Choice: Genital Modification and the Global Cosmetic Services Industry,' in *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol.24, no.60, (June 2009), pp.251-263, p.259.

practices can be seen as seemingly superficial, just where women are placed on the scale from ugly and unacceptable to beautiful and inspirational can have a very real impact on women's lives. In, *The Masque of Femininity*, Efrat Tseëlon argues that 'attractiveness is associated with better professional outcomes, while lack of attractiveness is related to social deviance.'[3] The idea that straying from these beauty norms can be seen as a form of deviance clearly challenges the rhetoric of choice that surrounds and sells Western beauty practices to millions of women. L'Oreal's slogan 'because you're worth it' loses much of its appeal when it becomes, 'because you have to.' Whether you regard women as autonomous agents acting only out of their own volition, or as being manipulated into entering an ongoing, and often lifelong battle with their appearance, the acceptable forms of beauty that women have to choose from are decidedly narrow, and often framed by a distinctly white, Western perspective. For example, current Western fashion demands that women be exceptionally thin, epitomized by the trend for the unhealthy and often unobtainable 'thigh gap.' The prioritising of this white, Western view, that professes to operate on principles of choice and sexual liberation, is particularly apparent in discussions of beauty practices that are associated with the 'other' or are assumed to take place outside of a supposedly liberal and enlightened culture. As previously suggested, in multicultural societies, women's bodies also become the visible location where tensions between cultures and cultural allegiances are played out, as is evident within the debates surrounding veiling, discussed in the previous chapter. Issues of dress or choices about how to wear one's hair become politicised, displaying either allegiance with, or rejection of, certain values.

Virginia Braun interrogates the association of cosmetic surgery with the principles of choice and agency, arguing that the freedom to choose to modify one's body can instead become an obligation. Braun suggests that 'there is almost a social imperative of 'what can be done should be done' [...].'[4] If, as Tseëlon argues, 'ugly [...] people are regarded as clearly disadvantaged'[5] or 'physically deviant'[6] then the decision to alter one's appearance to fit with what are seen as acceptable norms can be regarded as more to do with conformity than agency. However, as I have suggested, notions of choice and agency, and the idea of cosmetic surgery as a form of empowerment, are clearly much more alluring than those of

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[3] Efrat Tsseëlon, *The Masque of Femininity*, (London: Sage, 1995), p.79.
[4] Virginia Braun, "The Women are Doing it For Themselves' The Rhetoric of Choice and Agency around Female Genital 'Cosmetic Surgery", in *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol.24, no.60, (June 2009), pp.233-249, p.236.
[5] Efrat Tseëlon, *The Masque of Femininity*, (London: Sage, 1995), p.85.
[6] Ibid., p.85.

submission and compliance. In this way, the language used to promote cosmetic surgery can be seen to have been co-opted from neoliberal, post-feminist rhetoric that seeks to assert the view of women as autonomous and active individuals, rather than the passive victims of patriarchal culture. As Braun observes:

> [d]rawing both on feminist rhetoric from the women's health movement and post-feminist discourse, the surgeon invokes a position where anything which might suggest limitations on women's 'right to choose' to do whatever they want with their bodies is unacceptable.[7]

This type of rhetoric does not of course address the questions of why women may be choosing to alter their bodies, or indeed why the choices they make conform to such narrow views of beauty.

Neither does it address the possible harm that cosmetic surgery can cause. The recent scandal created by the faulty PIP breast implants is estimated to have affected 'more than 300,000 women [...] in 65 countries'.[8] Five executives of the company who supplied the 'sub-standard' silicone gel implants stood trial, facing charges of aggravated fraud, with 'more than 5,000 women registered as plaintiffs in the case'.[9] One plaintiff interviewed, Angela Mauro, expressed her concern that 'the court would treat the women with the same respect accorded other victims of medical malpractice' and 'not just as women who wanted implants'.[10] Mauro's apprehension exposes further problems caused by co-opting the language of choice in order to support cosmetic surgery. Not only are the women seen as having 'chosen' to undergo surgery that is classified as 'elective', and thus expected to take responsibility for this, the idea of choice can also be simultaneously used to both support and undermine their decision. Accepting that the surgery was purely a 'choice' strengthens the view of it as frivolous or unnecessary, distancing the women from other victims of medical malpractice, whose surgeries may have been accepted as necessary, and thus limiting the scope for them to be considered victims. The fact that they, the plaintiffs, have 'chosen' to undergo surgery then, potentially limits their course for reparation, as well as sympathy towards their case.

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[7] Virginia Braun, "The Women are Doing it For Themselves' The Rhetoric of Choice and Agency around Female Genital 'Cosmetic Surgery", in *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol.24, no.60, (June 2009), pp.233-249, p.237.

[8] 'PIP implants scandal: Victims at trial opening,' *BBC NEWS EUROPE,* http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-22181137 [accessed 3rd October 2013].

[9] Ibid., p.1.

[10] Ibid., p.1.

The idea of cosmetic surgery, or looking after and 'improving' one's body as in some ways self-absorbed or frivolous, can in part be linked to philosophical ambivalence over the self and the relationship between self-knowledge and self-care. In his essay 'Technologies of the Self,' Michel Foucault discusses what he describes as the Greco-Roman principles of the self developed in 'the first two centuries A.D. of the early Roman Empire [...].'[11] Foucault states the 'precept "to be concerned with oneself" was, for the Greeks, one of the main principles of the cities, one of the main rules for social and personal conduct and for the art of life.'[12] However, Foucault suggests that while the edict of being concerned with oneself also entailed the command to take care of oneself, this latter principle has been lost. Foucault states, 'when one is asked "What is the most important moral principle in ancient philosophy?" the immediate answer is not "Take care of oneself" but the Delphic principle, *gnothi saunton* ("Know yourself").'[13] Despite one being privileged over the other, Foucault stresses that these principles or precepts are in fact intrinsically linked, suggesting one enables the other. Foucault writes, 'the injunction of having to know yourself was always associated with the other principle of having to take care of yourself, and it was that need to care for oneself that brought the Delphic maxim into operation.'[14] The shift away from the principle of taking care of oneself, Foucault argues, is based on 'a profound transformation in the moral principles of Western society.'[15]

More recently there has been a shift back to emphasising the importance of taking care of oneself, at least at a basic level of health and beauty, in the West. This is predicated on a move away from the kind of Christian values that Foucault suggests influenced the view of 'taking care of ourselves as an immorality, [...]'[16] Instead, the importance of taking care of oneself has been reinstated through an insistence on the importance of the individual; knowing oneself is now presented as the unquestionable justification for taking care of oneself by fulfilling the expectations of hegemonic notions of beauty and acceptability. A woman who knows herself, and thus knows her own mind, should have her choice of numerous tools to take care of herself, such as beauty products and cosmetic surgery. The idea of a healthy body, achieved through this process of self-care, leading to a healthy mind,

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[11] Michel Foucault, 'Technologies of the Self,' in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault,* eds. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman and Patrick H. Hutton, (London: Tavistock Publications Ltd, 1988), p.19.
[12] Ibid., p.19.
[13] Ibid., p.19.
[14] Ibid., p.20.
[15] Ibid., p.22.
[16] Ibid., p.22.

encapsulates this link, although the body norms and standards promoted by women's magazines are often far from a medical view of healthy.

The impact of punishing beauty regimes on women's health is particularly relevant in relation to weight loss and the diet industry. The aforementioned 'thigh gap' is a current example of an extreme body trend that requires a gruelling weight loss regime and constant checking. However, those that achieve this 'desired' leg shape are equally likely to feel inadequate for lacking curvaceous breasts or buttocks. Women are shamed on the covers and pages of magazines for either being too thin or too fat, ensuring that all remain anxious about their appearance. As Greer wrote in *The Female Eunuch* (1970), '[t]he thinnest women either diet because of an imagined grossness somewhere or fret because they are not curvaceous: the curviest worry about the bounciness of their curves, or diet to lose them.'[17] The desires to be either thin or curvaceous can also linked to cultural standards of beauty. For example, twenty year old young Black woman, Claudia Aderotimi, recently died following a cosmetic surgery procedure that was intended to enhance her buttocks, but used 'less expensive industrial sealant',[18] rather than cosmetics grade silicone. An article reporting her death claimed that she 'wanted a bigger booty, after being rejected for a part in a hip hop music video because she didn't have the right 'look'.'[19] Despite the obvious tragedy, the author of the article does not wholly avoid passing judgement on Aderotimi, stating '[o]ur hearts go out to her grieving family and friends. *But* [my emphasis] it really makes you wonder how far people will be willing to go for fame.'[20] Furthermore, although the article expressly acknowledges the illegality of the surgery due to the use of industrial sealant as opposed to silicone, no judgment is made on the surgeon or the cosmetic surgery industry, suggesting that judgment is reserved for Aderotimi as it was her 'choice' to undergo the procedure.

In order to combat the perceived immorality that Foucault suggests can be linked to this kind of acute self-awareness, what he describes as moral distaste for the idea that 'we should give ourselves more care than anything else in the world',[21] a new morality is invoked

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[17] Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch*, (London: Harper Perennial, 2006), p.41.
[18] 'Young Woman Dies After Illegal Plastic Surgery' on *Hello Beautiful*, http://hellobeautiful.com/2011/02/10/girl-dies-after-illegal-plastic-surgery/#comments [accessed 13th November, 2013].
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Michel Foucault, 'Technologies of the Self,' in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault,* eds. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman and Patrick H. Hutton, (London: Tavistock Publications Ltd, 1988), p.22.

that has adopted the mask of women's rights. Women are constantly being made aware of their supposed physical shortcomings but are reassured that not only does the beauty industry have the tools to help them address these 'failings,' they also have a moral right to choose a healthy, beautiful body. However, treatment of women who choose not to fit with the accepted beauty norms of being ever youthful, slim, or in some cultures, suitably curvaceous, groomed and made-up, suggests that this moral right can easily become regarded as a moral obligation.

Academic Mary Beard faced an outpouring of abuse following a television appearance where she commented on the impact of immigration in the UK. Her critics, in the main, chose not to focus on undermining her argument through discussion or debate, but instead to ridicule her based on her looks. In a blog for *The Times Literary Supplement,* Beard responded to her detractors, commenting that, 'my appearance on *Question Time* prompted a web post that has in the last few days discussed my pubic hair (do I brush the floor with it), whether I need rogering (that comment was taken down, as was the speculation about the capaciousness of my vagina, [...].'[22] She also quotes web users as calling her 'a vile, spiteful excuse for a woman, who eats too much cabbage and has cheese straws for teeth' and 'a disgrace to Cambridge Uni and woman-kind.'[23] Beard suggests that the levels of abuse she suffered 'would be quite enough to put many women off appearing in public,'[24] and perhaps that is the point. Critic A.A. Gill summarises this attitude in his comment that Beard is '"too ugly for television."'[25] Unless she is prepared to 'fix' her hair, that Gill brands "a disaster," and change her clothes, described as "an embarrassment,"[26] then she should "be kept away from cameras altogether."[27] Quite for whom her clothes and general appearance is an embarrassment is unclear, and it is certainly not Beard, herself. In fact, Beard has expressly stated that she is, 'happy enough in her own skin not to bother with hair dye and make-up, [...].'[28]

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[22] Mary Beard, 'A Don's Life,' *The Times Literary Supplement*, http://timesonline.typepad.com/dons_life/2013/01/internet-fury.html [accessed 11th October 2013], p.1.

[23] Ibid., p.1.

[24] Ibid., p.1.

[25] 'Mary Beard: 'I will never have a makeover,'' *The Telegraph*, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/10204252/Mary-Beard-I-will-never-have-a-makeover.html [accessed 11th October 2013], p.1.

[26] Ibid., p.1.

[27] John-Paul Ford Rojas, 'Mary Beard hits back at AA Gill after he brands her 'too ugly for television,'' in *The Telegraph,* http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/picturegalleries/celebritynews/9223149/Mary-Beard-hits-back-at-AA-Gill-after-he-brands-her-too-ugly-for-television.html [accessed 11th October 2013], p.1.

[28] Ibid., p.1.

Perhaps it is the supposed norms of 'woman-kind' that Beard lets down by daring to appear to the nation as herself, 'every inch the 57-year old wife, mum and academic'.[29] Rather than adopting a masquerade of femininity in order to make her opinions, and even her very presence, more acceptable, Beard's appearance serves to challenge an unspoken status quo. Quite apart from letting woman-kind down, this challenge is in fact intentional, as Beard commented, she 'hoped her programmes proved to young people there was "another way of being a woman."'[30] However, the extreme negative reaction that Beard experienced may serve as more of a cautionary tale for young women considering any form of career that involves being in the public eye. Despite the rhetoric of choice that surrounds and supports the beauty industry, the backlash against Beard's rejection of these values questions the notion of an enlightened and post-feminist West, where women, having achieved liberation and equality, are choosing to present themselves as they please.

Again drawing on the work of Foucault, the routines required of women in order for their bodies to adhere to normalized standards of beauty, such as cosmetic surgery, dieting, exercising, moisturising, waxing, can be considered as forms of discipline that construct women's bodies as 'docile'. Using the analogy of soldiers, Foucault describes how their bodies are shaped in order to convey their purpose. He describes 'docile bodies' as malleable, which can be 'manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys'.[31] Foucault writes, '[a] body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved.'[32] His description of the 'docile body,' awaiting transformation or improvement has clear parallels with women whose bodies are transformed, either through their own efforts, or through those of cosmetic surgeons. In her article, 'Women and the Knife: Cosmetic Surgery and the Colonization of Women's Bodies,' Kathryn Pauly Morgan lists an army of 'anaesthetists, nurses, aestheticians, nail technicians, manicurists, dieticians, hairstylists, cosmetologists, masseuses, aroma therapists, trainers, pedicurists, electrolysists, pharmacologists, and dermatologists'[33]

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[29] Ibid., p.1.

[30] 'Mary Beard: 'I will never have a makeover,'' in *The Telegraph*, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/10204252/Mary-Beard-I-will-never-have-a-makeover.html [accessed 11th October 2013], p.1.

[31] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison,* (London: Penguin, 1991), p.136.

[32] Ibid,. P.136.

[33] Kathryn Pauly Morgan, 'Women and the Knife: Cosmetic Surgery and the Colonization of Women's Bodies,' in *Hypatia*, vol.6, No.3, *Feminism and the Body* (Autumn, 1991), pp.25-53, p.31.

that she argues, dominate 'beauty culture.'[34] Each are perceived as 'transforming the human body into an increasingly artificial and ever more perfect object.'[35] The extensiveness of Morgan's list provides an insight into the amount of work required to transform healthy women's bodies into acceptable versions of themselves.

Although it is possible to view the beauty industry as serving the needs or choices of women, transforming them not just physically, but also turning them from docile bodies to active agents who are choosing to beautify themselves for their own purpose or gain, the question of what shapes this purpose remains. Similarly to Braun's arguments on the rhetoric of choice that surrounds the beauty industry, Morgan suggests that the term 'elective,' when applied to cosmetic surgery, is seductive as it distances the surgery from 'apparently involuntary and more pathologically transforming forms of intervention in the bodies of young girls in the form of, for example, foot-binding or extensive genital mutilation.'[36] The use of the term 'elective' assumes that women are making choices outside of any cultural constraints, an assumption that is often directly reversed when exploring beauty practices that exist outside of West. Morgan refutes this usage of 'elective,' arguing that 'rather than aspiring to self-determined and woman-centered ideals of health or integrity, women's attractiveness is defined as attractive-to-men [...].'[37] This is not completely to deny women their agency in the choices that they make; however, it does question the context in which these decisions are made. In these apparently post-feminist times the rhetoric of choice can have a beguiling effect, leading discussions away from analysis of the contexts in which women are making decisions and instead simply celebrating that women are making any decisions at all.

In *The Beauty Myth* (1990), Naomi Wolf suggests that 'we are in the midst of a violent backlash against feminism that uses images of female beauty as a political weapon against women's advancement [...].'[38] Writing in 1990, Wolf ends with a call for the third wave of feminism to reject the 'beauty myth,' that she says promotes a 'divide and conquer'[39] attitude towards women. Instead she advocates for a sense of solidarity that encourages all

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[34] Ibid., p31.
[35] Ibid., p.31.
[36] Ibid., p.38.
[37] Ibid., p.32.
[38] Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*, (London: Vintage, 1990), p.10.
[39] Ibid., p.284.

women to 'tolerate other women's choices.'[40] However, over twenty years on from the publication of *The Beauty Myth*, and arguably now having passed through the third wave of feminism and on the cusp of fourth, or more troublingly being at a stage declared as post-feminism, the rhetoric of tolerating other women's choices is being used to bolster the 'beauty myth' rather than dismantle it. The call to respect women's choices, even, or especially, when they differ from one's own, is not wrong, and indeed, much of this thesis can be seen as advocating for just such a position. However, the conditions under which these choices are made have not changed as radically as Wolf predicted or hoped, and the restrictions on what women 'choose,' in terms of idealised images of beauty, remain.

Wolf describes a culture where women are not just coerced to beautify themselves; they are also forced into fierce competition with one another, always aware that there will be someone younger, thinner or more beautiful, ready to take their place in the home or at work. One implication of this is to keep women divided, fighting over small amounts of power and self-promotion. This leads to stereotypes of women as 'catty' or 'bitchy,' suggesting that the need to compete with each other is in fact not a need, despite the possible correlation between attractiveness and success as presented by Tseëlon, but rather something innate and fundamental to women's nature. However, as Jill Filipovic argues, 'contrary to simplistic ideas about catty, back-stabbing women, feminists don't fight each other because women are uniquely competitive or cruel. [...] it happens because we've internalized a narrative of scarcity: we act as though we're fighting for crumbs.'[41] The need to conform to the 'beauty myth' has been thoroughly incentivised, by allowing women who, at least for the time being, fit a narrow definition of acceptable attractiveness or beauty, more privileges under patriarchal society than those who fall outside of these definitions. Returning to the work of Marilyn Frye, discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, this 'beauty privilege' operates in a similar way to white privilege, whereby women may be reluctant to abandon any advantage in the pursuit for equality with white men, or recognition and admiration from the dominant, ruling group.

Central to Wolf's analysis of the 'beauty myth' is the idea of choice, or more specifically what she sees as the false choice it presents to women. Wolf argues:

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[40] Ibid., p.291.

[41] Jill Filipovic, 'The tragic irony of feminists trashing each other,' in *The Guardian*, http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/may/02/feminism-trashing-shulamith-firestone [accessed 17th September 2013].

> [t]he real issue has nothing to do with whether women wear makeup or don't, gain weight or lose it, have surgery or shun it, dress up or down, make our clothing and faces and bodies into works of art or ignore adornment altogether. *The real problem is our lack of choice.*[42]

Perhaps paradoxically, Wolf's later work has been cited as an example of the type of feminism that is often used to justify this 'false choice,' by aligning itself with a neoliberal, post-feminist view that promotes the idea of the autonomous individual who acts entirely outside of the constraints of culture.[43] In her essay, '"There Are No Victims in This Class": On Female Suffering and Anti-"Victim Feminism,"' Alyson Cole argues that Wolf, alongside others such as Camille Paglia, Christina Hoff Sommers and Katie Roiphe, presents herself as a 'whistle blower' that is calling out 'victim feminism.'[44] Cole suggests that Wolf's book, *Fire With Fire: The New Female Power and How it Will Change the 21st Century* (1993), presents a view of 'victim feminism' that is 'judgmental about other women's sexuality and appearances' and is 'suspicious of individualism and of money.'[45]

Although, the rhetoric of those rallying against 'victim feminism' can be appealing in that it promotes a view of women as powerful and in control of their own destinies, it also risks failing to acknowledge the intersectional factors that influence women's lives, such as race and class. As Cole asserts, 'in her effort to make feminism more inclusive [...] Wolf empties feminist politics of its politics.'[46] Furthermore, 'the emphasis she gives to advancing women's interests in the marketplace suggests that women's capitalist activities will occupy the center of her future feminism, and that women's problems are ultimately the troubles of the white, heterosexual, American middle class.'[47] Cole asserts that it was the huge success of *The Beauty Myth*, a book she describes as 'an excellent example of "victim feminism,"'[48] due to the presentation of women as 'victims' of standards of beauty imposed and endorsed by patriarchy, that ironically caused Wolf to denounce 'victim feminism.' Cole argues that 'ultimately Wolf chose to embrace the fruits of success, [...]'[49] which involved seeing

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[42] Ibid., p.272.
[43] Wolf's involvement in the third-wave and the development of 'post-feminism' is discussed at greater length in chapter 6 of this thesis.
[44] Alyson Cole, '"There Are No Victims in This Class": On Female Suffering and Anti-"Victim Feminism,"' in *NWSA Journal*, Vol. 11, No.1, (Spring Issue), pp.72-96, p.75.
[45] Ibid., p.75.
[46] Ibid., p.79.
[47] Ibid., p.79.
[48] Ibid., p.89.
[49] Ibid., p.89.

women, no longer as victims, 'but as career-oriented go-getters, just like Wolf.'[50] Thus the move away from 'victim feminism' can be seen as a precursor to the kind of 'reality based' feminism, as defined by Louise Mensch and referenced in chapter 2 of this research, whereby the 'reality' this feminism actually represents is that of successful, white women.

Despite Wolf's later work suggesting she has more in common with the cosmetic surgeon who, in an attempt to defend his profession and protect his income, argues that any form of analysis or criticism of the beauty industry is an infringement of women's liberties, *The Beauty Myth* still provides a relevant and polemical analysis of the West's beauty industry. Wolf likens the beauty myth to a religion, suggesting that it is 'a belief system as powerful as that of any of the churches whose hold [...] has so rapidly loosened.'[51] Equating the beauty myth with religion highlights the potentially coercive elements of an industry that persistently invokes the language of choice, almost as a form of dogma, in order to justify its appeal. It also, perhaps unintentionally, adds to discussions around agency, and specifically, how this is often denied or ignored in analysis of 'other' cultures' beauty practices or dress when decisions to advocate certain practices are frequently attributed to religious motivations. Although at the time of writing *The Beauty Myth*, pre-9/11, Wolf saw religion as in decline, religion nowadays, and specifically Islam, is very much in vogue in current debates. In fact, as previously discussed with regard to veiling, religion is sometimes suggested as offering women refuge from the demands of the 'beauty myth.'

Wolf's assertion that the beauty industry is 'a new fundamentalism transforming the secular West, repressive and doctrinaire as any Eastern counterpart',[52] challenges stereotypes that often depict the glamorous and self-assured Western woman as the antithesis to the submissive and traditional Muslim woman. Although Wolf's analysis focuses predominantly on Western culture, reframing the dialogue that surrounds beauty to include the concepts of coercion and submission impacts on feminist discussions taking place across cultures. By acknowledging that Western beauty practices may themselves be subject to the same level of critique often levelled at practices that originate outside of the supposedly liberated West, cross-cultural feminist debates can move beyond a notion of 'us' and 'them' that seems to function on the premise that if only 'they' were more like 'us,' then they would finally be free

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[50] Ibid., p.89.
[51] Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*, (London: Vintage, 1990), p.86.
[52] Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*, (London: Vintage, 1990), p.89.

from the tyranny of patriarchy. This is not to suggest that women are united across cultures by their shared experience as victims, and certainly from her later work it would seem that Wolf would strongly refute that. However, it does challenge the notion that while women in the Global South are perceived to be operating under a false consciousness, those in the West are making autonomous choices, outside of the influence of culture. This is particularly important in a multicultural context whereby women's expressions of religious allegiance or cultural identity are often presented as forced upon them, even when they specifically state that they have chosen to express themselves in such a way.

In *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism* (2010), Natasha Walter argues that women and young girls in the West are being influenced by a culture where 'artificial images of feminine beauty are held up as an ideal to which woman should aspire.'[53] Furthermore, Walter suggests that these images are becoming increasingly 'defined by the sex industry.'[54] However, she also stresses that these 'aspirational' images are being targeted at increasingly younger audiences, suggesting that now, 'even childhood playthings should look [...] sexy.'[55] She cites the example of Bratz dolls, which, like their predecessor, Barbie, are eternally youthful and 'sexy,' although of course without sex in the form of genitals. Walter expresses her concern over the influence of these dolls, arguing that, 'not only are little girls expected to play with dolls, they are expected to model themselves on their favourite playthings.'[56] She suggests:

> [l]iving a doll's life seems to have become an aspiration for many young women, as they leave childhood behind to embark on a project of grooming, dieting and shopping that aims to achieve the bleached, waxed, tinted look of a Bratz or Barbie doll.[57]

Although this description, much like Morgan's army of beauticians and technicians, clearly establishes the amount of time and investment needed in order for women to achieve the apparent ideal of looking like a doll, it also hints at the narrowness of the inspirational 'beauty' on offer. The dolls are all slim, with long hair, large eyes and tiny waists. They are also predominantly white, with traditionally European features. The toy company, Mattel, does make a black Barbie, however, they are in no way as aggressively marketed as Barbie's white sisters, or as ubiquitously available. This leaves vast numbers of young girls, who are

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[53] Natasha Walter, *Living Dolls, The Return of Sexism*, (London: Virago, 2010), p.3.
[54] Ibid., p.3.
[55] Ibid., p.4.
[56] Ibid., p.2.
[57] Ibid., p.2.

encouraged to play with dolls and aspire to emulate them, faced with a uniform, blank white stare.

The issue of the representation or lack of representation, of women of colour is not just present in the toy industry. The fashion industry also under represents women of colour, presenting a view of beauty that mirrors the world of dolls. In her book, *Pricing Beauty: The Making of a Fashion Model* (2011)*,* sociologist and former model, Ashley Mears, suggests that 'the high-end edgy look, with its youthful, skinny packaging, tends to come in pale shades of white.'[58] Models, Naomi Campbell and Iman, and former model agent, Bethann Hardison, have recently attempted to challenge this, raising concerns about the overwhelmingly white majority of models used to promote high-end fashion. Calling themselves 'The Diversity Coalition,' they have used 'their uniquely prestigious platforms to name and shame those designers who put on all-white shows at the Fall/Winter New York Fashion Week 2013.'[59] Putting aside how effective this campaign has been in actually ensuring more Black and ethnic minority women models appear in fashion, the Diversity Coalition have nonetheless been successful in drawing attention to this issue, to an extent, with interviews on primetime television news programmes such as Channel 4.

Mears' enquiries as to why the world of high-end fashion was so overwhelmingly white, met with mixed responses. As she describes:

> [m]ost producers I interviewed were frustrated by the absence of minorities in fashion – if it were up to them, they hinted, ethnic diversity would always be "in." They laid blame in all directions: bookers blamed clients, clients blamed bookers, and bookers even blamed other bookers, [...].[60]

Many also deferred responsibility to the 'whims of "the market,"'[61] whereby the comparatively small percentage of black consumers was used to justify the lack of black models on the catwalk. This suggests a self-perpetuating situation where the lack of representation of black models reduces the market share of black households, and the lack of black buying power is in turn used to justify the lack of representation.

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[58] Ashley Mears, *Pricing Beauty: The Making of a Fashion Model*, (London: University of California Press, 2011), p.190.

[59] Holly Baxter, 'Racism is endemic in fashion. Naomi Campbell's name and shame might be the answer' in The Newsatesman, http://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2013/09/racism-endemic-fashion-naomi-campbell-name-and-shame-might-be-answer [accessed 19th September 2013].

[60] Ashley Mears, *Pricing Beauty: The Making of a Fashion Model*, (London: University of California Press, 2011) p.191.

[61] Ibid., p.191.

Mears disputes the idea that all blame can be placed on the commercial market, rightly arguing that perhaps this could be the case at 'the commercial level of fashion' but high-end, editorial fashion, such as is found on catwalks and in the pages of *Vogue*, is 'not beholden to the mass buying public'.[62] Instead, Mears states that, 'their economic decisions are fundamentally cultural considerations.'[63] Furthermore, when black or ethnic models are used in fashion shoots, Mears argues that they are often chosen to promote stereotypes of the 'other' and 'cultural associations of ethnicity with urban roughness'.[64] Mears quotes a New York magazine editor as saying, 'black girls have a harder-edge kind of look. Like if I'm shooting something really edgy, I'll use a black girl [...].'[65] This description of the fashion industry presents an environment that both relies on, and perpetuates, cultural stereotypes, reminiscent of what Tarlo and Moors described as the assumption of 'the fashionable West and unfashionable rest',[66] discussed in the previous chapter. It also suggests a form of orientalism whereby knowledge of the 'other' is constructed through assumptions and stereotypes, rather than discovered. For example, the idea that Black models have a harder, 'edgier' look relies on the use of Black women in these types of campaigns, rather than actually reflecting the reality and diversity of Black experiences and beauty.

However, in their article, 'The Construction of Beauty: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Women's Magazine Advertising,' Katherine Frith, Ping Shaw, and Hong Cheng, observe that, in cultures outside of the West, negative stereotypes of white, Western women are used in advertising. Frith et al suggest that 'beauty is a construct that varies from culture to culture [...].'[67] Therefore, what, or who, may be used to sell fashion or beauty products in the West, may not in fact hold a universal appeal. Although Western or white and light-skinned women were found to be used widely in advertising across cultures, what these women were used to depict, or the type of advertisements they were chosen for, showed strong reference to the idea of Western women being morally 'loose' or sexually available. Frith et al cite that Western models in Japanese advertising, 'are posed doing things that Japanese women would

[62] Ibid., p.192.
[63] Ibid., p.192.
[64] Ibid., p.194.
[65] Ibid., p.194.
[66] Annelies Moors and Emma Tarlo, 'Introduction: Islamic Fashion and Ant-fashion: New Perspectives from Europe and North America,' in *Islamic Fashion and Ant-fashion: New Perspectives from Europe and North America* ed., Annelies Moors and Emma Tarlo, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p.13.
[67] Katherine Frith, Ping Shaw, and Hong Cheng, 'The Construction of Beauty: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Women's Magazine Advertising,' in *Journal of Communications*, vol.55, Issue 1, (March 2005), pp.56-70, p.56.

never do.'[68] Furthermore, they argue that 'in conservative Asian countries like Malaysia and Indonesia, only Caucasian women are used in lingerie advertising as it would be unseemly for a local women to be shown partially undressed.'[69] This suggests a production of knowledge is also taking place in the opposite direction to that identified by Said with his idea of orientalism. However, rather than challenge the validity of Said's approach, this reinforces the notion that the 'other' is as much a creation as a discovery.

Frith et al stress that 'for advertising messages to be resonant with a target audience, marketing theory holds that the ads would need to reflect the social norms and cultural values of a given society.'[70] With regard to the fashion industry in the West then, the decision to cast women of colour in specifically 'edgy' or 'urban' fashion shoots is a reflection of Western assumptions about women of colour and beauty norms. Although the research of Frith et al highlights how culturally specific certain aspects of the beauty industry can be, especially when prescribing particular moral standards to women's bodies and beauty, their findings also show a global leaning towards Eurocentric notions of beauty in advertising. Despite white models being used to sell different products in the East, and as such being ascribed a different cultural and moral value, white and light-skinned models still formed a large percentage of the women used overall. The reverse is clearly not true in the Western fashion industry. As a recent article in *The Guardian* comments on the 'endemic'[71] racism in the fashion industry, '[t]his year, at New York Fashion Week, 6 per cent of catwalk models were black and 9.1 per cent were Asian. 2 per cent were Latina; 0.3 per cent were categorised as 'other'. And 82.7 per cent were white.'[72] This lack of representation, coupled with the tendency to use models in ways that serve to strengthen cultural assumptions – whether these be suggestions of white, Western women as sexually 'loose' and promiscuous, or of black women being tough, angry and urban – reinforces narrow, prescriptive views of beauty that in turn create limited choices.

Although Naomi Campbell and Iman are both calling for greater diversity and more visible representations of women of colour in the fashion industry, each have also been cited

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[68] Ibid., p.58.

[69] Ibid.,p.58.

[70] Ibid., p.59.

[71] Holly Baxter, 'Racism is endemic in fashion. Naomi Campbell's name and shame might be the answer,' in *The Newsatesman,* http://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2013/09/racism-endemic-fashion-naomi-campbell-name-and-shame-might-be-answer [accessed 19th September 2013].

[72] Ibid., p.1.

as examples of racial inclusivity in the fashion world due to their own success as models. However, aside from the colour of their skin, both have also been noted to have facial features more commonly attributed to European women. As hooks remarks in her essay, 'Selling Hot Pussy: Representations of Black Female Sexuality in the Cultural Marketplace,' Iman has been 'noted in the past for features this culture sees as "Caucasian" – thin nose, lips, and limbs [...].'[73] hooks also asserts that Naomi Campbell has 'cross-over appeal,' stressing that Campbell 'embodies an aesthetic that suggests black women, while appealingly "different," must resemble white women to be considered really beautiful.'[74] hooks' essay challenges the assertion that increased representation of women of colour in magazines and the fashion industry alone will automatically challenge cultural stereotypes. Instead, she argues, 'black women are included in a manner that tends to reinscribe prevailing stereotypes',[75] supporting Mears' suggestion that black models are only used when a specifically urban or edgy look is required. hooks' argument lends weight to the notion that the fashion industry and 'beauty myth' both create and reflect cultural stereotypes and norms, compelling women to conform to limited and culturally inscribed perceptions of beauty, while presenting the illusion of an industry based on freedom and choice. Furthermore, her assertions that the success of Iman and Campbell are linked to their 'cross-over' appeal implies that in order to disrupt the narrow view of Western fashion, campaigns must focus on more than skin colour alone.

hooks also cites the examples of straightened hair, or 'wearing straight wigs',[76] as ways of making black women's looks more acceptable to the Western fashion industry. In her essay, 'Black Women, Beauty, and Hair as a Matter of *Being*,' Cheryl Thompson explores what she describes as 'the complexity of the juxtaposition between adhering to Eurocentric beauty standards and the assimilatory cultural practice of hair straightening, [...].'[77] Thompson argues that, 'more so than ever before, Black women are bombarded with images that have normalized long, straight hair.'[78] Furthermore, she argues long hair has become a symbol of femininity and a marker of women's sexual attractiveness, something, I would

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[73] bell hooks, 'Selling Hot Pussy: Representations of Black Female Sexuality in the Cultural Market Place,' in *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, ed. by Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury, (West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 1997), p.124.
[74] Ibid., p.125.
[75] Ibid., p.123.
[76] Ibid., p.123.
[77] Cheryl Thompson, 'Black Women, Beauty, and Hair as a Matter of Being,' in *Women's Studies*, vol.38, (2009), pp.831-856, p.832.
[78] Ibid., p.847.

suggest, that is equally applicable to white women. Thompson's article features interviews with women, one of whom, Latoya, claims:

> I feel that men have such a strong attachment to what it means to be feminine and female that they've created this expectation that to be a woman, to be considered sexy, to be attractive and desirable one must have a head of long flowing hair and to choose to do something different with hair is like a slap in the face and a personal offence to them. [79]

Although Latoya's description of the pressures women face to conform to certain, normalized standards of beauty does not address how these pressures often come from women themselves, she does, however, describe the level of assumed deviancy that comes from choosing not to conform. The idea that the supposedly personal choice of how to wear one's hair could be perceived as 'a slap in the face' suggests that the impact of beauty reaches far beyond individuals making autonomous choices. Instead, as with the concept of the Muslimwoman discussed in the previous chapter, women's bodies can be seen as sites where cultures inscribe and display their morality and social norms.

Thompson argues that, far from simply being an issue of personal preference or fashion, 'Black hair is inextricably laden with social, class, sexual, and cultural implications.'[80] Thompson stresses that the choices black women make about their hair are influenced by various factors, from Eurocentric standards of beauty that present the ideal as long, flowing, straight hair, to a conscious rejection of these standards that promotes an image of 'authentic' or 'natural' Blackness, characterised by the Afro or braids. Thompson suggests that in America, during the 1960s, there was a move towards reclaiming 'authentic' black hair as a way of promoting a 'Black is Beautiful' ideology, where 'a "real" Black person adorned with a "natural" hairstyle, while those who straightened their hair were deemed fake for attempting to emulate a White aesthetic, and an "unnatural" Black look.'[81] The idea of an 'authentic' or 'real' blackness creates a potentially hierarchical system whereby some women are judged as being worthy, authentic, advocates of their race and culture, while others are not. Again, much like the veiled Muslimwoman, described by Cooke, the 'natural' black woman becomes a cultural standard that, although empowering for some, can lead to others being regarded as 'inauthentic' or having a lesser claim to their cultural identity. The tensions between ideas of 'authentic' or 'inauthentic' cultural identities

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[79] Ibid., p.849.
[80] Ibid., p.851.
[81] Ibid., p.835.

are particularly apparent in a multicultural context where often a delicate balancing act takes place between differing or competing ideals. Returning to Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, this is evident in the character of Irie Jones whose personal outward battles with her hair reflect the internal conflict she feels over her identity.

Irie attends the hairdressers, 'intent upon transformation, intent upon fighting her genes, a headscarf disguising the bird's nest of her hair, [...].'[82] Irie desires '[s]traight straight long black sleek flickable tossable shakeable touchable finger-through-able wind-blowable hair.'[83] Her description of the kind of hair she coverts mirrors Thompson's interview findings. Smith's assertion that the hair salon Irie attends is a place where a 'war' is fought, and that the hairdressers must 'beat each curly hair into submission'[84] also supports Thompson's attempts to 'refute the notion that Black women are liberated from their hair.'[85] Their docile bodies are presented to an army of beauticians and hairdressers, ready for transformation. Both Thompson and Smith portray a world where women do battle with the hair; however, what is at stake is more than simply their appearance. As Thompson argues, although all women struggle to adhere to narrow definitions of beauty, and often face reprisals for deviating from these norms, 'Black women are unique in that we [they] are asked not just to strive to attain mainstream standards of beauty, but to have such standards completely override our natural *being*.'[86]

Smith stresses the process that black women must go through in order to achieve the ideal, flickable, tossable, hair, adding weight to Thompson's argument that 'covering your natural tresses and damaging your real hair for the sake of a desired "look" should not be taken lightly.'[87] Irie's inexperience in these matters, and the arduous process she must endure in order to achieve her desired look – modelled on one of her white peers at school – is unmistakeable. In her discussions with the hairdressers she is shown to have no idea of how her hair will be transformed from the hair she hates to the hair she aspires to. This naivety is also linked to the idea that she both lacks an awareness of, and thus is unable to embrace, her culture and hybrid identity. Irie's initiation into the world of chemical hair straightening

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[82] Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*, (London: Penguin, 2000), p.273.
[83] Ibid., p.273.
[84] Ibid., p.275.
[85] Cheryl Thompson, 'Black Women, Beauty, and Hair as a Matter of Being,' in *Women's Studies*, vol.38, (2009), pp.831-856, p.854.
[86] Ibid., p.854.
[87] Ibid., p.854.

becomes a symbolic rite of passage, where she witnesses both the pain and camaraderie experienced by women also pursuing this 'ideal.' Smith describes:

> [f]our women sat in a row in front of Irie [...], biting their lips, staring intently into a long, dirty mirror, waiting for their straighter selves to materialize. [...] Occasionally one said to another, 'How long?' To which the proud reply came, 'Fifteen minutes. How long for you?' 'Twenty-two. This shit's been on my head twenty-two minutes. It *better* be straight.'[88]

The hairdressers register their surprise at Irie's lack of experience or knowledge of how to manage her own hair. When questioned whether she has washed hair recently, she responds defensively that she has, only to find out that this was wrong answer. Much like her ignorance of the fact that when told her appointment was '*three thirty Jamaican time,* it naturally meant come late,'[89] Irie is also unaware that washing her hair too soon before chemically straightening it will lead to feeling like 'the devil's having a party on your scalp.'[90] Arriving on time, insisting that they go-ahead with straightening her hair, despite having only recently washed it, she suffers such pain that she collapses, only to come round to find her hair falling out in clumps. Although she is attempting to adhere to a modern interpretation of the principle, to take care of oneself, her suffering is in part caused by a failing of self-knowledge. Irie is shown as distant from herself and her culture. Her shame over her hair causes her to wash it too regularly and her desperation for transformation leads her to proceed with the chemical straightening process against the advice of the other women.

Despite Irie's foray into the world of hair and beauty being portrayed as disastrous by Smith, it is not presented as unusual. When she complains, ''But it hurts!' Andrea, her hairdresser replies, ''Life hurts [...] 'beauty hurts.''[91] Both the ideas that Irie should seek to conform to Eurocentric standards of beauty, and that this process will cause her a certain amount of pain and suffering, are taken by many of the characters as inevitable. That women should suffer is presented as an integral part of being a woman. As Wolf writes, 'love hurt, sex could kill, a woman's painful labor was a labor of love. What would be masochism in a man has meant survival for a woman.'[92] The idea that women have to suffer to be beautiful is simply presented as a natural addition to this list. The shop keeper, who sells Irie replacement hair that must be glued onto what is left of her own, asserts that ''Indian women have

[88] Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*, (London: Penguin, 2000), p.275.
[89] Ibid., p.273.
[90] Ibid., p.274.
[91] Ibid., p.278.
[92] Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*, (London: Vintage, 1990), p.219.

beautiful hair [...] everybody wants it!''[93] When challenged on this point by another customer, who stresses ''Some of us are happy with our African hair, thank you very much'',[94] she describes it in terms reminiscent of the excuses offered to Mears, as 'simply economics,' arguing that it is 'supply and demand'.[95] However, this supply and demand is not just fuelled by Irie's suffering and requirements in the quest to be beautiful; it is also reliant on the suffering of other women such as the girl who sold her hair, crying 'hot tears'[96] of embarrassment at the low price she was offered for sacrificing her own beauty. Although her encounter in the shop provides Irie with an opportunity to engage with someone who is promoting what Thompson has described as 'authentic' or 'natural' blackness, Irie's determination to be transformed is not shaken. Despite her hair already having been admired by the hairdressers for its 'loose curl'[97] and softness, characteristics that are attributed to it being 'half-caste hair,'[98] and thus possessing some of the assumed qualities of being white, her natural hair remains, as Thompson describes natural black hair, 'misunderstood' and 'villainized'.[99]

Irie's battle with her hair is paradoxically both a gesture of defiance and submission. Her transformation represents her desire to remake herself, establishing her claim on a hybrid identity that may help her reconcile herself to her surroundings, and the various pressures these place on her. By submitting to Eurocentric ideals of beauty and rejecting her own natural state, Irie is attempting to address conflicting elements of her identity; however, this project is ultimately unsuccessful. Her initial joy with the image of her new self is short lived. When confronted by the reaction of a family friend with the proclamation, 'you look like a freak',[100] Irie's certainty and confidence in her new found identity is shaken. She moves swiftly from being 'bewitched by her own reflection'[101] to 'catching an unfortunate glimpse of herself'.[102] Her motivation for changing her hair, to look more like a white school peer and thus gain the affection of her childhood friend, Millat, is challenged as being deeply

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[93] Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*, (London: Penguin, 2000), p.281.
[94] Ibid., p.281.
[95] Ibid., p.282.
[96] Ibid., p.280.
[97] Ibid., p.277.
[98] Ibid., p.277.
[99] Cheryl Thompson, 'Black Women, Beauty, and Hair as a Matter of Being,' in *Women's Studies*, vol.38, (2009), pp.831-856, p.855.
[100] Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*, (London: Penguin, 2000), p.283.
[101] Ibid., p.282.
[102] Ibid., p.289.

misguided. Through her hair, Irie is reminded of the importance of 'history'[103] and the need for knowledge or understanding of one's self. Her infatuation with Millat is described as 'slavish devotion,'[104] and thus her transformation is exposed as being less about taking ownership of her hybrid identity, and more about conforming to another's ideals. As the character of Maxine stresses, 'the Afro was cool, man. It was wicked. It was *yours.*'[105] Although Irie's attempt at establishing her own hybrid identity fails in this instance, hybridity is still celebrated within the novel. 'The Miseduction of Irie Jones,' is not a dismissal of hybrid identities. Instead, Smith advocates for the possibility of an 'authentic' hybrid identity, built on an acceptance of differing, and at times seemingly incompatible, cultural values and ideals. This authenticity comes, not from simply repeating the past, but from acknowledging it. It also requires the concept of authenticity to remain, perhaps paradoxically, open and unfixed.

Although much of this chapter has focused on the social pressures imposed upon women to look, and also behave, in a certain way, women can still be seen to make decisions in the beauty process. The need to acknowledge both women's agency and cultural context is especially strong with cross-cultural feminist discussions of beauty practices that often frame Western women's choices as influenced by their own desires and aspirations towards self-betterment while those of women in the East, or Global South, are discussed in terms of oppression and submission to tradition or cultural pressure. Braun raises the issue of this double standard, citing the differences between the language and ideologies used to shape and discuss Western perceptions of FGC (Female Genital Cutting) to those used to discuss the Western practice of FGCS (Female Genital Cosmetic Surgery). Braun argues that with regard to the various forms of female genital surgery, 'choice and agency underpin the apparent acceptability of these practices, and work to render them fundamentally different from (unacceptable) 'traditional' forms of female genital cutting.'[106] However, as suggested in the introduction to this research with reference to Carolyn Pedwell's arguments on the limits of cross-cultural analogies, drawing comparisons between the two practices should not lead to the simplistic assertion that each is as bad as the other. Rather, it should encourage careful

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[103] Ibid., p.289.
[104] Ibid., p.285.
[105] Ibid., p.285.
[106] Virginia Braun, "The Women are Doing it For Themselves' The Rhetoric of Choice and Agency around Female Genital 'Cosmetic Surgery", in *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol.24, no.60, (June 2009), pp.233-249, p.243.

consideration of the shifting contexts in which each practice takes place and an awareness of how, with regard to agency, FGCS and its association with 'choice,' is dependent on it being distanced from FGC.

FGC is often referred to in terms that emphasise the 'barbaric'[107] nature of the practice or the lack of agency or choice available to those that undergo the procedure. Braun suggests that this is in direct contrast to the terms used to describe FGCS, claiming that the difference in the way these two practices are discussed 'work to separate FGCS from 'FGM', a practice it could otherwise be aligned to, and which would seriously de-legitimate it.'[108] Although Braun uses the example of FGC in order to highlight the problematic position of asserting Western women's right to 'choose' this type of surgery when described as female genital cosmetic surgery, she pays little attention to the specifics of FGC. Her article does not address the differences between an assumedly autonomous adult and a child, despite FGC generally being carried out on young girls and adolescents as opposed to FGCS, which is in the most part practiced on adult women. The World Health Organisation suggests FGC 'procedures are mostly carried out on young girls sometime between infancy and age 15, and occasionally on adult women.'[109] Therefore it is clearly not as simple as arguing that there is a direct equivalence between the circumstances under which FGC is 'chosen,' or enforced, and those that influence FGCS. As Anne Phillips suggests, 'we cannot simply extend the protection we regard as appropriate to children to apply equally to adults because of the well-rehearsed risks of paternalism [...].'[110] Thus, suggesting that FGCS be subject to the same laws as FGC risks seriously underplaying the difference between consenting adults and children, regardless of whether one has doubts over how genuine 'consent' can be seen as being. Nonetheless, Braun's article provides an in-depth analysis of the issues raised by framing cosmetic surgery solely through the rhetoric of choice. It also raises a key point with

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[107] Sue Cameron, 'A Barbaric Practice that Shames us all' in *The Telegraph*, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/health/children_shealth/10116041/A-barbaric-practice-that-shames-us-all.html [accessed 13th September 2013].
[108] Virginia Braun, "The Women are Doing it For Themselves' The Rhetoric of Choice and Agency around Female Genital 'Cosmetic Surgery", in *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol.24, no.60, (June 2009), pp.233-249, p.241.
[109] World Health Organization, 'Female genital mutilation,' http://www.who.int/mediacenttre/factsheets/fs241/en/ [accessed 13th September 2013].
[110] Anne Phillips, *Multiculturalism without Culture*, (Oxfordshire: Princeton University Press, 2009), p.34.

regard to this thesis, that 'our own cultural practices are often so normalised that they are rarely subject to the same scrutiny as the practices of 'others.''[111]

Alice Walker's novel, *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), also focuses on the subject of FGC and the many factors that may influence a woman to choose to undergo this procedure. Walker presents FGC as a deeply complex issue that can be seen both in terms of resistance and oppression. However, the nuance and complexity that surrounds FGC in Walker's text should not be taken as an expression of doubt over the serious physical and psychological harm the procedure can cause. The character of Tashi, a native African woman who moves for a time to live in America, embodies the characteristics of both defiance and submission in attempts to preserve her cultural and tribal identity whilst balancing this with outside, Western influences and her journey towards presenting a coherent self.

Throughout the novel, Tashi engages with the process of psychoanalysis in an attempt to recover repressed memories surrounding the death of her sister, Dura, who died whilst undergoing ritual genital cutting, as well as to reconcile the deep psychological harm caused by her own experience of FGC. Dura's death has a profound effect on Tashi, and along with her own decision to go through with the ritual of FGC, leaves her both mentally and physically scarred. By utilizing the psychoanalytic concepts developed by Jung, Walker acknowledges the importance of the individual, and the individual's journey towards a sense of autonomy and self. Geneva Cobb More suggests that Walker 'explicitly appropriates Carl Jung's archetypal patterns of the ego, the shadow, the anima/animus, and the Self in a psychological process that promises individual harmony and wholeness [...].'[112] Turning to a doctor named Carl, believed to represent Carl Jung, Tashi recovers her memory and proclaims her sister's death a 'murder'.[113] In doing this she begins to free herself from the silence and collusion that surrounds ritual FGC and 'experiences the individuation journey to wholeness'[114] whereby 'the individual who endures considerable struggle [...] is awarded the Self, the inner sacredness and uniqueness of the individual who finds the god within his or

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[111] Virginia Braun, "The Women are Doing it For Themselves' The Rhetoric of Choice and Agency around Female Genital 'Cosmetic Surgery", in *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol.24, no.60, (June 2009), pp.233-249, p.243.

[112] Geneva Cobb Moore, 'Archetypal Symbolism in Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*,' in *The Southern Literary Journal*, Vol.33, No.1, (Fall 2003), pp.111-121, p.111.

[113] Alice Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, (London: Vintage, 1993) p.79.

[114] Geneva Cobb Moore, 'Archetypal Symbolism in Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*,' in *The Southern Literary Journal*, Vol.33, No.1, (Fall 2003), pp.111-121, p.113.

herself.'[115] Although not explicitly linked to Jung, Smith's portrayal of Irie's path towards an understanding and realization of the 'self' similarly suggests the importance of struggle.

Possessing the Secret of Joy also foregrounds the influence of culture and society on the individual. Tashi is shown as an individual, capable of making her own choices, often to the dismay of those around her, but these choices do not take place in a context of Tashi's own making. The meaning of these choices are also not fixed, despite often being referred to as conforming to 'tradition.' Instead, they are shown to be dynamic, their meaning shifting depending on time, location and perspective. Walker avoids presenting simplistic binary oppositions between tradition and modernity, colonizer and colonized, and oppressed and oppressor. She portrays, rather, the complex relationships between these seemingly oppositional points that in fact overlap as often as they diverge. Tashi is not simply the passive victim of her culture; she is actively engaged with it, first as protector and then as reformer. However, the psychological and physical toll that this engagement costs her is painfully clear. Her body is transformed by what is sold to her as her 'cultural tradition', from proud and defiant, to possessing 'the classic Olinka woman's walk',[116] characterized by the shuffle adopted by those who have undergone FGC, whereas before she used to stride.

Tashi's decision to undergo FGC is initially both an act of defiance against the interloping culture of the West, presented by the characters of Olivia and Adam who, although Black are Western outsiders, and the eventual destruction of her village. FGC is thus initially presented as a way for Tashi to express solidarity with her tribe and culture. Alyson Buckman describes Walker's text as a place where 'bodies [...] become sites of resistance to domination by power elites'[117] arguing that the 'text functions as an example of revolutionary action against the oppression of those colonized by the imperialist gaze.'[118] Buckman suggests that 'for those faced with conflict between traditional and colonial influence, the ritual of genital mutilation gains added significance as a means of resisting tribal colonization.'[119] In the preface to *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, an extract from Walker's earlier work, *The Color Purple* (1983), is included where the character of Tashi is first

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[115] Ibid., p.112.

[116] Alice Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, (London: Vintage, 1993), p.63.

[117] Alyson Buckman, 'The Body as a Site of Colonization: Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*,' in *Journal of American Culture*, vol.18, issue 2, (summer 1995), pp.89-94 p.89.

[118] Ibid., p.89.

[119] Ibid., p.90.

introduced. She is seen as celebrating the cultural significance of ritual female genital mutilation as a way of marking herself as separate from American or European culture. Walker writes, she 'was happy that the initiation ceremony isn't done in Europe or America [...] That makes it even more valuable to her.'[120] However, during *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, although already in turmoil over the implications of FGC for women and the disastrous impact the operation has had on her own life, Tashi's distress is further compounded by the discovery that FGC in fact takes place all over the world, even in her adopted home of America.

Tashi's meeting with Amy, an American Southern belle whose clitoris had been removed as a child when her mother discovered her touching herself, shakes her belief in the pretences of the West, as well as her belief that FGC was a traditional cultural practice, specific to Africa. Despite Amy's assertion that, 'even in America a rich white child could not touch herself sexually, if others could see her, and be safe',[121] Tashi refuses to believe, fearing her visions of 'the healthy green leaves of my America falling seared to the ground. Her sparkling rivers muddy with blood.'[122] Amy offers Tashi another understanding of FGC that is as much about control as tradition. Her revelation opens up the idea that FGC is a form of gendered violence rather than cultural preservation, challenging the presumed conflict that the procedure supposedly marks between tradition and modernity. The prevalence of FGC in the West is also stressed by Aileen Kennedy in her article, 'Mutilation and Beautification, Legal Responses to Genital Surgeries.' Kennedy asserts:

> [t]he spread (or return) of FGM to Western nations is attributable to global immigration trends, which partly explain the growing awareness of the practice and concern in Western nations to eradicate it domestically and internationally [...]. FGM, however, is not an unknown phenomenon in Western Cultures. [123]

Echoing the experiences of the character, Amy, Kennedy also attributes FGC in the West during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, to attempts to control women's sexuality and as being recommended as 'a cure for masturbation'.[124]

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[120] Alice Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, (London: Vintage, 1993), Preface.
[121] Ibid., p.177.
[122] Ibid., p.177.
[123] Aileen Kennedy, 'Mutilation and Beautification, Legal Responses to Genital Surgeries,' in *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol.24, no.60, (June 2009), pp.211-228, p.211.
[124] Ibid., p.211.

Returning to the importance of Freud in informing Western views of female sexuality as passive, as suggested by Fatima Mernissi, Freud's theories of female sexuality present the idea that female masturbation can be cured. Indeed Freud claims that women who continue to masturbate past childhood, and what he terms the initial 'phallic stage,'[125] risk failing to successfully adopt 'the path to the development of femininity'.[126] Freud suggests that, for women, a 'defiant persistence in masturbation appears to open the way to masculinity.'[127] He describes the clitoris as 'analogous to the male sexual organ'[128] arguing that it functions like a penis, 'with its virile character'.[129] However, he suggests that it is a little girl's dissatisfaction with the clitoris, when compared to the penis, and her acceptance of her 'organic inferiority'[130] that leads to her rejecting the clitoris as a substitute penis, and thus to accepting her femininity. Although, for Freud, this castration was symbolic, FGC can be seen as the physical realization of these ideas. For both Tashi and Amy, the excision of their clitorises served to curb what was seen as taking an unfeminine pleasure in sexual activity, either through masturbation or having sex with a partner. Amy describes '[s]crewing madly, feeling nothing',[131] following the removal of her clitoris at the behest of her mother. Similarly, Tashi had an active and pleasurable sex life, describing a time 'before circumcision'[132] when as a child she used to 'stroke'[133] herself, 'which was taboo'[134] or later, having sex with Adam and always achieving orgasm. The pleasure that Tashi enjoyed during sex only serves to compound her misery following FGC, and render her decision to willingly undergo this procedure even more incomprehensible to characters such as Raye.

The mother's central role in supporting and enforcing this castration is evident in both the reality of the practice of FGC, and in Freud's theory of 'Female Sexuality'. Saba W. Masho and Lindsey Matthews argue that 'beliefs and traditions around FGM are so powerful

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[125] Sigmund Freud, 'Female Sexuality' in *Psychoanalysis and Woman: A Reader*, ed. Shelley Saguaro, (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), p.30.
[126] Ibid., p.31.
[127] Ibid., p.26.
[128] Ibid., p.23.
[129] Ibid., p.23.
[130] Ibid., p.25.
[131] Alice Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, (London: Vintage, 1993), p.179.
[132] Ibid., p.113.
[133] Ibid., p.113.
[134] Ibid., p.113.

that women are its strongest advocates.'[135] This is in part because of the linking of FGC with the idea of making a good marriage and the notion that those who have not undergone FGC are somehow unclean and thus unmarriageable. They suggest 'propagating the practice of FGM through the generations becomes the duty of mothers and older women. These women have the responsibility of preparing their daughters for adulthood and marriage.'[136] Similarly, Freud sees the mother's role in the castration complex as allowing for her daughter's successful transition into womanhood and femininity. Freud describes a 'turning away'[137] from the mother, who was the child's initial love object, due to 'the reproach that her mother did not give her a proper penis – that is to say, brought her into the world as female.'[138] This acceptance of her femaleness, and with it her inferiority, as Freud sees it, necessarily means that her mother 'suffers great depreciation in her eyes.'[139] Despite the obvious physical and psychological harm done to daughters, both through the corporeal practice of FGC and the symbolic enforcing of women's supposed inferiority, each are viewed by mothers as necessary, paradoxically to ensure their daughter's welfare. Thus women both endure the process and perpetuate it, creating a complex cycle that blurs the lines between oppressor and oppressed.

Writing of her own experience of FGC, however, Ayaan Hirsi Ali describes how it was not her mother, or her father, whom she describes as a 'modern man' who 'considered the practice barbaric,'[140] that forced her to undergo the procedure. Instead it was her grandmother who sought to 'ensure that the old traditions would be respected in the old ways.'[141] Women's complicity in FGC is also a focus of *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. Despite suffering greatly at the hands of M'Lissa, the tusunga, Walker's word for the women that perpetrate the practice of FGC, Tashi is forced to confront M'Lissa's own suffering. M'Lissa was herself circumcised in an operation so severe that it severed some of the tendons in her leg, an incident echoed by Hirsi Ali's sisters' experience whose legs were scarred from struggling to escape the scissors. The severity of M'Lissa's operation was in part caused by her mother's

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[135] Saba W. Masho, Lindesy Matthews, 'Factors determining whether Ethiopian women support continuation of female genital mutilation' in *International Journal of Gynaecology and Obstetrics*, vol.107 (2009), pp.232-235, p.232.

[136] Ibid., p.234.

[137] Sigmund Freud, 'Female Sexuality' in *Psychoanalysis and Woman: A Reader*, ed. Shelley Saguaro, (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), p.27.

[138] Ibid., p.27.

[139] Ibid., p.26.

[140] Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Infidel*, (London: Pocket Books, 2008), p.31.

[141] Ibid., p.31.

initial reluctance to circumcise her daughter and her attempt to only partially remove the clitoris.

Through the characters of M'Lissa and Tashi, Walker demonstrates this cycle that sees women undergo intense pain and suffering, and then inflict this on one another. As with Wolf and Tseëlon's assertions about the competitive nature of the 'beauty myth,' and the risks of deviating from these norms, so Tashi and M'Lissa describe a culture where to remain uncircumcised is to be unmarriageable or seen as 'loose.' Hirsi Ali recounts her mother's initial fury upon finding that her daughters had been circumcised without her knowledge or consent; however, ultimately her grandmother's reasoning for forcing the procedure is accepted. When challenged for facilitating FGC, Hirsi Ali's grandmother commands, '[i]magine your daughters ten years from now – who would marry them with long *kintirs* [clitorises] dangling halfway down their legs?'[142] The horror of this image, of unmarriageable daughters, with clitorises that have been allowed to grow to their knees, is apparently enough to justify Hirsi Ali's circumcision. As she writes, it was presented as 'just something that had happened – had *had* to happen. Everyone was cut.'[143] In her book, *Wanted Women, Truth, Lies, and the War on Terror: The Lives of Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Aafia Siddiqui,* Deborah Scroggins reiterates this, describing the reaction of Hirsi Ali's parents to her grandmothers decision to have her circumcised. She suggests that although 'Hirsi and Asha disapproved, [...] they probably didn't regard female genital mutilation with the revulsion many Westerners felt. Nearly every woman they knew was infibulated, and Ayaan's grandmother didn't have to remind them how hard it was for an uncircumcised girl to find a husband.'[144]

The idea that FGC increases 'the marital desirability of girls'[145] links the practice to beauty in a way that is often overlooked or hidden in Western discussions. Emphasising the image of FGC as backward or traditional distances it from harmful Western beauty practices, that essentially form the same function of making women more desirable to men, despite the possible risks to their health. Scroggins also quotes Hirsi Ali's half sister, Arro, who she

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[142] Ibid., p.34.

[143] Ibid., p.34.

[144] Deborah Scroggins, *Wanted Women, Truth, Lies, and the War on Terror: The Lives of Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Aafia Siddiqui,* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2012), p.13.

[145] Saba W. Masho, Lindesy Matthews, 'Factors determining whether Ethiopian women support continuation of female genital mutilation' in *International Journal of Gynaecology and Obstetrics*, vol.107 (2009), pp.232-235, p.232.

claims 'wrote, it was called "pruning" in Somali language' and explicitly associates the process with hygiene and beauty regimes, saying it was 'regarded as a sign of cleanliness and beauty.'[146] Although, as previously suggested, the distinction between children and adults should not be lost in comparing FGC with Western beauty practices that are 'chosen' by adult women, adult mothers and grandmothers are the active agents, making 'choices' on behalf of their daughters and granddaughters. Thus FGC also raises questions over parental rights, a discussion that is too large and complex to be given any meaningful attention within this thesis. However, it is important to note that suggesting FGC is solely a product of an outdated patriarchal culture, fails to address women's own active roles in perpetuating this cultural standard, instead, presenting them as the pawns of tradition. This not only creates a false dichotomy between women in the West who are assumed to be able to 'choose' to enhance their desirability and thus make themselves more marriageable, or their bodies more socially acceptable, and those in the global South who are assumed to be the perpetual victims of their backwards, patriarchal culture. Ignoring women's roles in maintaining these conditions also ignores the complexity of their suffering; facilitating the collective amnesia that mothers must develop in order to inflict on their daughter the same pain that they themselves have endured.

M'Lissa claims that, 'even if they themselves almost died the first time a man broke into their bodies, they want to be told it was a minor hurt, the same that all women feel, that their daughters will barely notice, and cease, over time to remember.'[147] FGC is presented by M'Lissa as something that is necessary and inevitable, and if, as Masho and Matthews assert that, 'a study in 28 African countries in which FGM is commonly practiced showed that men have a strong preference for women who have undergone FGM',[148] then M'Lissa's character is simply presenting a popular view. M'Lissa suggests that women are united by their pain, denial and perpetuation of FGC. Although Tashi is eventually put on trial for murdering M'Lissa, she is also on trial for challenging this status quo and insisting on the acknowledgment of the suffering caused to women by trying to uphold these standards. She is on trial for remembering, for refusing to partake in the collective amnesia that denies the suffering of women, and therefore disrupting the myths that surround the procedure. As she

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[146] Deborah Scroggins, *Wanted Women, Truth, Lies, and the War on Terror: The Lives of Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Aafia Siddiqui,* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2012), p.13.
[147] Alice Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, (London: Vintage, 1993), pp.228-229.
[148] Saba W. Masho, Lindesy Matthews, 'Factors determining whether Ethiopian women support continuation of female genital mutilation' in *International Journal of Gynaecology and Obstetrics*, vol.107 (2009), pp.232-235, p.232.

writes on a sign presented as evidence against her at her trial, '[i]f you lie to yourself about your own pain, you will be killed by those who will claim you enjoyed it.'[149] Despite Tashi presenting a threat to the idea of women being united by their acceptance and practice of FGC, Walker offers hope of a new allegiance between women, evident in those who gather outside Tashi's window to show their support. This support is reemphasized when women line the streets as Tashi walks towards her execution, and raise their semi-naked and uncircumcised baby daughters in the air. Mbati unfurls a banner, proclaiming, 'RESISTANCE IS THE SECRET OF JOY!'[150] Resistance, both to the silence and taboo that surrounds FGC, but also to standards of beauty that deem it necessary.

Tashi's resistance takes many forms within the novel. Initially she is resistant to the colonial forces that are seen as a threat to her village and their traditions, and then to the traditions themselves. All her decisions are made in conflict, either with her own expectations, or those of others. Her original choice to join the militia and be circumcised, despite already being beyond the normal age of circumcision, is both a show of solidarity towards her own tribe and an act of defiance against colonial influences, in the form of Adam and Olivia. Although Tashi's friendship with Olivia endures for the duration of her life, she often defines herself in opposition to Olivia, highlighting the gap in understanding between not only the two characters, but also their two cultures. Olivia's role as colonizer is complex. A black, American missionary's daughter, her place in Africa is ambivalent and she is seen by Tashi as an outsider. Buckman suggests that, 'while Adam and Olivia are both black Americans and, thus, victims of oppression themselves; they are also agents of colonization.'[151] Despite her decision to undergo FGC and the catastrophic impact this has on her life, Tashi still declares that she does not regret her decision. As she says to Olivia, who begged her not to leave to join the Mbele camp, 'when I disobey you, the outsider, even if it is wrong, I am being what is left of myself.'[152]

Although Walker clearly portrays the horror and consequences of the FGC, she refrains from passing judgement, to an extent, on those who practice or choose it. Despite Buckman

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[149] Alice Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, (London: Vintage, 1993), p.102.
[150] Ibid., p.246.
[151] Alyson Buckman, 'The Body as a Site of Colonization: Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*' in *Journal of American Culture*, vol.18, issue 2, (summer 1995), pp.89-94, p.91.
[152] Alice Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy,* (London: Vintage, 1993), p.238.

suggesting that 'the reader is not persuaded to empathize'[153] with the character of M'Lissa, neither are they led to see her wholly as the villain of the piece. Even in the confrontation between the two characters, M'Lissa, although undeniably callous and cold in her acceptance of the suffering she has caused numerous women, expresses painful insight into the weight of cultural traditions, and Tashi's motivations in being circumcised. Tashi comes to understand her own and other women's role in practicing FGC and this becomes a source of strength. M'Lissa describes her own circumcision and her journey to becoming the tusunga. She describes the loss of herself following her circumcision, as a 'death' similar to that suffered by Tashi and acknowledges the horror of her role, and her subsequent uncaring attitude towards women, when she asks, 'Can you imagine the life of the tsunga who feels?'[154] To a degree, M'Lissa is shown as a woman who is doing what is needed to survive. Like Hirsi Ali's grandmother, who felt it was her duty to ensure that old traditions were kept alive, M'Lissa also describes herself as being 'in service to tradition, to what makes us a people.'[155]

Tashi's story highlights the complexity of the relationship between the individual and culture. Although clearly influenced by her culture, she is not defined by it. In fact, her actions show the power the individual has in challenging culture and notions of cultures as fixed or stable. From her death at the end of the novel, there is evidence of a form of cultural rebirth present in the character of Mbati, and Tashi's hope for the 'self-possession' and 'wholeness'[156] that Mbati's future daughters may have. Though not fully explored in the novel, the revelation of Amy's own circumcision raises the idea of FGC being an issue that cannot be assigned to any one culture or continent. Olivia's discussion with the women potters who make replicas of ancient fertility dolls also suggests a warning that permeates across cultures. She describes the modern dolls that 'every little girl is given'[157] as 'a little figure of a woman as a toy, with the most vacuous face imaginable, and no vagina at all'[158] asserting that, 'we are not supposed to have vaginas under this scheme, [...].[159] Her description of what sounds remarkably similar to a type of Barbie, or as mentioned earlier with reference to Walter's concern over the popularity of Bratz dolls, highlights the problems

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[153] Alyson Buckman, 'The Body as a Site of Colonization: Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*,' in *Journal of American Culture*, vol.18, issue 2, (summer 1995), pp.89-94 p.91.
[154] Alice Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, (London: Vintage, 1993), p.205.
[155] Ibid., p.210.
[156] Ibid., pp.256-257.
[157] Ibid., p.189.
[158] Ibid., p. 189.
[159] Ibid., p.189.

of representing women in this way, as without thoughts or feelings and removed from their anatomy.

Greer's *The Female Eunuch* also explores the representation of women as de-sexed. Writing on female sexuality, Greer argues:

> [h]er sexuality is both denied and misrepresented by being identified as passivity. The vagina is obliterated from the imagery of femininity in the same way that signs of independence and vigour in the rest of her body are suppressed.[160]

Greer's assertions about the representation of femininity also refer back to Freud's work on female sexuality, where women are assumed as being sexually passive. Greer's notion of the female eunuch suggests links to FGC, with her assertion that in women, the 'characteristics that are praised and rewarded are those of the castrate [...].'[161] Greer argues that 'women's sexual organs are shrouded in mystery.'[162] This mystery facilitates the distancing of women from their bodies and their sexuality, allowing for various harmful myths to fill the void left by a lack of self-awareness or understanding of one's own anatomy.

The idea that women's vaginas are distasteful and unclean is often presented as providing an incentive for FGC – Tashi describes how her 'uncircumcised vagina was thought of as a monstrosity.'[163] However, this view is not confined to cultures found in the global South, and is prevalent in the West too. Greer describes the vagina as being defined as a '*problem*,' arguing that 'vaginal secretions are the subject of a vast folklore; the huge advertising campaigns for deodorants and sweeteners of the vulvar area deliberately play upon female misgivings about the acceptability of natural tastes and odours.'[164] These cosmetic products are sold to women as a way of making their vaginas more acceptable, often under the guise of health and hygiene. However, these chemical remedies to non-existent, or culturally created issues, can arguably create more problems than they are intended to solve.

More recently surgical options such as labiaplasty are offered in order to remedy women's concerns around their vaginas, and specifically concerns over the way their vaginas look, rather than function. Greer asserts that, 'the cunt of a fresh and virtuous woman is

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[160] Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch*, (London: Harper Perennial, 2006), p.17.
[161] Ibid., p.17.
[162] Ibid., p.44.
[163] Alice Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, (London: Vintage, 1993), p.131.
[164] Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch*, (London: Harper Perennial, 2006), p.290.

thought to be pink and soft, the clitoris hardly protuberant, the membrane of the labia to be smooth and thin.'[165] Variations from this are assumed as abnormal or abhorrent; leading women to seek interventions in order to make sure their vaginas conform to this standard. Greer's statement also stresses the perceived linked between idealised perceptions of femininity, such as 'fresh' and 'virtuous,' and the appearance of female genitalia, suggesting that a women's character can be judged by characteristic of her vagina, a view advocated by supporters of FGC who denounce uncircumcised women as unclean and physically and morally loose. Shelia Jeffreys links the Western practice of labiaplasty with a desire to please men. She cites an interview with a woman who had undergone the procedure as saying, '"you may think you are doing it for your own self-esteem, to feel more desirable, but in the end you're really doing it to please men."'[166] Jeffreys describes labiaplasty as a 'particularly brutal western beauty practice'[167] and argues that its rise in prevalence in the West is partly due to increased availability of pornography. However, Jeffreys also suggests 'one reason that heterosexual women may feel their genitals require surgery is that they do not know what other women's genitals look like.'[168] Despite the ubiquitous images of women's vaginas displayed in pornography, very little variation is shown, leading women to assume that desirable labia all take a particular, standardized form.

Commenting on the launch event, and the following panel discussion, of the short film, *Centrefold,* that explores the ethics of labiaplasty, Meredith Thomas proposes that 'with more women and girls coming into contact with pornography, [...], an unrealistic impression can be created of a limited variation in appearance of female genitalia.'[169] Thomas suggests that psychoanalyst and feminist panellist, Susie Orbach was 'visibly torn between two doctrines' arguing that, 'her belief in female empowerment and body ownership conflicted with the sense that women's aspirations were being shaped by an unhealthy (masculine) view of beauty'.[170] Thus highlighting again, the seductive nature of the rhetoric of choice, as well as the co-opting of feminist principles of women's liberation and bodily autonomy in order to justify invasive cosmetic surgery. Despite the importance of supporting women's choices in

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[165] Ibid., p.291.

[166] Shelia Jeffreys, *Beauty and Misogyny: Harmful Cultural Practices in the West*, (Sussex: Routledge, 2005), p.85.

[167] Ibid., p.28.

[168] Ibid., p.83.

[169] Meredith Thomas, 'New short film Centrefold tackles the ethics of labiaplasty,' *Wellcome Trust Blog,* http://blog.wellcome.ac.uk/2012/07/20/new-short-film-centrefold-tackles-the-ethics-of-labiaplasty/ [accessed 8th October, 2013], p.2.

[170] Ibid., p.3.

relation to their bodies, and stressing that pleasure can be taken in altering ones appearance, Orbach draws attention to the idea that what is problematic is not that women are choosing to alter their bodies, but rather that the cultural contexts in which these decision are taking place are, as suggested with regard to Tashi, often not simply shaped by the desires of women themselves.

Although it is important to acknowledge and examine critically the multitude of factors that may influence these decisions, it is equally important not to entirely dismiss the idea that a decision was ever made. As Tashi realizes in Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, what was presented to her as a timeless cultural practice, strongly linked to place and tradition, that she sought out and expressly chose, had in fact been imposed upon her culture, rather than being integral to it. This does not undermine the idea that a choice was made, but instead questions the context in which this choice took place. Tashi's discovery of the small pottery figures of women, gleefully displaying their genitals, one touching her vagina 'as if the word 'MINE' were engraved on her finger,'[171] challenges the notion of FGC as timeless. Showing instead a time before this 'tradition,' and, as previously suggested, her meeting with Amy shakes her faith in the cultural specificity of FGC and in the supposed liberal modernity of America. This sense of FGC being 'inauthentic' becomes liberating for Tashi, allowing the possibility for change, as well as strengthening the idea that authenticity must be linked, to an extent, to a personal journey of understanding and development of self.

Both *Possessing the Secret of Joy* and *White Teeth* highlight examples of 'beauty' practices that are laden with cultural significance. Although not discussed in terms of beauty, Walker does link FGC with the importance of making a good marriage and providing pleasure for a man. Tashi talks of being taught that 'a proper woman must be cut and sewn to fit only her husband [...].'[172] An 'uncircumcised woman is loose [...] like a shoe that all, no matter what their size, might wear.'[173] However, published in 2000, Smith's novel strikes a very different tone from Walker's, published in 1992. *Possessing the Secret of Joy* forefronts the struggle between competing cultures, the colonizer and the colonized, tradition and modernity, and the conflict in attempting to present a coherent national identity. Although these themes are also present in *White Teeth,* Smith's novel displays these challenges as a

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[171] Alice Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, (London: Vintage, 1993) p.189.
[172] Alice Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, (London: Vintage, 1993) p.208.
[173] Ibid., p.207

cause for celebration, as if the author, if not all the characters, is already aware of the insight that Tashi learns, that resistance is the secret of joy.

However, like Walker, Smith avoids presenting the notion of the individual as divorced from, or outside of culture. Instead both stress the symbiotic relationship between self and culture that emphasizes the mutual impact that each may have on the other. Tashi's process of individuation is at once deeply personal and resolutely political. Her personal journey towards an authentic feeling of self involves both embracing and challenging cultural ideas that are assumed fixed. Irie's own process of individuation also involves 'a belief in each individual's uniqueness.'[174] Furthermore, although both characters are exposed to Western culture, the influence of Westernization is not presented as the dominant force. Instead, a balance is sought by Smith and Walker that highlights the fluidity between cultures, and cultural similarities, as well as the importance of acknowledging cultural difference. This balance challenges fixed notions of cultural 'insiders' and 'outsiders,' questioning ideas of 'authentic' cultures and cultural traditions.

Writing on the process of Westernization, Uma Narayan interrogates the assumption that liberal ideals, and specifically 'Third-World feminist voices' are 'rooted in elitist and "Westernized" views,' instead arguing that 'for many Third-World feminists, our feminist consciousness [...] has its roots much closer to home.'[175] Narayan argues that her own feminist perspective was developed as much in response to her early childhood experiences with her mother, as to her later schooling and 'Westernization.' She writes of a 'call to rebellion' that has a 'more primary root' and 'was not conceptual or English, but in the mother-tongue.'[176] This primary root was based on Narayan's observations of her own family life and her mother's suffering, whose silence Narayan credits with inciting her to speech.[177] Narayan argues that 'feminist daughters' must 'rethink notions of what it is to "be at home" in a "culture," and to redefine notions of "cultural loyalty, betrayal, and respect" in ways that do not privilege the experiences of men.'[178] Similarly, both Tashi and Irie can be seen to negotiate issues of cultural loyalty and respect, as well as undertaking the difficult task of

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[174] Geneva Cobb Moore, 'Archetypal Symbolism in Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*,' in *The Southern Literary Journal*, Vol.33, No.1, (Fall 2003), pp.111-121, p.112.

[175] Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism*, (Oxon: Routledge, 1997), p.6.

[176] Ibid., p.7.

[177] Ibid., p.7.

[178] Ibid., p.9.

disentangling 'cultural practices' from patriarchal positions that seek to shore up the privileges of men. For both characters beauty practices transcend simplistic assumptions about gender and agency and instead highlight the influences of complex intersections between race, culture, tradition and modernity. For each, beauty practices represent both submission and resistance.

The scope for analysing beauty practices then must go beyond exclusively theorizing the relationship between women and patriarchy, especially in a cross-cultural context. Migration and globalisation also shift the boundaries of these discussions. For example, it is now estimated that 'there are 66,000 women in England and Wales living with FGC, and 20,000 girls are at risk.'[179] Although illegal in the UK there have yet to be any convictions of those who practice it.[180] However, prosecution could lead to some women being subjected to different laws than others. Again drawing a comparison between female genital cosmetic surgery and FGC, Braun argues that some of the language used to define and criminalise FGC (or FGM) under the Female Genital Mutilation Act (2003), could equally apply to the practice of FGCS, although 'for a 'Western' woman, having one's labia 'trimmed' is not a criminalised act, even though some procedures fit within a strict anatomical interpretation of the law.'[181] There are of course variations of FGC that certainly go beyond the description of 'having one's labia trimmed.' Despite the obvious limits of comparing all forms of FGC with FGCS, as earlier suggested, Braun's analysis does highlight the problematic and often overtly colonial view whereby some women, namely Western, are seen as autonomous, free thinking adults and others are treated as incapable of making informed choices, even when they themselves are living in the West.

In the UK, FGC can again be seen to function as a form of resistance to Western assimilation. Waris Dirie, former model and campaigner against FGM, claims that the procedure takes place in immigrant communities 'because first of all the community sticks

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[179] Emine Saner, 'Waris Dirie: 'Female genital mutilation is pure violence against girls' in *The Guardian,* http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2013/oct/14/waris-dirie-female-genital-mutilation-fgm [accessed October 24th 2013].

[180] Days prior to submitting this thesis, 2 men became the first people to be charged in connection with performing FGC/FGM.

[181] Virginia Braun, "The Women are Doing it For Themselves' The Rhetoric of Choice and Agency around Female Genital 'Cosmetic Surgery", in *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol.24, no.60, (June 2009), pp.233-249, p.235.

together. They bring the same behaviour, even though they live right here in London.'[182] The perceived need to maintain a cultural identity that preserves a link to a group or place that has been left due to migration reinforces the use of FGC as a way of strengthening or re-establishing links with 'traditional' cultural practices. It can also be seen as demonstrating a rejection of the assumed Western values of sexual liberation or permissiveness. As Narayan comments:

> [v]isions of one's nation, one's national history and community, are deeply tied to one's sense of place, to one's sense of belonging to a larger community, to one's sense of heritage and loyalties. Inherited pictures of gender roles and family and social arrangements are often central elements both to one's sense of self and to one's sense of one's social world.[183]

Ironically, the presentation of FGC in the media as a 'traditional' cultural practice then only serves to further the appeal of the procedure as a form of resistance to Western 'modernity' and ideals. The binary between the assumedly liberated West and all the rest, in fact, strengthens the notion that FGC can have a positive role in fighting cultural assimilation or the tyranny of colonialism, rather than encouraging a critique of the practice as a form of gendered violence that is or has been inflicted on women and girls across continents, cultures and religions. Furthermore, maintaining the focus of debates around FGC on the barbaric or backwardness of the procedure not only serves to distance it from more socially acceptable forms of FGCS such as labiaplasty, it also assumes that what is problematic about FGM are the conditions under which it takes place, rather than the ideology that supports it. This undermines the aim of those campaigning against FGC who are not arguing for more sanitary conditions or the medicalization of the procedure, but to eradicate it. As Dirie comments, 'the whole point is to stop this mutilation in the first place.'[184]

An aggressive stance on multiculturalism that seeks to promote assimilation rather than an acceptance of difference, coupled with an uncritical view of feminism in the West, thus exacerbates the issue of FGC, rather than challenges it. Positioning FGC as something that happens elsewhere, either in terms of location or culture, creates a distance that allows commentators in the West, feminist and otherwise, to condemn the practice as alien and

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[182] Emine Saner, 'Waris Dirie: 'Female genital mutilation is pure violence against girls' in *The Guardian*, http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2013/oct/14/waris-dirie-female-genital-mutilation-fgm [accessed October 24th 2013].
[183] Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism*, (Oxon: Routledge, 1997), p.36.
[184] Ibid., p.3.

outside of Western experience or understanding. Through this frame of reference FGC then becomes either a problem for the West to solve – this attitude bringing with it the weight of colonialism – or to ignore in an attempt to avoid projecting the image of the benevolent white saviour. However, discussing FGC purely in terms of gendered violence also brings with it certain problems. Namely that by exploring the issue solely through the lens of gender other intersecting factors of influence, such as race, religion and cultural identity may be lost, potentially creating an analysis that promotes universalisms where all women are seen to be subject to the same problems and levels of discrimination and violence under patriarchy.

This is not to imply that a discussion of FGC that recognises the multiple meanings that influence this procedure is attempting to excuse or justify it; quite the opposite. By analyzing and attempting to understand the factors that influence the propagation of FGC across cultures and continents a solution can be sought that avoids both the trappings of colonialism and the paralyzing affects of cultural relativism. This solution will almost certainly be fluid and responsive rather than static, promoting a one-dimensional view of FGC as either purely a cultural tradition or gendered violence. This does not imply the need for more legislation that symbolically displays the West's disapproval and thus superiority. Female Genital Mutilation is already illegal in the UK and yet we have evidence of multiple women and girls undergoing the procedure but no prosecutions. The lack of prosecutions alone should raise an alarm questioning why the issue is not being taken seriously despite widespread condemnation, widening the discussion to include not just the various intersecting factors that support or promote FGC, but also encouraging those in the West to apply the same critical lens to their own cultural practices and attitudes, as they do to those that take place – perhaps more comfortably – elsewhere.

Chapter 5
A Culture of Violence and Victim Blaming

Honour violence, like the issue of veiling or FGC, has been given a new prominence in UK debates since 9/11, featuring in both discussions of multiculturalism and women's rights. Although presented in the context of concern over women's rights, both at home and abroad, discussions of 'honour'-based violence also have a wider political impact. By reinforcing cultural stereotypes and assumptions about fixed notions of 'us' and 'them,' the widespread media interest and condemnation of 'honour'-based violence can be seen as a tool used to shore up national identities in a time politically defined by both concerns over immigration and global terror. Despite existing legislation in the UK that is intended, at least symbolically if not always in reality, to protect women from violence, the complexities surrounding 'honour'-based violence are at times presented as allowing perpetrators to avoid detection or prosecution. Thus media and government attention to the issue of 'honour' based violence can also be placed in the wider context of a backlash against multiculturalism.

Many of these debates take place in the media, where complex and nuanced issues are often discussed through a simplistic lens that relies heavily on unchallenged assumptions of the liberated, enlightened, and, crucially, 'post-feminist,'[1] West. The notion of the West as post-feminist serves a dual function. Primarily it stresses the difference between 'them,' – predominantly depicted as the downtrodden Eastern, principally Muslim, woman, and the backward, traditional, and violent man – and 'us', the free thinking autonomous Western individual, uninhibited by culture or gender. Stereotypes of the violent Muslim man, intent on enforcing his patriarchal views and maintaining his family 'honour' by whatever means necessary, have arguably replaced what Angela Davis referred to in 1981, as 'the myth of the Black rapist.'[2] However, stressing the post-feminist position of women in the West also serves to dismiss feminist criticism of these assumptions, either through arguing that feminists have been paralyzed by cultural relativism, or, paradoxically, by invoking cultural relativism to suggest that concerns over violations of women's rights in the West are trivial in comparison to those taking place elsewhere, or within 'other' cultures.

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[1] Post-Feminist as referring to a time after feminism, or the notion that feminism has served its purpose and is thus irrelevant, is discussed in the introduction to this thesis. How post-feminism is both distinct from, yet related to postfeminism as a theoretical shift associated with the third wave is also elaborated on in the following chapter.

[2] Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race and Class*, (New York: Random House, 1981), p.173.

In the context of this thesis, the category of 'honour'-based violence, and its presentation in mainstream media, is explored in an attempt to combat assumptions about Western attitudes to violence against women. Predominantly, these assumptions are that violence against women, such as domestic violence and sexual assault, takes place elsewhere or is associated with the acts of individuals rather than cultures or communities. Furthermore, separating 'honour'-based violence from other forms of domestic abuse, in fact, reproduces cultural stereotypes that alienate women from accessing already limited services. This is despite the distinction often being intended to help women by supplying culturally sympathetic services and increasing an understanding of the impact of culture on women's lives. Reference to how 'honour'-based violence, sexual abuse and rape cases are reported in the media are made within this thesis in order to demonstrate both the discrepancies between what is seen as a 'cultural' crime, and thus an indictment on the community as a whole, and what is reported as the actions of individuals, operating outside of the dictates of their culture. Attention is also drawn to the sensationalizing affect of media reports on 'honour' violence that increase community tensions, perpetuating popular, and often unexamined, assumptions around notions of culture and cultural difference. The issues raised here touch on many explored in previous chapters with relation to tensions between women's rights and multiculturalism. Particularly, notions of agency and post-feminism that, as suggested in previous chapters, cast Western women as acting of their own volition, outside of the constraints of culture, while those of minority groups are assumed to be wholly dominated by their cultures, which are in turn portrayed as inherently patriarchal.

Ironically, by insisting that 'honour'-based violence or sexual violence and abuse are cultural issues, commentators in the West are reinforcing the idea of women as the bearers and protectors of their community's honour, the very notion they often seek to criticise. The articles analyzed within this chapter do not simply address the issue of rape or violence against women in other cultures, they perpetuate stereotypes and attitudes that only further stigmatise certain communities and their members, making it harder for individuals to speak out against abuse for fear of negatively impacting on the whole community. These assertions about the importance of culture in relation to women's rights alienate the very women they seek to support. The tendency for media commentators to call for entire communities to act or speak out when a minority of their members have committed violent or sexual crimes, in effect assumes that the wider community, at least tacitly, endorses that kind of behaviour.

This assumption can present women wishing to speak out about violence or sexual abuse with an uncomfortable, and unnecessary, false choice between their rights and their community. It creates a cycle whereby communities are accused of covering-up or endorsing violence against women and yet the justification for doing so is presented as an attempt to avoid further negative attention or exacerbate existing tensions between minority and dominant communities.

The reliance on cultural stereotypes in distinguishing 'honour'-based violence from other forms of violence against women can also have the effect of excluding Muslim feminists from actively engaging with these debates. Uma Narayan comments:

> [m]any contemporary individuals from Third-World backgrounds are aware that Western critiques of their cultural practices, notably practices affecting women, were often generated in a context whereby they functioned as justification for colonization and oppression. They are aware too of still-prevalent stereotypic views about Third-World cultures as "backward" and "barbaric" that are held by many Westerners, independent of any substantive knowledge about these contexts.[3]

The desire to avoid contributing to Islamophobia and neo-colonialism must then conceivably be balanced with the desire to speak out against violations of women's rights. As Alison M. Jaggar has argued '[c]riticism of one's own cultural practices in the hearing of outsiders may be experienced as a form of betrayal, and the presence of outsiders who are perceived as more powerful may inhibit discussion among insiders.'[4] The insistence that 'honour'-based violence is a community problem, or is closely linked to cultural practices, thus makes it decidedly difficult for Muslim feminists to criticise this violence without finding their critique co-opted into larger discussions that are used to demonise Muslims and Islam.

The term 'honour violence' is used to describe violence that takes place because of supposed notions of honour or the need to uphold or reinforce these assumed standards. However, 'honour' violence is a contested term. Linking the word 'honour' with violence raises questions over whose 'honour' is supposedly being protected or restored by these acts of violence. Women are often presented as being the bearers of 'honour,' particularly in Muslim communities, with violence against women seen as offering a way of restoring

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[3] Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism*, (Oxon: Routledge, 1997), p.55.

[4] Alison M. Jaggar, 'Globalizing Feminist Ethics,' *Decentering the Center: Philosophy for a Multicultural, Postcolonial, and Feminist World*, ed. Uma Narayan and Sandra Harding, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), p.14.

families' 'honour' when women have committed acts of assumed transgression, such as refusing to marry a man that has been chosen for them, or behaving in a way that may be considered 'loose' or inappropriate in relation to strict gender codes prevalent within their communities. A Crown Prosecution Service report, 'Honour Based Violence and Forced Marriage' acknowledges, 'the use of the term honour in relation to violence perpetrated in this way is contentious.'[5] The report goes on to state that there 'is not and cannot be any honour or justification for the abuse of human rights of others.'[6] However, working with this term, the CPS define 'honour'-based violence as 'a crime or incident, which has or may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of the family and/or community'.[7] Key to this interpretation of 'honour' violence as distinct from domestic violence is the idea of the involvement of the wider family, and community endorsement of this abuse. Implicit in this is the assumption that domestic violence in the West does not involve wider family or community members and is not culturally endorsed, either explicitly or tacitly.

A recent case of 'honour'-based violence, widely reported on in the media, establishes this link between violence against women and wider family members that goes beyond the interpersonal violence more commonly associated with domestic abuse. The murder of Banaz Mahmod eventually resulted in the prosecution of the victim's father, uncle, and two cousins. Mahmod's horrific murder and the discovery of her body stuffed into a suitcase was attributed, in an article published in *The Telegraph*, to her father's desire to restore his family's 'honour' and standing within the community following her decision to leave her abusive husband and embark on a relationship with another man, Rahmat Sulemani. The recent conviction of Mahmod's cousin, Dana Amin, for helping to dispose of her body, led the judge to comment that the reason for her death was her family's subscription to 'this perverted code in that a grown woman cannot choose how to live her life.'[8] Furthermore, the judge suggested that, despite Amin's 'assertion of regret,'[9] Amin was in fact 'proud of the role' he played and was 'proud to be considered a real man'[10] by his uncle.

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[5] 'Honour Based Violence and Forced Marriage,' The Crown Prosecution Service, http://www.cps.gov.uk/legal/h_to_k/honour_based_violence_and_forced_marraige/ [accessed 5th November 2013].
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.
[8] 'Cousin 'still proud' of disposing of honour killing-victim's body, judge says,' in *The Telegraph*, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/law-and-order/10500550/Cousin-still-proud-of-disposing-of-honour-killing-victims-body-judge-says.html [accessed 12th December 2013].
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.

Reports of Amin's trial differs slightly in *The Daily Mail*, which claim that it was Amin who declared himself 'proud'[11] of his crime. Although the difference is seemingly slight, *The Daily Mail's* version of events clearly emphasises the notion that 'honour'-based violence is endorsed by families and, by extension, communities, stressing that not only were wider family members involved in the violence but they were also 'proud' of this involvement. The article documents the abuse Mahmod suffered, both at the hands of her family and her former husband. She is reported as having told the police of the multiple rapes she suffered in her first marriage, saying 'it was like I was his shoe that he could wear whenever he wanted,'[12] and stating 'I didn't know if this was normal in my culture, or here.'[13] Despite this evidence highlighting the police's involvement in Mahmod's case, and awareness of her predicament prior to her murder, no mention of the subsequent inquiry into these obvious police failings is made. However, the Independent Police Complaints Commission criticised the police for '"delays in investigations, poor supervision, a lack of understanding and insensitivity".'[14] Subsequently, a constable and an inspector faced disciplinary action and it was recommended that six detectives should receive a written warning. Despite the IPCC investigation, one police officer who is reported to have 'believed the pleas of Banaz Mahmod were melodramatic'[15] after being told 'that her father had tried to murder her in a so-called "honour killing"',[16] only received a written reprimand and has since been promoted.

Although it is suggested that Mahmod 'had to pay the "ultimate price"'[17] for apparently bringing shame onto her family, it is clear that she was also the victim of police officers' refusal to take violence against women seriously. That Mahmod was dismissed as 'melodramatic' despite having repeatedly reported the sustained abuse she suffered at the

[11] Sara Malm, 'Cousin of honour killing victim who helped dispose of her body in a suitcase is jailed for eight years...and say he's proud of what he's done,' in *The Daily Mail*, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2519461/Cousin-honour-killing-victim-helped-dispose-body-suitcase-jailed-years--says-hes-proud-hes-done.html [accessed 12th December 2013].

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Nick Britten, 'Police failed to heed pleas from honour victim,' in *The Telegraph*, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1583629/Police-failed-to-heed-pleas-from-honour-victim.html [accessed 12th December 2013].

[15] Richard Edwards, 'Police officer who dismissed cries for help of murder victim escapes punishment' in *The Telegraph,* http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/3538920/Police-officer-who-dismissed-cries-for-help-of-murder-victim-escapes-punishment.html [accessed 12th December 2013].

[16] Ibid.

[17] Nick Britten, 'Police failed to heed pleas from honour victim,' in *The Telegraph*, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1583629/Police-failed-to-heed-pleas-from-honour-victim.html [accessed 12th December 2013].

hands of her first husband and family, suggests that the answer to whether this was normal, in both her culture and here, is sadly, yes. Mahmod was both the victim of an overtly patriarchal code of 'honour' practiced in her 'culture', and a decidedly more subtle form of patriarchy that sees the police shy away from 'domestic' situations and dismiss violence against women. Furthermore, the notion that 'honour'-based violence is distinct from other forms of domestic violence, which, although perhaps not taken seriously by police, is nonetheless established in law, appears to have given rise to the idea that the police lacked understanding and were not suitably trained to deal with Mahmod's case.

Veena Meetoo and Heidi Safia Mirza's paper, '"There is nothing 'honourable' about honour killings": Gender, Violence and the Limits of Multiculturalism,' also stresses the view that 'honour' violence is a problematic term, as the title of their paper asserts. Furthermore, they link the increased interest in 'honour'-based violence with 9/11 and the resulting cultural tensions between East and West. Meetoo and Mirza claim that 'post 9/11 risks associated with gender related violence are on the public and political agenda.'[18] They argue that, although this increase in interest can be claimed to have opened up and ignited a new concern for debates around women's rights, the 'increased focus on "honour" based crimes need to be seen within the current climate of Islamophobia.'[19] Research has highlighted a marked increase in hate crimes against Muslims in the UK, following the events of 9/11 and the 7/7 bombings. Furthermore, this has been shown disproportionately to affect Muslim women. As already mentioned in chapter 3 of this thesis in relation to veiling, a recent report for the University of Birmingham stresses that:

> prompted by the 'visual identifiers' that readily and easily demarcate Muslim women as different and 'other', these identifiers have been shown to provide a stimulant for those seeking an outlet for the venting of anger or some other denigratory sentiment about Muslims [...].[20]

Although a large amount of the hate crimes reported were aimed at Muslim women specifically, the report emphasises the impact that these crimes had on victims' families and the wider community, suggesting a climate of fear and misunderstanding.

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[18] Veena Meetoo and Heidi Safia Mirza, '"There is nothing 'honourable' about honour killings": Gender, violence and the limits of multiculturalism,' in *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol.30, no.3, (May-June 2007), pp.187-200, p.193.

[19] Ibid., p.194.

[20] Dr Chris Allen, Dr Arshad Isakjee, and Özlem Ögtem Young, '"Maybe we are hated" The experience and impact of anti-Muslim hate on British Muslim women,' University of Birmingham, http://tellmamauk.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/maybewearehated.pdf [accessed 4th December 2013], p.27.

The women interviewed also spoke of how their experiences of hate crime had led them to question their identity. The '"Maybe we are hated" The Experience and Impact of Anti-Muslim Hate on British Muslim Women' report argues that 'their experience undeniably led to feelings of exclusion and separation, of not belonging to Britain or of being a part of British society.'[21] One victim interviewed is quoted as saying 'am I a British Muslim or a Bangladeshi Muslim?'[22] The idea that these incidents of hate crimes, ranging from taunts and verbal abuse to physical violence, led the women to question whether they belonged to contemporary British society and how they could balance both their desire to be British citizens and Muslim women, suggests a form of 'double-consciousness.' Theorized by W. E. B. Du Bois in relation to the racial discrimination experienced by black men and women in America in the twentieth century, Du Bois' understanding of double-consciousness is still applicable today.

Du Bois describes a similar split in terms of identity and belonging in 1903 as that expressed by the Muslim women interviewed in 2013. He writes, '[o]ne ever feels his two-ness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings [...].'[23] Another victim interviewed in the recent study for Birmingham University pointed to the misrepresentations of Muslims in the media that often focuses on those who 'have very little resonance with wider, far more diverse communities,'[24] as a possible source for this misunderstanding or climate of Islamophobia. This is perhaps where the link with the theory of double-consciousness and modern British Muslim women's experiences is particularly striking. What Du Bois describes as 'this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity'[25] clearly still has a strong resonance with Muslim women's experiences of seeing themselves and their communities through the eyes of the Western media, where they are both judged and pitied. The impact of this 'Western' gaze, intersecting with the 'male gaze,' places Muslim women in a position that enforces the development of a hyper-

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[21] Ibid., p.1.

[22] Ibid., p.1.

[23] W. E. B. Du Bois, 'The Souls of Black Folk,' in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, 6th Edition, ed. Nina Baym, (London: W.W. Norton & Company Ltd., 2003), p.879.

[24] Dr Chris Allen, Dr Arshad Isakjee, and Özlem Ögtem Young, '"Maybe we are hated" The experience and impact of anti-Muslim hate on British Muslim women,' University of Birmingham, http://tellmamauk.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/maybewearehated.pdf [accessed 4th December 2013], pp.25 -26.

[25] W. E. B. Du Bois, 'The Souls of Black Folk,' in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, 6th Edition, ed. Nina Baym, (London: W.W. Norton & Company Ltd., 2003), p.879.

awareness of their embodied selves. Somewhat ironically, although the practice of veiling has been described as offering Muslim women a way of opting out of a scopic economy predicated on the male gaze,[26] it can be seen to have the opposite effect with regard to the 'Western' gaze, making Muslim women hyper-visible. This hyper-visibility not only leads to Muslim women being subjected to disproportionate incidents of Islamophobia, as the Birmingham University report suggests, but it also increases an awareness of how the identity of 'the Muslim woman' is visually constructed, both physically, by Muslim women, and in the minds of others. Furthermore, the visual impact of the hyper-visible Muslim woman is often exploited in the media to stress cultural difference. The notion that the visual identity of Muslim women is incompatible with a nebulous and ill-defined sense of 'Britishness' emphasizes this sense of double consciousness where Muslim women are persistently reminded, by others and themselves, that they occupy a space outside of what is presented as established 'Western' culture.

Evidence of Islamophobia in relation to the reporting of 'honour' violence can be found in the media reliance on cultural stereotypes, such as the submissive Muslim woman or the domineering and backward Muslim man, as already mentioned, that are often invoked in order to illustrate, and more problematically explain, instances of such abuse. Despite the hyper-visibility of Muslim women in Western media, their voices are often conspicuously absent from discussions and debates, with cultural stereotypes taking the place of women's voices. Reference to stereotypes and widely accepted notions of culture provide a comforting familiarity that means, as Narayan asserts, 'members of the Western audience are often left "feeling solidly informed", with nothing "in the picture" that suggests any need to re-examine the picture.'[27] However, although this reliance on cultural stereotypes may prove comforting to a Western audience, Meetoo and Mirza stress that these simplified portrayals of cultures actually serve to further undermine the victims of 'honour' violence.

> They contribute to putting women at risk through sensationalising these crimes through their style and content of reporting which results in a voyeuristic spectacle (cries of 'how dreadful'!) followed by multicultural paralysis and inaction ('nothing to do with us! It is part of their culture!).[28]

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[26] See Chapter 3 for further discussion of veiling in relation to the male gaze.

[27] Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism*, (Oxon: Routledge, 1997), p.104.

[28] Veena Meetoo and Heidi Safia Mirza, '"There is nothing 'honourable' about honour killings": Gender, violence and the limits of multiculturalism,' in *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol.30, no.3, (May-June 2007), pp.187-200, p.195.

There is also the suggestion that the media is over-representing the frequency and prevalence of 'honour'-based violence to sensationalise notions of a clash of cultures or discredit multiculturalism.[29]

In an analysis of the representation and reporting of 'honour'-based violence in the British media, Aisha Gill claims the 'idea that honour crimes had become an "epidemic" was pervasive in media accounts.'[30] She argues that reports were characterised by phrases 'like "ghastly way of life", "culture" and "western ways" [...] to describe [...] the experiences of young women of a Muslim background in general.'[31] Similar to the debates around veiling and FGC, discussions of 'honour'-based violence present the dual purpose of both strengthening and maintaining a Western sense of liberal superiority by distancing unacceptable behaviour as distinctly 'Other' or separate from the Western tradition of liberal democracy and values of enlightenment. The perceived need to discuss 'honour' based violence as distinct from other forms of domestic violence is problematic, not only because this discussion can all too easily be co-opted into justifying the wider discourse of Islamophobia, as Meetoo and Mirza suggest, but also because it allows the West to separate itself from acts of violence against women, as if this is an issue that has now been satisfactorily addressed.

The AHA foundation, created by Ayaan Hirsi Ali and her supporters to 'help protect and defend the rights of women in the West from oppression justified by religion and culture',[32] goes to some lengths to establish the difference between 'honour'-based violence and domestic violence. The website provides a link to a 'Training Curriculum on Honour Violence and Forced Marriage for Law Enforcement and Child Protective Professionals.'[33] As with the CPS, the AHA foundation's definition of 'honour'-based violence as distinct from domestic violence stresses the involvement of family relations and the wider community in perpetrating and endorsing these crimes. Their website suggests that:

> [a]lthough honor violence involves violence by one family member against another, it
> has characteristics that make it unique and warrant a different approach by social

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[29] Attempts to discredit multiculturalism due to the idea that it fails to address minority cultures' derogatory attitudes to women have been discussed at greater length in chapter 1.

[30] Aisha Gill, 'Patriarchal Violence in the Name of 'Honour,'' in *International Journal of Criminal Justice Sciences*, vol.1, issue 1, (January 2006), pp.1-12, p.3.

[31] Ibid., p.3.

[32] AHA Foundation, http://theahafoundation.org/about/ [accessed 11th November 2013].

[33] AHA Foundation, http://theahafoundation.org/issues/honor-violence/ [accessed 11th November 2013].

service providers and law enforcement. For example, a perpetrator of honor violence believes that his conduct is justified because of the victim's actions. Because this perception is supported by deeply ingrained cultural mores, he is generally not alone in this belief and often has the support of his family and community, either in planning and committing the violence or fleeing from law enforcement afterwards.[34]

However, embedded in this description are various assumptions about Western attitudes to violence against women that seem to escape interrogation.

Hirsi Ali also tackles the subject of 'honour'-based violence in her part polemic, part autobiography, *Nomad: A Personal Journey Through the Clash of Civilizations,* previously cited. She questions what she sees as American police and reporters bending 'over backward to avoid the heinous words *honor killing*, as if a change in label could transform these horrific killings into ordinary domestic crimes.'[35] Hirsi Ali argues that avoidance of the term 'honor killing' is motivated by cultural relativism. Referring to a discussion between Germaine Greer and Pamela Bone, also previously cited in this thesis, Hirsi Ali claims that it is 'unconscionable for her [Greer] to refrain from speaking out against honor killing because it would be "tricky" to challenge the culture that condones it.'[36] Hirsi Ali's belief in the importance of distinguishing 'honour'-based violence from domestic violence is based on the assumption that greater awareness of the cultural implications of 'honour'-based violence will help prevent further killings. She argues, 'if you don't talk about it, other people won't be able to spot the signs. Insight into the pattern that eventually leads to murder is an aid to educators, social workers, law enforcement officials, and neighbors and friends of potential victims.'[37] Although in many ways this is, of course, true, a greater awareness of the signs of abuse, both in the general public and public services, may lead to earlier interventions on behalf of victims. However, this could also be said of all domestic violence and abuse. Furthermore, her description of domestic violence that takes place outside of a 'cultural' context as 'ordinary'[38] has the effect of belittling domestic violence, while simultaneously sensationalizing 'honour'-based abuse.

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[34] Ibid.

[35] Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Nomad: A Personal Journey Through the Clash of Civilizations,* (London: Simon & Schuuster UK Ltd, 2010), p.223.

[36] Ibid., p.225.

[37] Ibid., p.221.

[38] Ibid., p.223.

As already noted, the ability to establish a distinction between 'honour'-based violence and other forms of domestic violence or violence against women relies heavily on the premise that acts, when perpetrated by Western men, are only ever the actions of individuals operating outside of the influence of Western culture. Furthermore, there is the assumption that Western culture, and thus community and family members, always wholly condemn these acts. However, with regard to the attitudes displayed by the family members of those who endure domestic abuse, Meetoo and Mirza refute this, suggesting 'many survivors of domestic violence in a Western context who have attempted to seek help from their own mothers do not always receive support, being told to put up with it because "he's your husband."'[39] Research has also been conducted into the perceived attitudes of social workers employed to support victims of domestic violence that has found women may be subject to 'being blamed'[40] when reporting abuse or seeking help from authorities. These attitudes can be seen to place women suffering domestic abuse in a similar position to victims of 'honour'-based violence, as defined by the AHA foundation and CPS, despite the attempts to distance one group from the other.

In interviews with victims of domestic violence who were in contact with social workers, June Keeling and Katherine van Wormer found that women often experience a process of 're-victimisation'[41] from the very people that are supposed to be helping them. Keeling and van Wormer write:

> professionals, including social workers, sometimes blame the victims of domestic violence for their predicament, reinforcing other messages that society sends to these women. These messages serve to subjugate women further who experience domestic violence.[42]

Keeling and van Wormer's account of the experiences of victims of domestic violence is markedly similar to that put forward by the AHA foundation as being specific to 'honour'-based violence. The AHA foundation claims that 'honour'-based violence is often mitigated by the idea that the victim is 'believed to have caused the violence through her own

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[39] Veena Meetoo and Heidi Safia Mirza, '"There is nothing 'honourable' about honour killings": Gender, violence and the limits of multiculturalism,' in *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol.30, no.3, (May-June 2007), pp.187-200, p.190.

[40] Julie Keeling and Katherine van Wormer, 'Social Worker Interventions in Situations of Domestic Violence: What We Can Learn from Survivors' Personal Narratives?', in *British Journal of Social Work*, vol.42, issue 7, (October 2012), pp.1354-1370, p.1364.

[41] Ibid., p.1359.

[42] Ibid., p.1364.

behaviour.'[43] Despite the AHA foundations' suggestion that this is specific to 'honour'-based violence, this attitude is also evident in instances of domestic abuse with one social worker interviewed by Keeling and van Wormer claiming, 'often what I witnessed when working with women in the CPS system was that women were being held even more accountable for the violence perpetrated against them than the men involved in the system [...].'[44] Thus, although distinguishing 'honour'-based violence from other forms of domestic abuse is intended to help its victims by raising awareness of the specificity of this type of violence, it can have the opposite effect.

If as Meetoo and Mirza argue, 'honour' violence 'has become 'ethnicised' within the British multicultural context',[45] this may lead to women being caught between competing discourses of Islamaphobia, that present 'honour'-based violence as intrinsic to Islam and a Muslim way of life. Thus, interpretations of multiculturalism, through the promotion of diversity over difference, assume a cultural relativist approach that suggests an uncritical tolerance for what can be described as 'cultural' practices. According to Meetoo and Mirza:

> not only do young women 'slip through the cracks' of the shifting liberal democratic discourse on multiculturalism, but since September 11 young ethnicised women have become highly visible. However they are now problematically contained and constructed in the public consciousness within a discourse of fear and risk posed by the presence of the Muslim alien 'other'.[46]

The ethnicizing of violence against women has also lead to it being politicized, playing on fears of the idea of the enemy within, prevalent in the mainstream media since 9/11 and 7/7.

As already noted in the introduction to this thesis, Laura J. Shepherd argues that, post 9/11, '[t]he enemy abroad' was 'recognizable as an Irrational Barbarian, constructed with reference to gender'[47] and linked to barbaric attitudes towards women. This in turn constructed women as victims in need of saving, helping to garner support for an aggressive

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[43] AHA Foundation, http://theahafoundation.org/issues/honor-violence/ [accessed 11th November 2013].

[44] Julie Keeling and Katherine van Wormer, 'Social Worker Interventions in Situations of Domestic Violence: What We Can Learn from Survivors' Personal Narratives?', in *British Journal of Social Work*, vol.42, issue 7, (October 2012), pp.1354-1370, p.1364.

[45] Veena Meetoo and Heidi Safia Mirza, '"There is nothing 'honourable' about honour killings": Gender, violence and the limits of multiculturalism,' in *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol.30, no.3, (May-June 2007), pp.187-200, p.188.

[46] Ibid., p.188.

[47] Laura J. Shepherd, 'Veiled References: Constructions of Gender in the Bush Administration Discourse on the Attacks on Afghanistan Post - 9/11,' in *International Journal of Feminist Politics*, vol.8, no.1, (March 2006), pp. 19-41, p.25.

foreign policy that enabled attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq. However, insisting on the cultural specificity of 'honour'-based violence can also be linked to the notion of an enemy within, which not only serves to increase distrust and suspicion based on cultural differences that can then be exploited to attack multiculturalism or question immigration policy; it also upholds the image of the West as fair and benevolent.

By ethnicizing 'honour'-based violence the doors are left open for perpetrators of these types of crimes to invoke a cultural defence. Somewhat ironically, the notion of cultural defence and the idea that perpetrators may be granted reduced sentences due to presenting cultural influence as a mitigating circumstance, is also used to argue against multiculturalism. In a discussion of the implications of a cultural defence, Anne Phillips proposes 'the issue for the coming years will not be the mitigating use of culture (leading to reduced sentences) but its explanatory role.'[48] I would argue that evidence of culture as offering an explanation, if not a defence, can already be found in the media reports on 'honour'-based violence cited throughout this chapter. Phillips suggests that although courts may dismiss the idea of a cultural defence justifying a lesser sentence, by accepting 'culture' as an explanation for violence, stereotypes that 'represent minority and non-Western cultures as condoning extreme levels of violence against women'[49] will be perpetuated. These stereotypes, with regard to 'honour' violence, cast Muslim men as inherently violent, and Muslim women as weak and submissive. They also assume the supposed cultural standards to be fixed and hegemonic. Although Phillips acknowledges that different cultural norms may 'often involve different attitudes towards sex, marriage, family, or honour',[50] she stresses that 'the move from disapproval to violence is *not* dictated by culture, and explaining why some people – but not others – make this move typically involves a more particularised account of the individuals concerned.'[51] The reliance on cultural stereotypes and generalizations is evident in both the AHA Foundation's, and CPS's definitions of 'honour'-based violence. Although some level of universalizing or stereotyping can be expected when attempting to create a system that either speaks for, or seeks to protect, large groups of people, with regard to 'honour'-based violence, the dependence on generalizations, both to define it and distinguish it from domestic violence, serves to further discriminate against the people the definition is intended to protect.

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[48] Anne Phillips, *Multiculturalism without Culture*, (Oxfordshire: Princeton University Press, 2007), p.91.
[49] Ibid., p.91.
[50] Ibid., p.93.
[51] Ibid., p.93.

Cultural stereotyping can also be used to gauge the extent to which the victim can claim 'victimhood,' as well as provide an explanation for the actions of the perpetrator. For example, women who do not fit the stereotype of the typical, submissive Muslim, may find themselves judged more harshly if they themselves are accused of committing violent or transgressive acts. Phillips refers to the case of Zoora Shah, 'who was convicted in 1992 of the murder of Mohammed Azam and sentenced to serve twenty years.'[52] The feminist activist group, Southall Black Sisters, campaigned against this verdict and established, through months of interviews with Shah, that she had been 'abandoned by an abusive husband, befriended by Azam, a heroin dealer, who had beaten and raped her and forced her into prostitution, [...].'[53] They claim the 'final straw came when she feared that Azam had sexual designs on her daughters.'[54] However, despite denying having murdered Azam, Shah refused to give evidence at her trial, choosing 'to remain silent about her abuse in the hope of saving the honour of her daughters.'[55]

The Southall Black Sisters wrote that the 'case of Zoora Shah represented our toughest challenge in respect of battered women who kill.'[56] Although granted an appeal due to the fact that 'extensive medical evidence supporting her claim that she was suffering from diminished responsibility at the time of the fatal act had been ignored',[57] and the information regarding the extent of the abuse she suffered at the hands of Azam had been omitted, the appeal was unsuccessful. The Southall Black Sisters suggested: '[d]espite strong medical and other evidence, she lost the appeal mainly because the judges deemed her story of surviving by her wits in an all-male, criminal world in absolute poverty to be 'incapable of belief.''[58] However, Phillips notes:

> [t]hey argued that fresh evidence was inadmissible because Shah had provided no reasonable explanation as to why she had not told this story before, or why she had confided in no one through what she now claimed to be years of physical and sexual abuse.[59]

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[52] Ibid., pp.87-88.

[53] Ibid., p.88

[54] Southall Black Sisters, 'Zoora Shah,' http://www.southallblacksisters.org.uk/campaigns/zoora-shah/ [accessed 19th November 2013].

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Anne Phillips, *Multiculturalism without Culture*, (Oxfordshire: Princeton University Press,2007), p.88.

Despite cultural understandings of honour and duty being used as an explanation for violence against women, these same understandings of honour and culture were not considered a valid explanation for Shah's silence, presumably because, as Phillips suggests, Shah had failed to conform 'to the images of the submissive South Asian woman'.[60] In killing Azam, Shah had become 'active' and thus transgressed the stereotype assigned to her.

Although in this case there was clearly a lack of understanding of issues of race and gender – the Southall Black Sisters described the Court of Appeal as showing both 'ignorance and arrogance'[61] with regard to these matters – it is debateable whether a more thorough understanding of 'honour'-based violence, as defined by the CPS or AHA Foundation, would have actually helped Shah. Relying as it does on fairly crude cultural stereotypes, the definition of 'honour'-based violence only serves to silence and further marginalize women such as Shah, who both conform to, and transgress, these strict cultural stereotypes. Although, of course, very few people fit neatly within stereotypes, which are, almost by definition, simplified and partial perspectives. As Phillips notes: 'one is left feeling that culture will only be recognized as relevant when women conform to a particular stereotype [...] There is little room here for the complexity of most individuals' lives.'[62] Nevertheless, cultural stereotypes persist, particularly in the media, and can be seen as performing the dual function of offering some form of explanation for extreme acts of violence, as well as serving almost as a safety valve that allows these acts to be discussed from a comfortable distance. The 'othering' of extreme violence is not just restricted to cultural differences either, but can also be seen when people convicted of particularly brutal acts are referred to as 'animals' or 'sub-human.' Of course, referring to people of other cultures as animals, regardless of whether they were criminals or not, has particularly racist undertones and has historically been used to dehumanize them and thus justify their subjugation. However, with regard to violence, the suggestion that those who commit violent acts are animals allows for the pretension of a distinction between 'us' and 'them,' again creating a comfortable distance.

The Rochdale child sex abuse scandal in 2012, where nine Muslim men, eight of whom were British Pakistani, were convicted of sexually abusing young white women, saw widespread coverage of the 'cultural' influences that are assumed to have motivated the

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[60] Ibid., p.88.
[61] Southall Black Sisters, 'Zoora Shah,' http://www.southallblacksisters.org.uk/campaigns/zoora-shah/ [accessed 19th November 2013].
[62] Anne Phillips, *Gender and Culture*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), p.98.

perpetrators. These motivations ranged from an apparently permissive attitude to paedophilia and sexual abuse within the Muslim community, to assumptions that Muslim men view white women as 'easy' or fair targets. Commenting on the case, former Home Secretary Jack Straw claimed '[t]here is an issue of ethnicity here which can't be ignored.'[63] Speaking on BBC Radio Four, he went on to say that this has to be 'faced and addressed within the Asian community',[64] again reinforcing the notion that it wasn't simply nine men on trial, but an entire community. An inquiry into the case found that 'social services and police had "missed opportunities" to help victims of the Rochdale sex abuse gang [...].'[65] Many of the failings associated with the eventual prosecution of the nine men focused on problems caused by multiculturalism. Worries about cultural sensitivities were blamed for limiting police action in the case, due to fears of sparking accusations of racism or Islamophobia.

Writing in the *Daily Mail*, Melanie Phillips claimed, 'what paralysed these authorities was that, in politically correct Britain, no criticism is allowed to be made of religious or ethnic identities.'[66] She went on to state that this is not a race issue '[t]his is about religion and culture - an unwesternised Islamic culture which holds that non-Muslims are trash and women are worthless.'[67] However, she somewhat contradictorily continued, '[a]nd so white girls are worthless trash. Which is itself of course a race issue.'[68] Melanie Phillips' lack of clarity over the distinction between 'race' and culture goes some way to highlighting the difficulty of mobilising these two issues in public debate, where slippage between the two is frequent. It also implies that although judgements and generalizations on 'race' are legitimately unacceptable, generalizations based on culture are not. This delegitimization of 'race' as a category that can form the basis for negative generalizations is, in part, due to the problematizing of 'race' as a concept in academia, as signified by the presence of scare quotes around the term. This should not suggest that 'race' is no longer relevant, not least because of the continued prevalence of racism; however, as is evident in Melanie Phillips'

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[63] John Bingham, 'Muslim community in 'denial' about grooming rings, says Jack Straw,' in *The Telegraph*, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/9571388/Muslim-community-in-denial-about-grooming-rings-says-Jack-Straw.html [accessed 20th November 2013].

[64] Ibid.

[65] 'Rochdale child sex ring: did political correctness delay justice?' in *The Week*, http://theweek.co.uk/crime/49280/rochdale-child-sex-ring-did-political-correctness-delay-justice [accessed 20th November 2013].

[66] Melanie Phillips, 'The Rochdale sex ring shows the horrific consequences of Britain's 'Islamophobia' witch-hunt,' in *The Mail Online*, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2141930/The-Rochdale-sex-ring-shows-horrific-consequences-Britains-Islamophobia-witch-hunt.html#ixzz2lCoZNEuQ [accessed 20th November 2013].

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid.

article, culture has arguably become the new term within which to hide multiple racist assumptions. Furthermore, Melanie Phillips' analysis also suggests the presence of 'reverse racism,' a contentious concept used to promote the idea of multiculturalism or political correctness gone-mad, where white men, or in the Rochdale case, white women, are now the group most discriminated against.

This type of rhetoric has proved particularly popular in recent political debates on issues such as immigration, with parties such as the British National Party professing to offer a common sense approach, rather than an overtly racist one. In an article for *The Spectator* titled 'The Rise of Racism may be Horribly Close,' Fraser Nelson quotes the BNP's Northamptonshire organiser, Reg Norgan, as arguing on the issue of immigration, ''It's not racist to defend your people, your culture and identity when it is [under] attack,' [...].'[69] Rather than frame the debate around race, Norgan suggests that the real issue is defending 'British culture,' although notably he fails to define what this actually is. However, as Nelson asserts, '[t]hat the BNP is racist is, of course, not a matter of opinion. It has a whites-only membership policy, for example, and while it no longer supports compulsory repatriation, there are no prizes for guessing its definition of 'indigenous population'.'[70] This, he suggests 'is the BNP paradox. Britain has never been less racist. Yet support for the main racist party has never been higher.'[71] By shifting the parameters of the debate from 'race' to culture arguments that would have previously been dismissed as racist are now afforded some credibility, despite the fact that many of the cultural stereotypes that they reproduce are as damaging and derogatory as those associated with overt racism. Rhetoric such as that used by Norgan, suggests a benign and unquestionable nationalism that seeks to defend 'British culture' from an attack brought about by multiculturalism and perceptions of an overly 'soft' immigration policy. This defence is based on what is often presented as a 'common sense' approach to issues such as immigration, where arguments are based on a lack of space and services, or an insurmountable clash of cultures, rather than on overt racism. I would also argue feminist rhetoric and concerns are also being co-opted as part of this 'common sense' approach, where, despite continuing discrimination and inequality based on gender, support

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[69] Fraser Nelson, 'The Rise of Racism may be Horribly Close,' in *The Spectator*, http://www.spectator.co.uk/features/3648608/the-rise-of-british-racism-may-be-horribly-close/ [accessed 20th November 2013].
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.

for women's rights is used to further the notion of conflicting or irreconcilable cultural differences.

Melanie Phillips, too, seems to be extolling the importance of taking a 'common sense' approach to issues of race and cultural difference, suggesting that the Rochdale case is 'inescapably [...] a cultural Muslim issue' and that 'all who shriek "racist" or "islamophobe" are doing so 'in order to stifle proper debate [...].'[72] Nonetheless, however pragmatic Phillips may suggest it is to argue that, as a Muslim issue, the whole Muslim community must 'acknowledge communal responsibility,'[73] her reasoning reflects her bias and reliance on cultural stereotypes. Although she acknowledges that 'in general the overwhelming majority of sex crimes against girls are committed by white men,'[74] this is not suggested by Phillips to represent white, Western attitudes to women, nor does she call for all white men to publically denounce such behaviour. Furthermore, Phillips dismisses the very real climate of Islamophobia, post-9/11 and the London 7/7 bombings, that increase cultural sensitivities, making minority Muslim communities feel constantly under suspicion or attack and thus less likely to denounce members of their own community for fear of adding fuel to an already volatile situation. As Mohammed Shafiq, chief executive of the Ramadhan Foundation commented, 'there are some people in my community, the Pakistani community, the elders, who think that the best thing to do is just ignore it and assume it is all a BNP and EDL conspiracy.'[75] More recently, as noted in the introduction to this thesis, following the murder of Fusilier Lee Rigby in 2013 by two Muslim extremists, The Muslim Council in Britain reported an 'unprecedented escalation in violence'[76] towards the Muslim community, with Mosques being the targets of petrol bomb attacks. Thus far from seeking to stifle debate, highlighting the presence and influence of Islamophobia is actually calling for the acknowledgement of many Muslim's lived reality so that debates can accurately reflect all involved.

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[72] Melanie Phillips, 'The Rochdale sex ring shows the horrific consequences of Britain's 'Islamophobia' witch-hunt,' in *The Mail Online*, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2141930/The-Rochdale-sex-ring-shows-horrific-consequences-Britains-Islamophobia-witch-hunt.html#ixzz2lCoZNEuQ [accessed 20th November 2013].
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.
[75] John Bingham, 'Muslim community in 'denial' about grooming rings, says Jack Straw,' in *The Telegraph*, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/9571388/Muslim-community-in-denial-about-grooming-rings-says-Jack-Straw.html [accessed 20th November 2013].
[76] 'Muslim call for government action over mosque attacks,' in *BBC News UK*, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-23412247 [accessed 20th November 2013].

However, Melanie Phillips' is not a lone voice in suggesting that the Rochdale case should be dealt with as a 'cultural' issue. David Aaronovitch echoes Phillips' views in his piece for *The Times*, 'Let's be honest. There's a clear link with Islam.' Aaronovitch's title again suggests a common sense approach, where people should just 'be honest'[77] and accept the assertion that sexual grooming of young girls is a Muslim issue that should be addressed by the Muslim community. Aaronovitch also quotes Shafiq as claiming that 'a minority of Pakistani men had got it into their heads that white girls were fair game' and that 'the community clearly had a problem.'[78] However, he fails to explain how the actions of what Shafiq describes as, 'a minority', translate to the community as a whole. Implicit in the idea that the entire Muslim community should be held accountable for the actions of a minority of its members, is the assumption that the Muslim community is separate from the wider community as a whole. As with the separate category of 'honour'-based violence, that Aaronovitch argues is the 'cousin'[79] of sexual grooming, suggesting that these are specifically Muslim issues masks the attitudes towards women prevalent in Western culture that allowed this abuse to take place. Media coverage of 'honour'-based violence, and the sensationalizing of sexual grooming as something that can be attributed to a clash of the cultures, effectively makes it somebody else's problem, shifting the responsibility for dealing with this issue from the police and social services, to a minority community.

Aaronovitch also quotes Nazir Afzal, Chief Crown Prosecutor for northwest England, as blaming '"cultural baggage" and saying the 'availability of vulnerable young white girls is what has drawn the men to them.'"[80] However, Aaronovitch does not question what has caused this availability. Central to the Rochdale case is the failure of the police and social services to act on allegations made by the young women being abused. Although journalists such as Aaronovitch and Melanie Phillips suggest that this can be attributed to a heightened awareness of cultural sensitivity due to the requirements of a so-called 'politically correct' multiculturalism, there are factors outside of multiculturalism that may have influenced this inaction. John Bingham writes that 'the Rochdale Borough Safeguarding Children's Board, found that social workers repeatedly failed to take action in response to complaints from under-age girls', suggesting that '[r]ather than being treated as victims, they were viewed as

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[77] David Aaronovitch, 'Let's be honest. There's a clear link with Islam,' in *The Times*, (May 10th 2012) p.17.
[78] Ibid.,p.17.
[79] Ibid., p.17.
[80] Ibid., p.17.

"problematic" and "wilfull" and thought to be "making their own choices".'[81] This is despite many of the girls involved being under the legal age of consent. The idea that these young girls, many of whom were already involved with social services and thus visible to the authorities, could be dismissed as being 'problematic' or 'wilful' suggests a misogyny that runs deeper and wider than the Muslim community.

Although Phillips asserts that the Rochdale case is a 'race' issue due to the victims being white, rather than the perpetrators being of Pakistani origin, thus invoking the dubious concept of 'reverse racism', absent from her critique is the arguably much more relevant issue of class. The white girls that were apparently assumed to be 'trash' and 'worthless' were predominantly from disadvantaged backgrounds or in the care of the state. That their requests for help were ignored by both the police and social services, who in some instances were expressly charged with ensuring the care of these young girls, suggests a high level of contempt or lack of concern for the welfare of the victims who were simply viewed as 'problematic' or unworthy of help. If, as Phillips argues, these young girls were viewed as 'worthless' and 'trash' by the perpetrators of their abuse, then their experiences of being dismissed as 'problematic' or 'wilfull' can only have confirmed this impression, for both the victims and those seeking someone to abuse. Phillips' assertion that it is Muslim men who view Western women as 'worthless' implies that in the apparently post-feminist West, this position is not the norm, however, the experience of the victims in the Rochdale case would seem to suggest otherwise. Returning to the previous chapter, the victims in the Rochdale case can be seen to have fallen through the cracks left by a feminism that focuses on individual and 'career-orientated go-getters' such as Naomi Wolf and Louise Mensch, an attempt to move away from seeing women as victims. Similarly to Meetoo and Mirza's assertion that the ethicising of 'honour' violence has positioned Muslim women between changing stances on multiculturalism and an increased fear of the 'alien' and 'other' following 9/11, the young women in the Rochdale case are caught up in the discourse of post-feminism that insists that what is important is that they were making choices, rather than questioning the contexts in which these choices were made.

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[81] John Bingham, 'Muslim community in 'denial' about grooming rings, says Jack Straw,' in *The Telegraph*, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/9571388/Muslim-community-in-denial-about-grooming-rings-says-Jack-Straw.html [accessed 20th November 2013].

Although multiculturalism has been blamed for police failings, in viewing these young girls as 'making their own choices', social services and the police can be seen as utilising the rhetoric of post-feminism, as much as multiculturalism, in order to justify their inaction. The desire to move away from 'victim' feminism provides the perfect framework for justifying assumptions that all choices young women make are somehow liberated, and thus conceals the various factors that influence or limit women's decisions. As with the beauty and cosmetic surgery industries, the rhetoric of post-feminism is being used against women by enforcing the idea that issues to do with structural inequality have been resolved. In the Rochdale case, social status and age clearly impacted on, not just the options available to the young girls, but also their ability to be heard, or more importantly, believed, when they attempted to speak out about their abuse. Furthermore, implicit in the assumption that these young girls were 'making their own choices' is the idea that they can be held accountable, or blamed for the abuse they suffered.

This attitude of victim blaming is also prevalent in Western media, especially in the reporting of rapes or sexual assaults. Recent high-profile rape cases, such as that in Steubenville, Ohio, have exposed deeply misogynistic attitudes towards women and victims of sexual abuse, both in the details of the case and its reporting. The victim in the Steubenville rape case was, at times, afforded less compassion by media commentators than the perpetrators. Even her status as a 'victim' was questioned, with one of the perpetrators, Ma'lik Richmond's lawyer, Walter Madison, filing a 'motion to have the girl be referred to as "the accuser" instead of "the victim."'[82] Ariel Levy's extended report for *The New Yorker*, 'Was Justice Served in Steubenville?' suggests that Madison's defence strategy seemed to rest on 'trying to establish that the victim was a dissolute, habitual drinker – "a party girl" [...] – and also that she was sober enough to give consent',[83] implying that if she was a victim at all it was of her own 'loose' behaviour. However, Levy recounts a conversation with Madison where he said 'he considered himself "very much a feminist," [...].'[84] Despite his apparently feminist stance, Madison argues that following the publishing of photos and video footage of the night she was raped on social media sites such as *YouTube* and *Twitter*, the

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[82] Ariel Levy, 'Was Justice Served in Steubenville?', in *The New Yorker*, http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2013/08/05/130805fa_fact_levy?printable=true&currentPage=all [accessed 13th November 2013], pp.1-20, p.14.
[83] Ibid., p.16.
[84] Ibid., p.16.

victim was faced with 'two choices at this point: Dad, I'm a slut.' Or, 'I'm raped.''[85] Although from his defence strategy, Madison's claim to being a 'feminist' seems to be on shaky ground, echoes of his attitude about personal responsibility and the levels of culpability that victims in cases of rape, sexual assault and domestic violence can or should assume are also present in more established, historical feminist debates.

In her collection of essays, *Sex, Art, and American Culture*, published in 1992, Camille Paglia asserts the need for 'a new kind of feminism, one that stresses personal responsibility and is open to art and sex in all their dark, unconsoling mysteries.'[86] This attitude can be seen as indicative of much of third-wave feminism that stressed the need to move from 'victim' feminism towards emphasizing women's agency.[87] Presumably this is also the kind of feminism Madison had in mind when claiming he was 'very much a "feminist," [...].'[88] As suggested in the previous chapter, the move away from 'victim' feminism sought to reposition women as autonomous individuals, capable of exercising their agency outside of the restrictions that may be placed on them due to their gender, race, class or sexuality. This has arguably led to the seemingly natural progression from third-wave feminism to the rhetoric of post-feminism, which is particularly popular in the Western media. As Rosalind Gill and Ngaire Donaghue have stressed, 'contemporary media culture in the West is marked by a distinctly postfeminist sensibility [...].'[89] Paglia's collection of essays offer an example of the Western media embracing post-feminist rhetoric, particularly as parts of the collection were originally printed in mainstream media publications not previously renowned for their interest in feminist issues or writing. For example, her views on date rape, a concept she claims to 'loathe' as evidence of women's inability to accept or appreciate 'male lust',[90] were originally aired in an interview with Warren Kalbacker and published in the October 1991 edition of *Playboy*.

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[85] Ibid., p.16

[86] Camille Paglia, *Sex, Art, and American Culture*, (London: Penguin Books, 1993), p.vii.

[87] Although the move away from 'victim' feminism and post-feminism have previously been mentioned throughout this thesis, these issues are addressed in greater depth in the following chapter.

[88] Ariel Levy, 'Was Justice Served in Steubenville?', in *The New Yorker*, http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2013/08/05/130805fa_fact_levy?printable=true&currentPage=all [accessed 13th November 2013], pp.1-20, p.14.

[89] Rosalind Gill and Ngaire Donaghue, 'As if Postfeminism Had Come True: The Turn to Agency in Cultural Studies of "Sexualisation,"' in *Gender, Agency, And Coercion*, ed. Sumi Madhok, Anne Phillips, and Kalpana Wilson, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p.241.

[90] Camille Paglia, *Sex, Art, and American Culture*, (London: Penguin Books, 1993), p.59.

On the issue of rape, Paglia, much like Melanie Phillips with 'race,' professes to take a 'common sense'[91] approach, writing '[a] girl who lets herself get dead drunk at a fraternity party is a fool. A girl who goes upstairs alone with a brother at a fraternity party is an idiot.'[92] Furthermore, she argues, '[i]f she's drunk, she's complicitous.'[93] Paglia appears to base these views on what she claims is an understanding of the 'reality' of the male sex as 'hot.'[94] Paglia suggests, '[m]asculinity is aggressive, unstable, combustible.'[95] She argues that 'pursuit and seduction are the essence of sexuality'[96] and that the reality of sex is 'of male lust and women being aroused by male lust. It attracts women. It doesn't repel them.'[97] Although this may be true for some, Paglia offers little evidence to support her case apart from a passing reference to the apparently universal appeal of rock stars and athletes, whom she suggests '[g]irls hurl themselves at [...].'[98] However, irrespective of what women may or may not find sexually appealing, Paglia's analysis of the lure of male lust at the very least assumes that a woman must be conscious enough to be aroused or attracted by a man's pursuit of her. Although she labels women who were intoxicated at the time of a rape or sexual assault taking place as 'fools,' and 'complicitous,' her argument is of limited use in cases such as Steubenville where the victim was proven to be incapable of giving consent or, indeed, expressing her arousal.

However, this 'common sense' approach, advocated by media commentators such as Paglia and the rhetoric of post-feminism, seems particularly pervasive with regard to responses to the Steubenville rape case. Writing on the actions of those people who shared images of the victim being carried by her wrists and ankles, or who posted derogatory comments on social media sites, Levy quotes a prosecutor in the case, Jane Hanlin as saying, 'They don't think what they have seen is a rape in the classic sense.'[99] Video footage and comments posted, that formed the evidence for the prosecution, however, show that those who witnessed the incident referred to it as rape. Even though Hanlin suggests that

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[91] Ibid., p.51.
[92] Ibid., p.51.
[93] Ibid., p.59.
[94] Ibid., p.57.
[95] Ibid., p.53.
[96] Ibid., p.59.
[97] Ibid., p.59.
[98] Ibid., p.59.
[99] Ariel Levy, 'Was Justice Served in Steubenville?', in *The New Yorker,* http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2013/08/05/130805fa_fact_levy?printable=true&currentPage=all [accessed 13th November 2013], pp.1-20, p.9.

bystanders didn't believe what they were witnessing to be rape 'in a classic sense,' one teenage boy was filmed saying '"they raped her harder than that cop raped Marcellus Wallace in 'Pulp Fiction.' She is so raped right now."'[100] Perhaps the clearest expression of an attitude towards rape in line with that which Paglia expressed over twenty years ago, is a tweet that comments, '"If they're getting 'raped' and don't resist then to me it's not rape. I feel bad for her but still."'[101] In Paglia's terms, the victim in the Steubenville rape case was suffering the inevitable consequences for presumably not taking 'personal responsibility for her sexuality, which is nature's red flame',[102] by being intoxicated in the presence of men who, for Paglia, were just being men. The fact that this sort of attitude seems to have established a rubric for assessing and judging the behaviour of victims in cases of rape and sexual assault is testament to how pervasive and ubiquitous post-feminist rhetoric has become.

However, these post-feminist codes of behaviour, or expectations of how women should exercise their agency as autonomous individuals, are often not present in cross-cultural analysis and media reporting of incidents of male violence. Instead, a return to the view of women as exclusively victims is established, as long as those women do not transgress the cultural stereotypes that reinforce this view. Invoking a cultural defence in order to explain, if not justify, male violence towards women, when women do not fit the stereotypical submissive role, challenges certain women's claim to the status of victimhood, as Anne Phillips, noted earlier, has also remarked. This clearly presents a paradox whereby the rights of women supposedly advocated by the West, such as the right to education or to so-called sexual liberation, are in fact seen as providing an explanation for violence against women in other cultures. In the Steubenville case, when questioned by Levy on whether 'he felt unsettled when he saw his friend masturbating on a passed-out girl', Richmond replied 'I wasn't really thinking about, Oh, this is rape. I was just thinking, he talked to her, so I don't really care what they do."'[103] This suggests that by entering into some form of relationship with her attackers, by communicating through mobile phone calls and texts, the girl had left herself open to the abuse. As Levy writes, the assumption was that 'May's relationship with the girl, conducted through their cell phones, somehow made what was happening

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[100] Ibid., pp.5-6.

[101] Ibid., p.4.

[102] Camille Paglia, *Sex, Art, and American Culture*, (London: Penguin Books, 1993), p.53.

[103] Ariel Levy, 'Was Justice Served in Steubenville?', in *The New Yorker*, http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2013/08/05/130805fa_fact_levy?printable=true&currentPage=all [accessed 13th November 2013], pp.1-20, p.17.

acceptable.'[104] The implications being that although the girl was behaving in a way supposedly endorsed by the West, and certainly stereotypical ideas of Westernization prevalent in other cultures, the abuse that she suffered was somehow justified by her behaviour.

The gang rape of a young woman, Jyoti Singh Pandey, on a bus in Delhi in 2012, was afforded very different coverage than that of the Steubenville case, and in some ways rightly so, as Pandey sustained fatal injuries during the attack when she was repeatedly penetrated with a rusty metal bar and later died. Commenting on this, Germaine Greer reports that the victim in the Delhi gang rape case died from injuries so severe that '[w]hen she was found, only 5 percent of her intestines were inside her body.'[105] Greer goes on to suggest that describing the attack as a rape at all is problematic, arguing that '[t]o describe an attack of such appalling brutality as a rape is to overemphasise the sexual element; what happened to Jyoti Singh Pandey was a deadly assault, [...].'[106] In Paglia's terms, this was 'a real rape' where the victim was attacked by unknown assailants. This 'real,' or what could be described as 'true' victim status, was further enforced by the Western media, who often focussed on Pandey as being as much a victim of her culture as of her murderers.

The rape was reported in *The Observer* not just as an appalling act of violence perpetrated against a young women, but as revealing 'a painfully divided society' and being evidence of 'a clash of two cultures'.[107] Jason Burke writes that the rape 'laid bare the dark side of India's growth story'[108] suggesting that in India there is an 'acutely unhappy coexistence of mutually incompatible social norms: those of a deeply conservative patriarchal rural society and those of a modern urban city [...].'[109] As seen throughout this thesis, the notion of tensions caused by a conflict between tradition and modernity are a common feature in discourses around multiculturalism, with tradition typically being seen as bad, especially for women, and modernity as progress, rather than simply change. However, in this case

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[104] Ibid., p.17.

[105] Germaine Greer, 'Horrors masked by the language of misogyny,' in *The Age*, http://www.theage.com.au/comment/horrors-masked-by-the-language-of-misogyny-20130404-2h7s4.html [accessed 27th November 2013].

[106] Ibid.

[107] Jason Burke, 'A clash of two cultures as women are left out of India's bright new future,' in *The Observer*, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/dec/29/clash-cultures-india-women [accessed 27th November 2013], pp.1-4, p.1.

[108] Ibid., p.1.

[109] Ibid., p.1.

Burke suggests the clash is caused by 'urbanisation'.[110] He draws attention to the fact that the attackers 'grew up in villages where rapes, which happen with frightening regularity, are dismissed as a risk teenage girls run, an extension of the activities of young men doing what young men do.'[111] Of course, Burke's argument relies on the idea that men raised in urban environments do not rape women, something which is clearly not true. His suggestion that the idea of rape as simply, 'young men doing what young men do' is somehow particularly 'rural,' seems largely unfounded. In fact, far from being confined to rural areas, and thus presumably impoverished or somehow lacking in modern enlightenment, this attitude seems worryingly widespread; from the feminist writings of Paglia, published over twenty years ago, to those more recently attempting to excuse or justify the actions of the perpetrators in the Steubenville case.

Burke further argues that violence is 'endemic'[112] in India, going on to list crimes, that though appalling, could also have taken place anywhere in the world. His analysis seemingly removes the issue of culture – with regard to race, religion and ethnicity – by shifting the focus from clashes between tradition and modernity caused by multiculturalism, to the idea of a clash between the 'urban' and the 'rural.' However, his argument reproduces stereotypes of the 'backward' and un-educated 'foreign' man, but links this notion to the idea of place rather than religion or 'race.' Burke aligns the 'modern,' and thus assumedly progressive, urban areas of India with a particularly Western, capitalist and neoliberal version of modernity that stresses the importance of 'modern values based on individual liberty'[113] and the 'impressive creation of wealth'.[114] In doing so, he recreates a cultural divide that sees modern India as Western and liberated, and traditional India as inherently patriarchal and outdated. Despite arguing that India must and has broken free of its colonial past, writing 'the colonialist left India 65 years ago and the country has moved on',[115] Burke's article suggests a lingering and perhaps more subtle form of colonialism. The shift from culture to place still relies on existing stereotypes that produces a form of neo-colonialism, linking Western influence with progress, however, much like Reg Norgan's attempts to distance the BNP's stance on

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[110] Ibid., p.2.
[111] Ibid., p.2.
[112] Ibid., p.2.
[113] Ibid., p.1.
[114] Ibid., p.2.
[115] Ibid., p.2.

immigration from racism by instead focussing on culture, Burke's argument attempts to present a benign image that is not associated with older, and more overt forms of colonialism.

Writing in *The Times*, Libby Purves also highlights urbanisation as a factor in the Delhi gang rape, in an article that promotes a similar, if not so subtle, form of colonialism. Purves suggests that Delhi's 'particular problem' is that 'tens of thousands of newly urbanised people, from villages still almost medieval, live alongside modern workers including liberated women.'[116] Purves' assessment of the villages as 'almost medieval' again suggests the notion of this clash between tradition and modernity, casting the villages as lagging centuries behind those in the Western world, who she describes as 'in the last century', having 'struggled away from legal [...] oppression of women.'[117] Her article concludes by employing distinctly post-feminist rhetoric in an attempt to further distance India and violence against women from the supposedly enlightened and liberated Western world. As I suggest at the beginning of this chapter, by bringing together both post-feminist rhetoric and a cultural relativist approach, feminist critique can be ousted. By claiming that 'we [in the West] have the luxury of fretting about frillier feminist issues such as magazine images, rude remarks and men not doing housework',[118] Purves simultaneously dismisses all current strands of Western feminism as frivolous, whilst again suggesting that those in the East or Global South are in desperate need of catching up.

Purves describes 'murderous, hyena-like'[119] men as a 'norm'[120] in India, presenting the attackers in the Delhi gang rape case as predatory animals that though despicable, are almost inevitable, 'natural' products of their culture. Just as the calls for the entire Muslim community to address the actions of the nine men involved in the Rochdale child sex abuse case, Purves argues 'India can't pin the whole atrocity on a few bad boys.'[121] Instead, she claims there is evidence of 'cultural rottenness'[122] and suggests that we in the West are 'looking Eastward in disgust, [...].[123] Despite this 'cultural rottenness,' Purves does

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[116] Libby Purves, 'Indian women need a cultural earthquake; The Delhi bus rape should shatter our Bollywood fantasies. Sexual harassment and worse are still a girl's lot,' in *The Times*, (London: December 31st 2012).
[117] Ibid., p.2.
[118] Ibid., p.2.
[119] Ibid., p.1.
[120] Ibid., p.1.
[121] Ibid., p.2.
[122] Ibid., p.2.
[123] Ibid., p.2.

acknowledge that the death of Jyoti Singh Pandey 'has galvanised fury across India'[124] and caused 'civil unrest, demonstrations and vigils'[125] on an almost unprecedented scale, suggesting that the tolerance for violence against women in India is perhaps not as pervasive or endemic as either Purves or Burke would have their Western readers believe.

Purves rightly asserts that 'without serious enforcement, laws are useless',[126] although she neglects to address that this statement equally applies in the West where it is suggested 'the number of rape allegations handed to prosecutors in England and Wales has hit a five-year low – despite a 30% increase in the number of rapes reported to the police.'[127] Highlighting the prevalence of rape in the West, and the apparent mishandling of those cases by public services that lead to a low rate of prosecution, is not to argue for a form of cultural relativism that bars Purves from discussing rape in other cultures until problems surrounding the same issue are tackled within her own. Rather, it is to suggest that her article offers a particularly one-sided and unbalanced view of how differing cultures address such crimes. Statistics reported in the media are often sensationalized or presented in order to have maximum dramatic effect. In fact, one of the recommendations made in, *The Stern Review* (2010), a recent Home Office report into the handling of rape cases by public authorities in the UK, was 'that the National Statistician and the Home Office should aim to ensure that the publication of crime statistics is always accompanied by enough explanation to ensure that their meaning can be widely understood.'[128] This clearly supports my view that, when presented in a sensationalized manner, media coverage of 'honour'-based violence or violence against women that takes place outside of the West is used to reinforce cultural stereotypes and increase a sense of Western superiority, rather than raise awareness of issues facing women.

Academic research based on both the statistical evidence and interviews with rape victims, supports the view that the UK legal system is far from perfect with regard to dealing with rape. Articles such as Jan Jordan's 'Here we go round the review-go-round: Rape

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[124] Ibid., p.1.
[125] Ibid., p.1.
[126] Ibid., p.1.
[127] 'Rape case referrals to CPS reach five-year low,' *BBC News*, (October 27th 2013), http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-24692104 [accessed 29th November 2013].
[128] Baroness Vivien Stern, *The Stern Review*, Home Office and Government Equalities Office, 2010, http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100418065537/http://equalities.gov.uk/PDF/Stern_Review_acc_FINAL.pdf [accessed 29th November 2013], P.119.

investigation and prosecution – are things getting worse not better?', Jennifer Brown's 'We mind and we care but have things changed? Assessment of progress in the reporting, investigating and prosecution of allegations of rape' and Jacqueline Wheatcroft and Graham Wagstaff's, 'Revictimizing the Victim? How Rape Victims Experience the UK Legal System,' all suggest serious issues with the way rape victims are treated by public authorities. Jordan claims that in the UK, 'the chances of obtaining a conviction appear to be little changed, or even decreasing in likelihood.'[129] Furthermore, Jordan argues that Police officers' attitudes towards rape victims, and how credible their status as 'victims' are, can have a real impact on whether allegations are believed or prosecutions pursued. Jordan writes:

> [p]olice officers' decision-making regarding true or false complaints is still typically influenced by their subjective judgements of complainants' credibility, the unfortunate irony being that the factors raising police doubts are the very factors likely to enhance vulnerability to rape.[130]

With regard to the Rochdale child sex abuse case, assumptions about the victims' behaviour and their right to 'victim' status can clearly be seen to have impacted on how police and social services responded to initial complaints. As already argued, cultural stereotypes also play a part in defining who is a victim. This was the case with the murder of Banaz Mahmod, although then a lack of understanding was suggested as the cause of police failings.

Differences in the reporting of the Delhi gang rape and Steubenville gang rape, however, also expose differing attitudes to victims. Although clearly different in the levels of violence inflicted upon the young women involved, with the Delhi gang rape resulting in the victim's death, each woman was also treated to markedly different levels of public sympathy and coverage in the media. Whereas the Steubenville victim was subject to further threats of violence following the release of her name, with two teenage girls charged with menacing and aggravated menacing for threatening the victim over social media sites,[131] the Delhi gang rape victim was selected for the American, International Woman of Courage Award. The perpetrators of the attacks were also referred to in noticeably different ways, with the attackers in the Delhi case described as animals or 'hyena-like' and those in the Steubenville

[129] Jan Jordan, 'Here we go round the review-go-round: Rape investigation and prosecution – are things getting worse not better?', *Journal of Sexual Aggression*, vol.17, no.3, (November 2011), pp.234-249, p.238.
[130] Ibid., p.238.
[131] Michael James, 'Teen Girls Charged for Allegedly Threatening Steubenville, Ohio, Rape Victim,' in *ABC News*, http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/headlines/2013/03/teen-girls-charged-for-allegedly-threatening-steubenville-ohio-rape-victim/ [accessed November 29th 2013].

case spoken of as 'high school football stars'[132] whose fall from grace was reported in the media as particularly tragic. *ABC News* ran an article titled, 'Steubenville Rape Case: Script Goes Awry for Accused Teen' presenting a rags-to-riches story about one of the defendants, Ma'lik Richmond, suggesting that his 'promising future' was now 'threatened' and lamenting the fact that 'his fate will be in the hands of a juvenile court judge'.[133] In contrast, the attackers in the Delhi rape case were afforded no public sympathy – in fact sparking public outrage and mass protests – and the death penalty was sought, and won, for the four defendants old enough to stand trial in an adult court.

The treatment of the victim in the Steubenville case, by those convicted of raping her, the media reporting the case, and many of her peers who filmed the attacks or commented on video and photographic evidence posted on social media sites, exposes a double standard in the way women are viewed, both in a post-feminist and cross-cultural context. Although agency is often presented as an unquestionably good thing, in many of the cases discussed above, the assumed presence of agency, or women making 'choices' such as the choice to consume alcohol, attend a party, or pursue some form of relationship with a man, is in fact presented as an explanation for the violence or abuse that they suffer. In the case of Zoora Shah the severity of her sentence was arguably influenced as much by her 'choice' to remain silent in court rather than jeopardise her daughters' honour – where the cultural justification for this was dismissed – as for her choice to murder Mohammed Azam, the assumption being that one cannot have enough agency to murder a man who has abused you, and then lack the agency to speak out about this. Thus Shah was caught between two competing discourses, one that promotes the view of women as autonomous individuals, operating with complete agency, and the other that insists for a woman to invoke a cultural defence she must be entirely subjugated by that culture and show no evidence of resistance to its dominant norms. Of course in reality there is movement between these two positions that can allow for women to express degrees of agency or experience degrees of oppression. This is particularly true in a multicultural setting whereby cultures are not fixed or sealed but porous and dynamic, and is further complicated by the idea that agency can be expressed through a resistance to the

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[132] Richard Oppel, 'Ohio Teenagers Guilty in Rape That Social Media Brought to Light,' in *The New York Times*, http://www.newyorktimes.com/2013/03/18/us/teenagers-found-guilty-in-rape-in-steubenville-ohio-html?pagewanted=1&_r=0 [accessed November 29th 2013].

[133] Matt Lombardi, Lisa Soloway and Sean Dooley, ''Steubenville Rape Case: Script Goes Awry for Accused Teen,' in *ABC News*, http://abcnews.go.com/2020/steubenville-rape-case-script-awry-accused-teen/story?id=18712245&singlePage=true [accessed November 29th 2013].

norms of the majority culture, as with the practice of veiling in Europe or countries that do not enforce the practice by law for example, even when that culture is assumed to be offering greater individual freedom or choice. As Sumi Madhok argues:

> [t]he trouble with conceptual accounts of agency especially when they are applied within oppressive contexts is that they rest on unreconstructed models of universalist, ahistorical, acontextual liberal humanist agency which are almost always conceptualised in oppositional terms – as challenging/resisting existing power relations and articulating universalised models of emancipatory politics – the idea that given half the chance people will connect to their true liberal humanist/autonomous selves.[134]

In relation to 'honour'-based violence, the assumption that liberation lies outside of the victims' culture presents a particularly narrow scope for agency when linked with liberatory practice. This, coupled with the understanding that to denounce 'honour'-based violence is to denounce your entire culture and community, an understanding that the category promotes rather than interrogates, leaves little room for agency, reinforcing the stereotype of the subservient and submissive woman, whether they assert their agency or not.

As Hirsi Ali has argued, education is key to promoting an understanding of the factors that can increase the likelihood of 'honour'-based violence, as well as helping public service workers such as teachers, police and social services spot symptoms of this abuse. However, the attempt to create a narrowly defined category that relies on static depictions of cultures and derogatory cultural stereotypes, in fact, reduces our understanding of 'honour'-based violence, which can lead to women who do not fit these stereotypes being over-looked or left unsupported. Understanding 'honour'-based violence as domestic violence should allow for women, regardless of their background, to access the services and legislation that the West is so proud of providing for them. Focussing on the commonalities between 'honour'-based violence and other forms of domestic violence prevalent in the West is not to deny any differences, or to devalue the horror that many women suffer under the guise of protecting or restoring honour. It is an argument for avoiding 'othering' women from other cultures to a point when their lives are presented as alien or incomprehensible. As Diana Meyers writes on the subject of FGC, but equally applicable to 'honour'-based violence and its portrayal in Western media and society, 'narrow categories and prejudicial values often distort or block

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[134] Sumi Madhok, 'Action, Agency, Coercion: Reformatting Agency for Oppressive Contexts,' in *Gender, Agency, And Coercion,* ed. Sumi Madhok, Anne Phillips, and Kalpana Wilson, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 104-105.

introspection and empathy.'[135] As outlined in the second chapter of this thesis, narrow categories such as 'honour'-based violence also limit the possibilities for "world"-travelling whereby understanding and solidarity could be built across communities based on shared, although different, experiences. Distancing 'honour- based violence from other forms of domestic abuse maintains the pretence that violence against women is an issue that has been resolved in the West, protecting and reinforcing the notion of Western superiority. Meyers argues, 'a culture's ultimate defensive weapon is to make alternative ways of life unimaginable or imaginable only as bizarre or loathsome specimens.'[136] In a time of austerity and increased tensions over immigration, the 'othering' of 'honour'-based violence provides a way of galvanising national identity through the assertion that 'we' are not like 'them.' The category of 'honour'-based violence, though often promoted with good intentions, is equivalent to the question W. E. B. Du Bois suggested many well-meaning liberals were too uncomfortable to ask. What he referred to as the 'real question,' effectively asking Muslims in the West, 'How does it feel to be a problem?'[137]

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[135] Diana Tietjens Meyers, 'Feminism and Women's Autonomy: The Challenge of Female Genital Cutting,' in *Metaphilosophy*, vol.31, no.5, (October 2000), pp. 469-491, p.486.
[136] Ibid., p.487.
[137] W. E. B. Du Bois, 'The Souls of Black Folk,' in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, 6th Edition, ed. Nina Baym, (London: W.W. Norton & Company Ltd., 2003), p.879.

Chapter 6
Theorizing the Fourth Wave

A possibly unintended consequence of the co-opting of feminist rhetoric into highly topical and contentious issues such as immigration and foreign invasions, a theme that has been recurrent throughout this research, is an increased public and media engagement with feminism. Following this increased engagement, a recent spate of articles published in the media has announced the emergence of a 'fourth wave' of feminism. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, high profile campaigns such as No More Page Three, Lose the Lads Mags, the Everyday Sexism Project and the petition for women to be represented on bank notes, have attracted widespread media attention and support. Campaigns to end FGM[1] are also receiving considerable public exposure, leading to political interventions such as the Education Secretary, Michael Gove, agreeing to write to the head-teachers of primary and secondary schools in order to draw their attention to this issue and increase awareness of the existing guidelines meant to protect young women in the UK from undergoing FGM.[2] However, many of the women credited with organizing these various campaigns have also been subjected to numerous incidents of online abuse in the form of rape and death threats. Despite evidence of a well-established and vocal backlash against women overtly advocating feminist aims, the existence of these campaigns has led some to assert that now is the time of the fourth-wave. Certainly feminism is currently receiving high levels of interest in the media and online, though what distinguishes the 'fourth wave' from previous waves, and what the scope and goals for this apparently 'new' generation of feminist are, is still very much open to debate.

In an article for *The Guardian,* 'The fourth wave of feminism: meet the rebel women,' Kira Cochrane welcomes her readers 'to the fourth wave of feminism.'[3] Cochrane argues that its arrival is heralded by an increased feminist presence online and an ability to utilize

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[1] I use the acronym 'FGM' here, rather than 'FGC' as used previously, as this is the title that the majority of campaigns are run under. There are some exceptions, however, such as the Orchid Project, who instead use the term Female Genital Cutting.

[2] Alexandra Topping, 'Michael Gove Agrees to Write to Schools Over Female Genital Mutilation,' in *The Guardian*, http://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/feb/25/michael-gove-schools-female-genital-mutilation [accessed 25th February 2014].

[3] Kira Cochrane, 'The fourth wave of feminism: meet the rebel women,' in *The Guardian*, http://theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/10/fourth-wave-feminism-rebel-women [accessed 10th December 2013], p.1.

technological advances. Writing that the 'campaign for women's liberation never went away, but this year a new swell built up and broke through',[4] she suggests that the fourth wave is 'defined by technology: tools that are allowing women to build a strong, popular, reactive movement online.'[5] Likening the shift caused by social media to third-wave feminists' attempting to define their feminism as separate to that of their second wave mothers', Cochrane writes '[w]hat's happening now feels like something new again.'[6] Although she suggests this is a progression from the third wave, her description of a generation of women who are now actively engaging with feminism as having been brought up in the ideology of post-feminism, reinforces the notion of this slippage or lack of distinction between third-wave feminism and post-feminist ideals. She describes a generation that 'grew up being told the world was post-feminist, that sexism and misogyny were over, and feminists should pack up their placards.'[7] Akin to the women that Betty Friedan described in *The Feminine Mystique*, however, they '[s]uddenly realized they all shared the same problem, the problem that has no name'.[8] Cochrane suggests that despite their up-bringing, this generation has also begun to see through the myth of post-feminism and women are actively organizing themselves to stand against it. She argues that, 'brought up to know they are equal to men, fourth-wave feminists are pissed off when they're not treated as such, [...].'[9] Although Cochrane's claims are compelling, in as much as the campaigns she cites have certainly had wide coverage in the media and helped to raise the public profile of feminist activism, much of what she relies on to distinguish the fourth wave as distinct or new has already been utilized in the promotion of the third wave.

Alongside the possibility that frequent reference to women's rights is now made in relation to a wide variety of contemporary issues, perhaps another reason for feminisms' increased presence in the media can be explained by what Rosalind Gill describes as a 'major change in [...] journalism [...] the rise of the columnist.'[10] Gill claims '[v]iews, it is sometimes said, have replaced news.'[11] She suggests that columnists 'are not experts or

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[4] Ibid., p.1.
[5] Ibid., p.2.
[6] Ibid., p.2.
[7] Ibid., p.6.
[8] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, (London: Penguin Books, 1965), p.17.
[9] Kira Cochrane, 'The fourth wave of feminism: meet the rebel women,' in *The Guardian*, http://theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/10/fourth-wave-feminism-rebel-women [accessed 10th December 2013], p.8.
[10] Rosalind Gill, *Gender and the Media*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), p.128.
[11] Ibid., p.128.

specialists in a particular area of journalism, but generalists, adept at expressing their opinion on an endless range of topics, able to "sound off" about anything and everything on a weekly or even daily basis.'[12] Most pertinent to the argument that this shift towards an increase in columnist-style reporting can be linked to an increased interest in feminism, and to persistent pronouncements of the arrival of the fourth wave, is Gill's observation that '[f]rom a gender perspective it is striking that many of these new columnists are female.'[13] Although it is clearly not the case that all women are feminists, and certainly, at times, the strongest denouncements of feminism come from women, the increase in female columnists can account for the proliferation of women's views on issues that could be considered 'feminist,' and thus linked to what is being hailed as the emergence of the fourth wave.

However, referring back to Susan Faludi's *Backlash*, which suggested that the media played a large role in ushering in post-feminism, Gill convincingly argues that:

> [f]ifteen years on from Faludi's research, the press is still full of trend stories, warning career women of the risks of "superwoman burn-out" and the dangers awaiting their children in the guise of irresponsible nannies or abusive childminders, fragile emotional lives, and poorer SATs results.[14]

The relationship between feminism, feminists and the media then, is no less complex and fraught than it is with online campaigning and the increased use of social media. Nonetheless, these media have allowed feminism to reach progressively larger audiences, and increasingly, platforms such as *Twitter* have also allowed women to interact with and challenge journalistic accounts of their lives, leading to a wider representation of women's experiences.

Whether or not the 'wave' analogy provides a useful concept for engaging with feminism was also mentioned in the introduction to this study. What is problematic, to a large degree, is the lack of consensus over what constitutes a 'wave.' There is a considerable amount of disagreement over when 'waves' are deemed to have started or ended, or indeed which theorist can be attached or attributed to which 'wave.' Thus, the lack of consensus over the arrival of the 'fourth wave' is hardly surprising. In an attempt to provide clarity, at least within the pages of this chapter, the second wave of feminism is associated with taking place approximately between the 1960s to 1990. This, of course, encapsulates the work of numerous theorists and various differing 'feminist' ideologies, and is by no means concrete.

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[12] Ibid., p.128.
[13] Ibid., p.129.
[14] Ibid., p.130.

The 'third wave,' announced formally by Rebecca Walker in 1992, although evident from 1990 in Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth*, is associated with the period of the 1990s onwards. Again, this is by no means definitive. Although generational and ideological differences can be seen within waves of feminism, equally, there are clear examples of overlapping ideas and feminists whose theories, despite being originally associated with one wave, are just as relevant and vital to another.

Researching for this chapter alone has given rise to considerable doubt over how useful the notion of feminist waves is when attempting to discuss the history of feminism or assess its various shifts. Nonetheless, the 'wave' analogy persists, both in academic literature and in mainstream media discussions and journalism. Despite the difficulties this presents, when described as 'a swell, surge, or rush, as of feeling or of a certain condition,'[15] or in relation to making waves, to 'cause trouble'[16] or 'create a significant impression,'[17] the appeal of the wave analogy to the feminist movement is clear. The symbolism of a wave offers an idea of strength that is not captured by discussions of feminist ideologies as distinct and separate from one another. It also hints at a reluctance to abandon normative feminist action altogether, suggesting, at least, the desire for some form of feminist unity, however tenuous or fractured this may be. A possible solution that allows for conveying the strength of feminist movements, yet acknowledges both where specific waves diverge and overlap, as well as the multiplicity of feminisms, is to envisage a wave as allowing for a movement that is constantly in flux, rolling back as often as it rolls forward, gaining strength from what it brings with it rather than losing momentum due to what it leaves behind.

As the fourth wave is discussed as a rejection of the third and the notion of feminism as being past, the third wave was also, to an extent, conceived as a backlash against post-feminism, which was taken as simultaneously a celebration and rejection of the ideals and gains promoted by the feminist 'mothers' of the second wave. The notion of feminist 'mothers' in this context is primarily symbolic. The feminist mothers that third-wave feminists are thought to be rallying against are not necessarily biological mothers, but rather the mothers of the second-wave movement. However, there are examples of third-wave feminists rejecting the ideas of their own mothers, most notably the daughter of Alice

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[15] *Dictionary.com,* http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/wave?s=t [accessed 10th December 2013].
[16] *The Oxford English Reference Dictionary*, Second Edition, ed. Judy Pearsall and Bill Trumble, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.1634.
[17] Ibid., p.1634.

Walker, Rebecca Walker. In an essay for *Ms. Magazine*, published in 1992, Rebecca Walker stated, 'I am the third wave.'[18] Although, at the time of announcing herself as 'the third wave,' Rebecca Walker was not expressly renouncing her mother, they have since become estranged, something that Walker directly attributes to her rejection of her mother's specific feminist ideals. Discussing her relationship with her mother in 2008, in a *Daily Mail* article titled, 'How my mother's fanatical views tore us apart,' Rebecca Walker is quoted as stating, 'my mother's feminist principles coloured every aspect of my life',[19] and asserting that the reason she is no longer in contact with her mother is due to 'daring to question her ideology.'[20] Though less forthcoming about their relationship, Alice Walker has responded to some of the accusations levelled at her, writing on her blog, 'I learn via Wikipedia that my daughter was banished because she questioned my "ideology"!'[21] This is clearly something Alice Walker disputes as she argues, 'I'm the kind of mother who would cheer.'[22]

Helene A. Shugart, Catherine Egley Waggoner, and D. Lynn O'Brien Hallstein suggest that 'third-wave feminists define themselves first in terms of what they are not; namely, they reject the feminism of the second wave, claiming that it reflects almost exclusively the perspectives and values of white, middle-class, heterosexual women [...].'[23] However, Walker's rejection of her mother's values can hardly be seen as moving away from a heteronormative, white, middle-class position. Although Rebecca Walker is quoted as commenting in a 1992 interview for *The Times*, ''I hope I never have to hear the word post-feminist again, [...]',[24] referring to the idea that feminism is no-longer relevant, her subsequent pronouncements on the issues she associates with her mother's politics could equally be seen as a rejection of postfeminism as a distinct ideology, developed through the interactions between feminism and postcolonial, postmodern and poststructuralist theory. As seen in chapter 4 of this thesis, which explores Alice Walker's fiction through one of her

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[18] Rebecca Walker, 'Becoming the Second Wave,' in *Ms. Magazine*, (January/February 1992), pp.39-41, p.41.
[19] Rebecca Walker, 'How my mother's fanatical views tore us apart,' in *Mail Online*, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1021293/How-mothers-fanatical-feminist-views-tore-apart-daughter-The-Color-Purple-author.html [accessed10th December 2013].
[20] Ibid., p.2.
[21] Alice Walker, 'Taking Care of the Truth – Embedded Slander: A Meditation on the Complicity of Wikipedia,' on *Alice Walker's Garden*, http://alicewalkersgarden.com/2013/03/taking-care-of-the-truth-embedded-slander-a-meditation-on-the-complicity-of-wikipedia/ [accessed 11th December 2013].
[22] Ibid.
[23] Helen A. Shugart, Catherine Egley Waggoner, and D. Lynn O'Brien Hallstein, 'Mediating Third-Wave Feminism: Appropriation as Postmodern Media Practice,' in *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, vol.18, no.2, (June 2001), pp.194-210, p.194-195.
[24] Kate Muir, 'Riding on the third wave,' *The Times,* (July 8th 1992), p.1.

novels, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, much of Alice Walker's work can be seen to problematize the notion of a singular view of feminism that promotes a white, Western view of women's liberation as universal, thus advocating for the space that postfeminism offers in theorizing the experiences of black and minority women, within a broad feminist, or 'womanist' framework.

The development of Postfeminism as a distinct ideology, separate from post-feminism, can also be linked to the early 1990s. Ann Brooks suggests that:

> postfeminism is framed within the feminist academic community, particularly those drawing on postmodernism, poststructuralism and post-colonialism to inform their understanding of feminism in the 1990s. Postfeminism as understood from this perspective is about the conceptual shift within feminism from debates around equality to a focus on debates around difference.[25]

This situates postfeminism within the third wave, broadly fitting with Shugart et al's assertion that a primary objective for third-wave feminists was to disrupt a white, heteronormative, middle-class view. However, evidence of feminist academics and activists seeking to challenge the tendency for feminist theory to prioritize a singular, white perspective, is apparent long before the 1990s, and particularly, before the popularization of postmodernism within academia.

In fact, the importance of problematizing the 'grand narrative' of Western feminism was stressed far earlier than the 1990s. As early as 1851, in a discussion of civil rights and women's liberation, Sojourner Truth famously asked 'ain't I a woman too?' In 1982, bell hooks repeated this question in her book, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. Challenging what she saw as the racism endemic in the American women's movement, hooks argues:

> [w]hile it is in no way racist for any author to write a book exclusively about white women, it is fundamentally racist for books to be published that focus solely on the American white woman's experience in which that experience is assumed to be *the* American woman's experience.[26]

Following this, in 1984, in an approach that can broadly be considered intersectional, (although as suggested in chapter 2 of this thesis, various theorists whose work could be considered 'intersectional' predate the official coining of the term), hooks stressed the need

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[25] Ann Brooks, *Postfeminisms: Feminism, Cultural Theory and Cultural Forms*, (London: Routledge, 1997), p.4.
[26] bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, (London: Pluto Press, 1982), p.137.

for feminists to take into account factors other than gender, such as race and class. She argued that '[r]ace and class identity create differences in quality of life, social status and lifestyle that take precedence over the common experience women share [...].'[27] Angela Davis was raising similar concerns over the white, ethnocentrism apparent in mainstream Western feminism, as well as highlighting the importance of considering class in feminist analysis in *Women, Race and Class*, published in 1981. Also taking what could be deemed an intersectional approach, in her essay, 'White Woman Listen! Black feminism and the boundaries of sisterhood,' first published in 1982, Hazel Carby wrote of Black feminists, '[w]e can point to no single source for our oppression. When white feminists emphasize patriarchy alone, we want to redefine the term and make it a more complex concept.'[28] Carby's essay sought to disrupt not only the singular view of 'white feminism,' but also the notion that for feminism to be effective, it must be simple. This is a view that has stubbornly persisted within contemporary discussions of feminism, particularly those taking place outside of academia.

In 'Towards a Black Feminist Criticism,' first published in 1977, Barbara Smith highlighted the invisibility of Black lesbian women's experiences from dominant discussions of feminism. Again pointing to the complex intersections between being a woman, black and a lesbian, Smith suggested that each combined to produce an understanding and experience of oppression that differed greatly from that of middle-class white women. Smith argued that 'Black women's existence, experience, and culture and the brutally complex systems of oppression which shape these are in the "real world" of white and/or male consciousness beneath consideration, invisible, unknown.'[29] Within her analysis Smith also cites Alice Walker as an author who is calling attention to 'how the political, economic, and social restrictions of slavery and racism have stunted the creative lives of Black women',[30] promoting an intersectional analysis of women's experiences and oppression. Key to Smith's critique was not just the importance of acknowledging the impact of race or class on feminist analysis, but also the need to challenge the heteronormative stance of much feminist criticism. Smith implies the revolutionary possibilities of adopting, or at least recognizing, a

[27] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p.4.
[28] Hazel Carby, 'White Woman Listen! Black feminism and the boundaries of sisterhood,' in *Black British Feminism: A Reader*, ed. Heidi Safia Mirza, (London: Routledge, 1997), pp.45-53, p.46.
[29] Barbara Smith, 'Toward a Black Feminist Criticism,' in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter, (London: Virago Press, 1986), pp.168-185, p.168.
[30] Ibid., p.169.

Black lesbian perspective, suggesting that there was 'something dangerous' in the act of 'writing about Black women writers from a feminist perspective and about Black lesbian writers from any perspective at all.'[31] She claims that this danger is particularly relevant for Black Lesbian critics, where '[h]eterosexual privilege is usually the only privilege that Black women have.'[32] The notion of 'heterosexual privilege' refers back to discussions in chapter 2 of this research, whereby the importance of regarding privilege as structural was noted. That Black women may have heterosexual privilege also serves to highlight that Black should not be mistaken for a homogenous category that is simply presented as in binary opposition with White, but rather that individuals within both groups may experience varying and different forms of oppression.

Adrienne Rich also sought to challenge what she saw as 'compulsory heterosexuality,' and what she described as 'heterosexuality as a political institution which disempowers women [...].'[33] Rich comments on the erasure of lesbians of colour from academic feminist writing, suggesting that this is influenced by the 'double bias of racism and homophobia.'[34] She also suggests that compulsory heterosexuality forces women to adopt what she describes as 'doublethink', reminiscent of W. E. B. DuBois's notion of double consciousness, discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis. Rich describes 'doublethink' as something 'from which no woman is permanently and utterly free'.[35] She argues '[h]owever woman-to-woman relationships, female support networks, a female and feminist value system are relied on and cherished, indoctrination in male credibility and status can still create synapse in thought, denials of feeling, wishful thinking, a profound sexual and intellectual confusion.'[36] Rich also links this 'indoctrination in male credibility' with white women's racism.[37] Again, returning to the second chapter of this thesis, a similar position can be found in Marilyn Frye's ideas on 'arrogant perception', who, writing in 1983, suggested that white women may 'cling to the hope of true membership in the dominant and powerful group [...]'.[38]

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[31] Ibid., p.168.
[32] Ibid., p.182.
[33] Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', in *Blood, Bread and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979-1985,* (London: Virago Press, 1987), pp.23-75, p.23.
[34] Ibid., p.25.
[35] Ibid., p.48.
[36] Ibid., p.48.
[37] Ibid., p.48.
[38] Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*, (California: The Crossing Press, 1983) p.121.

Perhaps, then, it is more accurate to think of postfeminism as a conceptual shift that, despite having roots in far earlier activism and feminist debates, was brought to the fore in the 1990s. In *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*, Michèle Barrett and Anne Phillips suggest there has been an 'almost paradigmatic shift from 1970s to 1990s feminism, [...].'[39] However, Barrett and Phillips stress that the contrast between each period 'is not intended as a marker of feminist "progress".'[40] They also argue that 'many of the issues posed in that [earlier] period return to haunt the present.'[41] This suggests a more integrated approach to the third wave, or the emergence of 'postfeminism,' that has developed from within the second wave feminist movement, rather than evolved as a wholesale rejection of it. Phillips, in particular, advocates for an approach that, although acknowledging the importance of difference, does not abandon what she terms the 'aspiration towards universality.'[42] Phillips argues that 'feminism cannot afford to situate itself *for* difference and *against* universality, for the impulse that takes us beyond our immediate and specific difference is a vital necessity in any radical transformation.'[43] This approach is also echoed in Seyla Benhabib's discussion of the relationship between feminism and postmodernism, mentioned briefly in the introduction to this thesis. Benhabib cautions against adopting too 'strong' a postmodern position, suggesting, '[a] certain version of postmodernism is not only incompatible with but would undermine the very possibility of feminism as a theoretical articulation of the emancipator aspirations of women.'[44] Neither Phillips or Benhabib argue that feminism should reject or resist postmodernism entirely; in fact, suggesting the importance of postmodernism's influence on feminism, Phillips writes 'pretensions towards a universal truth or universal humanity have been rightly criticized, and the work of many recent feminist theorists has revealed how persistently such abstractions confirm the perspectives of a dominant group.'[45] Thus, although aware of the benefits offered to feminism by adopting, to an extent, a postmodern approach to theory, both Phillips and

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[39] Michèle Barrett and Anne Phillips, 'Introduction,' in *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates,* ed. Michèle Barrett and Anne Phillips, (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992), p.6.

[40] Ibid., p.2.

[41] Ibid., p.2.

[42] Anne Phillips, 'Universal Pretensions in Political Thought,' in *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates,* ed. Michèle Barrett and Anne Phillips, (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992), p.28.

[43] Ibid., p.28.

[44] Seyla Benhabib, 'Feminism and Postmodernism: An Uneasy Alliance,' in *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*, Seyla Benhabib, Judith Butler, Drucilla Cornell and Nancy Fraser, (London: Routledge, 1995), p.29.

[45] Anne Phillips, 'Universal Pretensions in Political Thought,' in *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates,* ed. Michèle Barrett and Anne Phillips, (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992), pp.27 -28.

Benhabib advocate a pragmatic and practical approach that does not dismiss the importance of praxis.

In her chapter, 'The Contradictions of Successful Femininity: Third-Wave Feminism, Postfeminism and 'New' Femininities,' Shelley Budgeon explores the relationship between postfeminism, and the third wave. However, there is a certain amount of slippage between postfeminism as a conceptual shift linked predominantly to postmodernism, post-colonialism and poststructuralism, and post-feminism as associated with a time after feminism, perhaps hinting at the difficulties of entirely separating third-wave feminism from a post-feminist position. Budgeon aligns third-wave feminism with 'the theme of 'empowerment'' and with the promotion of 'a "politics of difference" starting from the specificity of individual experience.'[46] Although this focus on the individual and empowerment, and in particular, women's success, is an area where post-feminism can be seen to closely parallel third-wave feminism, Budgeon attempts to separate the two, though, at times the distinction is blurred. She suggests '[b]y asserting that equality has been achieved postfeminist discourse focuses on female achievement, encouraging women to embark on projects of individualized self-definition and privatized self expression in the celebration of lifestyle and consumption choices.'[47] However, she goes on to argue that the aim of third wave feminism is 'to advance a politics based upon self-definition and the need for women to define their personal relationship to feminism in ways that make sense to them as individuals.'[48] The third-wave feminism that Budgeon describes is a feminism that has been privatized, and is organized around 'individualized self-definition,' factors she also problematically associates with post-feminism. The difference that Budgeon theorizes between a 'feminist' and 'post-feminist' stance is in the intention or insistence of a continuing need for feminist analysis that is promoted by the third wave.

Budgeon argues that 'third-wave feminism asserts that feminism continues to be both possible and necessary.'[49] She suggests that the third wave has sought to acknowledge the relatively successful position of women in contemporary Western societies, not to align itself

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[46] Shelley Budgeon, 'The Contradictions of Successful Femininity: Third-Wave Feminism, Postfeminism and 'New' Femininities,' in *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism, and Subjectivity,* ed. Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff, (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2013), p.282.
[47] Ibid., p.281.
[48] Ibid., p.283.
[49] Ibid., p.279.

with post-feminism, but to create a form of feminism that is both relevant and effective. Although, as Astrid Henry observes, 'the coining of the term "third wave" is frequently attributed to Rebecca Walker,'[50] the notion of third-wave feminism was already established in print prior to Walker's declaration, specifically in Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth*. Despite Wolf calling for intergenerational cooperation within *The Beauty Myth*, suggesting that the 'links between generations of women need mending if we are to save one another',[51] she also stresses that the third wave must be 'peer-driven.' Wolf writes '[n]o matter how wise a mother's advice is, we listen to our peers.'[52] Like Wolf, Budgeon stresses the influence of peers on the development of third-wave feminism rather than an intergenerational approach to feminist issues, arguing '[n]ew levels of gender parity in educational attainment and occupational success mean that women are as likely, or perhaps more likely, to identify with their *generation* than their *gender*.'[53] Increased 'educational attainment and occupational success' are, however, hardly a commonality that can be found in generations when differences highlighted by class or ethnicity are acknowledged, let alone, across cultures within a global context. Thus the shift in focus from gender to generation, despite suggesting the disruption of universalisms based on gender, can instead be seen to be creating a new 'universal' category based on an assumption of a similarity of experience that is linked to generation.

Even at what can be considered the very start of the third wave, ideological differences surrounding how the feminist movement should progress showed that there was often no more unity amongst peers, than across generations. Although published only four years after *The Beauty Myth*, another prominent third wave feminist's text, *The Morning After: Sex, Fear and Feminism* (1994), written by Katie Roiphe, also the daughter of a well-known second-wave feminist, already begins to show signs of a shift from Wolf's vision of the third wave that advocates an intergenerational approach to combat the perceived feminist backlash. Instead Roiphe appears to be advocating a post-feminist stance that positions feminism as the problem. However, this vision was certainly not shared by everyone. Henry describes her experience of reading, *The Morning After: Sex, Fear and Feminism*, commenting, 'I was

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[50] Astrid Henry, 'Feminism's Family Problem: Feminist Generations and the Mother-Daughter Trope,' in *Catching a Wave: Reclaiming Feminism for the 21st Century*, (New England: University Press New England, 2003), p.222.
[51] Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*, (London: Vintage, 1990), p.283.
[52] Ibid., p.281.
[53] Ibid., p.280.

quick to dismiss Roiphe during that initial reading in great part because, to put it bluntly, I thought she was dead wrong about the state of contemporary feminism. What she described bore little resemblance to the feminism I knew.'[54] Henry stresses that although both she and Roiphe 'share a generational label'[55] and even 'seemed to have read the same books, taken some of the same sort of classes, and participated in the same "feminism on campus,"'[56] each had developed considerably different impressions of feminism. Henry argues that '[f]or Roiphe, feminism was like a stern mother telling women how to behave. She described feeling constrained by feminism, her individuality and freedom curbed by its long list of rules and regulations.'[57] Roiphe's feminism fits with the popular, and popularised, notion of the third wave as a rejection of the second. Despite the seeming generational similarities highlighted by Henry, her own assessment of the third wave was very different.

Henry describes the presence of post-feminist ideology in Roiphe's text, observing, '[i]n Roiphe's description of contemporary feminism, it is no longer misogynist men, patriarchal attitudes, or sexist culture that "regulates" women's behaviour. The task of regulating women's behaviour has been taken over by feminists.'[58] This backlash against feminism, initially identified by Wolf as part of the problem, is now offered by Roiphe as a solution to feminism's failings. This is despite, ironically, the women who declared themselves as founders of the third wave, such as Wolf and Rebecca Walker, initially stressing that the third wave was, in part, intended to combat the rhetoric of post-feminism. With the shift from the focus on 'victim feminism,' that stressed women's collective experience of patriarchy, to the promotion of individual empowerment, in part supported by the rhetoric of postmodernism that challenged the idea of any universal experience of being a 'woman,' there was a seemingly natural progression from third-wave to post-feminism.[59] However, just as the problematising of 'race' as a distinct or coherent category based on the acknowledgment that there are as many differences within racial groups as there are between them has not led to the end of racism, the notion that there is no universal category of

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[54] Astrid Henry, 'Feminism's Family Problem: Feminist Generations and the Mother-Daughter Trope,' in *Catching a Wave: Reclaiming Feminism for the 21st Century*, (New England: University Press New England, 2003), p.209.
[55] Ibid., p.209.
[56] Ibid., p.209.
[57] Ibid., pp.209-210.
[58] Ibid., p.210.
[59] See Chapter 4 on Wolf's move away from 'victim' feminism.

'woman' should not be taken to signal the end of sexism, or, for that matter, be used to justify the arrival of post-feminism.

Indeed, Monique Wittig has claimed that the dissolution of the category 'woman' is, in fact, necessary to combat sexism and misogyny. In her essay, 'One is Not Born a Woman', Wittig argues that feminists must avoid the tendency to think of both 'man' and 'woman' as natural terms that emphasizes the difference between the two, suggesting 'by admitting there is a 'natural' division between women and men, we naturalize history, we assume that 'men' and 'women' have always existed and will always exist.'[60] A consequence of this, Wittig argues, is that 'we naturalize the social phenomena which express our oppression, making change impossible.'[61] Not unlike Smith and Rich, both also writing on the radical possibilities for feminism offered by lesbianism, Wittig links the 'refusal to become (or to remain) heterosexual', not only with challenging 'the *role* 'woman'', but also with 'the refusal of the economic, ideological and political power of a man.'[62] Implicit in this analysis is an awareness of what Smith termed 'heterosexual privilege' as well as the notion that 'what makes a woman is a specific social relation to man'.[63] Wittig suggests the possibilities for feminism, not just in theory but also in praxis, in thinking beyond this binary. She argues that 'the doctrine of difference between the sexes',[64] that which is used to justify women's oppression, thus destabilizing the category of 'woman,' offers a way for feminists to challenge sexism, rather than rendering feminism as incoherent or incapable of action.

Budgeon also suggests the possibilities of widening the focus of feminism, particularly for the third wave. Her assertion that 'third-wave feminism does not privilege gender or sexual difference as its key site of struggle nor does it limit itself to any single issue'[65] acknowledges the influence of postmodernism, seemingly implying an intersectional approach to feminist analysis that seeks to explore multiple forms of oppression, and how these may intersect to affect women's lives. These varying axes of oppression, though, are still clearly conceptualised from a distinctly Western perspective. Budgeon recognizes that

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[60] Monique Wittig, 'One is Not Born a Woman,' in *Psychoanalysis and Woman: a Reader,* ed. Shelley Saguaro, (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), pp.282-289, p.283.

[61] Ibid., p.283.

[62] Ibid., p.284.

[63] Ibid.,p.288.

[64] Ibid., p.288.

[65] Shelley Budgeon, 'The Contradictions of Successful Femininity: Third-Wave Feminism, Postfeminism and 'New' Femininities,' in *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism, and Subjectivity,* ed. Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff, (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2013), p.280.

third-wave feminism encompasses contradictions that she links to the problems of trying to create a coherent theory that does not rely on universalisms, and instead embraces a postmodern position that questions unified concepts based on 'gender' or 'race.' Attempts to resolve these difficulties have led to a shift in focus from equality to agency, or what Budgeon terms, 'a late modern female empowerment discourse.'[66] Budgeon suggests '[t]his discourse is underwritten by the assertion that women's access to an autonomous subject position increased significantly in the latter half of the twentieth century resulting in women's ability to define their own identities independent of their relation to others.'[67] However, not only does this ignore the impact of any social factors on shaping women's lives and identities, the notions of agency and 'choice' are still represented in particularly Western terms. The suggestion being that increased agency is synonymous with women's gains, where 'women are often held to be key beneficiaries of a range of socio-economic changes that now characterize Western societies and the neoliberal tropes of freedom and choice'.[68]Although Budgeon questions the promotion of these ideas in relation to how easily they can be co-opted into the discourse of post-feminism, her analysis does not challenge the use of the trope of the 'liberated Western woman' in relation to colonialism, that has been shown to be present in many contemporary feminist discussions throughout this thesis.

I would argue that the task for the fourth wave is in many ways similar to that of the third; finding a way of balancing the rights of groups, with those of individuals, to acknowledge the notion of gender as a construct, and the importance of agency, whilst not downplaying the factors that may influence how gender is constructed, or how agency may be constrained or presented. Budgeon conceptualises a third-wave feminism that enables women to seek and achieve what is presented as a universal understanding of liberation, suggesting with her analysis what, as referenced earlier in chapter 5, Sumi Madhok calls, 'the idea that given half the chance people will connect to their true liberal humanist/autonomous selves'.[69] This would seem to underestimate what postmodernism can offer feminist theory. As bell hooks has argued, 'critiques of essentialism which challenge notions of universality and static over-determined identity within mass culture and mass consciousness can open

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[66] Ibid., p.284.
[67] Ibid., p.284.
[68] Ibid., p.284.
[69] Sumi Madhok, 'Action, Agency, Coercion: Reformatting Agency for Oppressive Contexts,' in *Gender, Agency, And Coercion,* ed. Sumi Madhok, Anne Phillips, and Kalpana Wilson, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 104-105.

new possibilities for the construction of self and the assertion of agency'.[70] With regard to the relationship between feminism and multiculturalism, this offers feminists new ways of conceiving agency that are not solely structured within a Western framework, promoting a wider understanding of feminism that does not exclude women who may be making choices that seem to conflict with Western views of equality or liberation. However, a move away from any form of universalism or essentialism may not necessarily benefit women. As discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, and in line with Phillips' argument for an 'aspiration towards universalism',[71] although multiculturalism should not be seen as being, by necessity, in conflict with women, neither can the favouring, or celebrating, of cultural difference be placed over the importance of recognizing and challenging gender inequalities.

Many of the issues prominent in the third wave, or indeed, what some are now labelling the fourth wave, (although as with all 'waves' there is some debate over when the fourth can be considered to have begun), were also the source of debates and divergent discussions in the second. Although third-wave feminism is persistently portrayed as a break from, or rejection of, second-wave feminism, this lack of intergenerational cooperation or awareness is often presented as simply a fact, rather than as a problem. However, the notion that the third wave is the disgruntled and rebellious offspring of the second, where a connection with one's peers is coupled with the rejection of the values of the previous generation, suggests a movement that is primarily in opposition with its predecessors, and thus unable to benefit from established feminist gains and theory. For example, the No More Page 3, and Lose the Lads Mags campaigns clearly revisit debates about freedom of expression, women's rights, and censorship, reminiscent of discussions in the eighties taking place between anti-pornography feminists, such as Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon, and those that considered themselves 'sex-positive.' These issues were as divisive then as they are now. Lynne Segal suggests that it was the split over attitudes surrounding sexuality, male violence and pornography that 'produced the final and fundamental rift between feminists at the end of the 1970s' and 'shattered any potential unity about the nature, direction and goal of feminism.'[72] Adding to these tensions, Dworkin and MacKinnon's radical feminist stance on pornography, and particularly their Anti-

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[70] bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*, (Boston: South End Press, 1990), p.29

[71] Anne Phillips, 'Universal Pretensions in Political Thought,' in *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates,* ed. Michèle Barrett and Anne Phillips, (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992), p.28.

[72] Lynne Segal, *Is the Future Female? Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism*, (London: Virago Press, 1987), p.65.

Pornography Civil Rights Ordinance, was uncomfortably aligned with a conservative political right-wing. Furthering the notion of the cyclical nature of feminist concerns and debates, this uneasy alliance between a radical feminist stance and conservative political aims is not so dissimilar to the current co-opting of feminist discussions on multiculturalism by those seeking to challenge immigration and enforce a strong, national identity that claims women's rights at its centre.

Thus the return of many issues from the second-wave to the third, as noted by Barrett and Phillips,[73] can also be seen in the apparently 'new' arrival of the fourth. These debates, as they take place in the media or on social media sites such as *Twitter*, often lack any reference to previously established feminist discourses and thus, rather than move the argument forward, seem intent on replaying it. Although in academia greater attention is placed on acknowledging the feminists' debates and theorists that have come before, the role that the discussions taking place on social media sites have in shaping perceptions of feminism should not be underestimated, not least because for some, it is the utilization of social media and the internet that has brought about the fourth wave. Although social media may provide a platform for pushing feminism forward, arguably broadening the reach of feminism to engage women outside of academia or established circles of feminist activism, the tendency is for feminism to be simplified online. *Twitter*, for example, only allows 140 characters, preventing the kind of nuanced discussions that acknowledge the wealth of feminist thought and literature that has already been established. This not only leads to the false view of a fourth-wave that has seemingly emerged from nowhere, it also stifles intergenerational conversations, where each generation must define a 'new' sexism before they can begin to challenge it.

The role that the internet and social media sites play in perpetuating or facilitating misogyny has already been mentioned in this thesis, although not discussed explicitly. For example, in relation to the levels of abuse academic, Mary Beard, was subjected to via the internet, following her appearance on *Question Time,* or the importance of social media to the Steubenville rape case, where much of the evidence that resulted in the conviction of two of the young men involved, Trent Mays and Ma'lik Richmond, was gathered from social media

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[73] Michèle Barrett and Anne Phillips, 'Introduction,' in *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates,* ed. Michèle Barrett and Anne Phillips, (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992), p.2.

sites, to the extent that some newspapers reported it as a 'trial by twitter.'[74] However, although in the Steubenville case the perpetrators' eventual prosecution was aided by evidence posted on the internet, much of the abuse and harassment that the victim was subjected to following video footage and photos of the assault being posted online, was also expedited by the internet. The role of the internet, particularly *Twitter*, in facilitating feminist discussions has also been mentioned with relation to debates over the terms 'intersectional feminist' or 'privilege checking' discussed in greater depth in chapter two. In all of the above cases, the role of the internet has presented women with a dilemma. Although it has undoubtedly served to raise the public profile of feminism, although arguably only for those already seeking out feminist opinions and debates, and even helped lead to the prosecution of men guilty of sexual assault, it has also left women exposed to an onslaught of misogyny on an almost global scale.

Following their successful campaign to ensure women were represented on Bank of England banknotes, journalist and activist, Caroline Criado-Perez and MP Stella Creasy, were subjected to a torrent of abuse, rape and death threats, via social media. Criado-Perez reported receiving '"about 50 abusive tweets an hour for about 12 hours."'[75] Creasy reported receiving threats that ranged from the specific, '"You better watch your back… Im gonna rape your ass at 8pm and put the video all over the internet"' to '"If I meet you in an alley you will definitely get fucked."'[76] Two people, a man and a woman, were subsequently charged 'with improper use of communications network'[77] in relation to the abusive tweets sent to Criado-Perez, but 'no further action over similar messages allegedly sent to MP Stella Creasy'[78] was taken. Rather than signal an end to the online abuse directed at Criado-Perez though, news of the charges being brought against two of the individuals involved seems to have reignited tensions. Although it could be argued that the solution is to simply log-off the social media sites, and thus avoid seeing the abuse altogether, if social media is being hailed

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[74] Ariel Levy, 'Was Justice Served in Steubenville?', in *The New Yorker*, http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2013/08/05/130805fa_fact_levy?printable=true&currentPage=all [accessed 13th November 2013], pp.1-20.

[75] Keith Moore, 'Twitter 'report abuse' button calls after rape threats,' *BBC News*, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-23477130 [accessed 17th December 2013].

[76] Sam Jones, 'Labour MP Stella Creasy receives Twitter rape threats,' in *The Guardian*, http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2013/jul/29/labour-mp-stella-creasy-twitter-rape-threats [accessed 17th December 2013].

[77] 'Two charged over Caroline Criado-Perez tweets,' in *The Guardian*, http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/dec/16/two-charged-caroline-criado-perez-tweets [accessed 17th December 2013].

[78] Ibid.

as a possible format for new forms of feminist activism, then abusing women until they no longer engage via this medium becomes an effective tool for silencing feminists. As Criado-Perez says, '"Getting off Twitter is just not an option for me – it's how I do my activism, how I work.'[79] Criado-Perez's insistence on the importance of social media to her activism and work as a feminist would seem to confirm the importance of the internet in relation to 'fourth' wave feminism. Nonetheless, her experience of online abuse would also suggest that the relationship between feminism and social media is as fraught as it is productive.

Although it was for the death and rape threats that Criado-Perez sought prosecution, in an interview for *The Guardian*, Jane Martinson suggests 'it is the attacks from women online that seem to upset Criado-Perez most.'[80] This abuse from other women and particularly feminists, was often in the form of 'saying stuff like how rubbish the banknote campaign was.'[81] Despite the success of the campaign to insist that women were not entirely erased from Bank of England banknotes, the project was not supported by all feminists, and the backlash was particularly established on *Twitter*. As Marina Strinkovsky writes '[w]hen the Bank announced that Jane Austen will feature on the new £10 note, Twitter erupted – but not in jubilation; in fury.'[82] Strinkovsky claims that criticism of the campaign took many forms but most suggested it was 'frivolous,' or 'trivial.'[83] Also writing in *The Independent*, Jane Merrick questions whether having Jane Austen featured on a ten-pound note is really a sign of progression, claiming '[w]hen even a Ukip MEP hardly known for his progressive views has endorsed the idea of Austen on a banknote, the argument is won. Let's go one better.'[84] Although Criado-Perez was, in fact, campaigning for the representation of women on bank notes, rather than specifically Jane Austen, Merrick argues that instead of Austen, '[i]f we wanted to show the world that we are a truly progressive nation, we should have a black or

[79] Jane Martinson, 'Caroline Criado-Perez: 'I speak as someone psychologically scarred,'' in *The Guardian*, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/19/stories-of-2013-caroline-criado-perez-twitter [accessed 19th December 2013], p.3.
[80] Ibid., p.3.
[81] Ibid., p.3.
[82] Marina Strinkovsky, 'If you thought it was trivial to care about putting a woman on a bank note, #feministtenner will prove you wrong,' in *The Independent*, http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/if-you-thought-it-was-trivial-to-care-about-putting-a-woman-on-a-bank-note-feministtenner-will-prove-you-wrong-8998479.html [accessed 19th December 2013], p.2.
[83] Ibid., p.1.
[84] Jane Merrick, 'So you think Jane Austen on bank note would be progressive? We can do better than that,' in *The Independent*, http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/so-you-think-jane-austen-on-bank-notes-would-be-progressive-we-can-do-better-than-that-8674928.html [accessed 19th December 2013].

Asian Briton on a banknote.'[85] Merrick's assertion, despite suggesting a seemingly positive stance on multiculturalism, again reinforces the notion that there is a clear and defined choice between advocating for the representation of women, or advocating for multiculturalism.

Though Merrick's assertions about Britain's 'terrible history of imperialism',[86] and her argument that choosing 'a non-white face for a banknote' would provide 'role-models, and a greater sense of belonging, for ethnic minority children'[87] are valid, her points also bear the undercurrent of post-feminist rhetoric. Merrick does suggest that a woman of colour, Mary Seacole, would be a worthy candidate for appearing on a banknote, however, for Merrick, what is important is not that Mary Seacole was a *woman* of colour, but simply that she was 'of colour'. While Criado-Perez's campaign has received criticism for being 'a privileged white women's crusade that re-enacted the marginalization of minority voices',[88] Merrick's argument removes women from the picture entirely, presumably believing the issue of gender equality to have been resolved. Rather than suggest focussing on the intersecting issues of race and gender, Merrick's argument assumes that these factors are in competition with one another. This obscures the importance of promoting the presence of women as figures of value, both current and historical, in the public consciousness. It also belies the significant impact that Austen has had, and continues to have, not least with regard to industry. Criado-Perez equates the lack of response from the police and those in charge of *Twitter*, when presented with the abuse she was suffering, with a similarly dismissive attitude that she suggests is 'part of a culture which "consistently undervalues women".'[89]

Despite Merrick's suggestion that Criado-Perez's campaign was trivial or not 'progressive' enough, the strength of feeling it inspired, both positively and negatively, suggests that it was of some importance. As Strinkovsky observes 'when something many dismissed as pointless and marginal attracts a volcanic eruption of anger, what does it mean?

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[85] Ibid., p.2.
[86] Ibid., p.3.
[87] Ibid., p.3.
[88] Marina Strinkovsky, 'If you thought it was trivial to care about putting a woman on a bank note, #feministtenner will prove you wrong,' in *The Independent*, http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/if-you-thought-it-was-trivial-to-care-about-putting-a-woman-on-a-bank-note-feministtenner-will-prove-you-wrong-8998479.html [accessed 19th December 2013], p.1.
[89] Jane Martinson, 'Caroline Criado-Peres: 'I speak as someone psychologically scarred,'' in *The Guardian*, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/19/stories-of-2013-caroline-criado-perez-twitter [accessed 19th December 2013], p.3.

It means it mattered to people.'[90] Although Strinkovsky suggests 'it mattered to those targeted by the campaign – sexist men, sexist power structures, sexist institutions',[91] it also clearly mattered to feminists who felt excluded from the campaign, and to those promoting post-feminism that would have you believe it was unnecessary. The argument that it was a 'privileged white woman's campaign' was used to suggest that focus of the campaign was trivial in comparison to other issues facing women, such as domestic violence, the closure of women's refuges, a drop in prosecutions and charges following allegations of rape. These kinds of criticisms were not just made by those on the fringes of mainstream 'media' feminism, but also, perhaps ironically, by women who had themselves often been accused of failing to promote intersectional feminist analysis, or support minority voices. Editor of the *New Statesman*, Helen Lewis, herself no stranger to *Twitter* abuse and accusations of white privilege,[92] also initially criticised the campaign for its seemingly trivial focus, asking '[a]ren't there bigger things to worry about than who gets pictured on our money? What about rape, domestic violence, income inequality'?[93] However, Lewis changed her position, acknowledging that when 'faced with a huge array of injustices, it's better to do something than do nothing'.[94] The argument that feminists had more pressing issues to address than the absence of women from British banknotes suggests a form of relativism that is potentially as paralyzing for the feminist movement as post-feminist rhetoric that suggests all the battles have been won, at least in the West. As Lewis observes, 'Criado-Perez might not have "smashed patriarchy", but she has shown that you can make the world better, even if only by a fraction.'[95] However, accusations of 'white privilege' and re-enacting the 'marginalization of minority voices' suggests that there is also the question of who Criado-Perez has made the world better for.

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[90] Marina Strinkovsky, 'If you thought it was trivial to care about putting a woman on a bank note, #feministtenner will prove you wrong,' in *The Independent*, http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/if-you-thought-it-was-trivial-to-care-about-putting-a-woman-on-a-bank-note-feministtenner-will-prove-you-wrong-8998479.html [accessed 19th December 2013], p.2.

[91] Ibid., p.2.

[92] Zoe Williams, 'Are you too white, rich, able-bodied and straight to be a feminist?' in *The Guardian,* http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/apr/18/are-you-too-white-rich-straight-to-be-feminist [accessed 19th December 2013].

[93] Helen Lewis, 'Women on bank notes: I was wrong,' in *The New Statesman*, http://www.newstatesman.com/helen-lewis/2013/07/women-bank-notes-i-was-wrong [accessed 19th December 2013].

[94] Ibid.

[95] Ibid.

Though Criado-Perez's success could, as Lewis argues, 'serve as a template for a successful, focussed campaign'[96] it was not intersectional, in as much as the focus was solely on gender and increasing the visibility of women, rather than also acknowledging the importance of increasing the representation of multiple ethnicities, or working-class women. Jane Austen, as a white, relatively privileged and well-educated woman, was perhaps not the most challenging or revolutionary woman who could have been chosen by those advocating an intersectional approach to feminist activism, although she is considered by some to be a proto-feminist, and certainly many of her novels feature strong female characters. Nonetheless, despite recognizing that Jane Austen was possibly not the most revolutionary figure for the Bank of England to accept, it is at the very least problematic, if not impossible, to expect one campaign to be representative of all women. Furthermore, Merrick's position plays all too easily into the notion of a hierarchy of oppressions, rather than advocating simply for an intersectional approach that asserts the importance of acknowledging how different axes of oppression intersect to influence women's lived experiences. An obvious flaw in her criticism of Jane Austen being chosen to feature on a ten pound note being that those who campaign for the increased visibility of disabled women, for example, may have been equally dissatisfied with the choice of Mary Seacole. It is perhaps best then to see Criado-Perez's campaign as a small but necessary step. Rather than assume, as Merrick appears to, that the issue should not focus on the representation of women at all, instead it is important to see this as a victory to be expanded on in order to make it more inclusive and representative of a wider number of women living in Britain today. If not, feminist activism is both paralyzed by relativism, cultural or otherwise, and feminist activists are held to a level of accountability, where they are assumed to be representative of all of womankind. This not only limits action, but also ironically furthers the myth of a singular feminism that minority voices by definition disrupt.

The notion of a unified feminist past, although clearly a fiction, still presents a problematic allure for some. Suggesting the need for feminism to return to a past that she romanticizes as being characterised by feminists uniting 'under a single, worthy demand: universal suffrage',[97] Joanna Biggs argues for the importance of a fourth-wave intellectual voice that can offer the movement unity and coherence. Like Cochrane, Biggs suggests that

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[96] Ibid.

[97] Joanna Biggs, 'Feminism is on a high – but it needs a strong intellectual voice,' in *The Guardian*, http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/dec/29/feminism-needs-new-intellectual-voice [accessed 8th January 2013], p.2.

in 2013 'feminism has been in buoyant mood, high on its own successes'.[98] However, Biggs also claims that despite the 'energy' of the fourth wave, the movement is too fractured, choosing to address issues that, although important, do not reflect the concerns of all women. Referring to Caroline Criado-Perez's successful campaign to ensure women are represented on Bank of England bank notes, she suggests that '[t]here is no reason that a mother in Rhyl or a carer in Blackpool wouldn't be happy that Jane Austen will appear on their tenners,' but also asks 'equally, how are their worries and concerns reflected by it?'[99] Biggs questions whether 'aiming for so many mediocre, concessionary, scattershot goals [is] more likely to dissipate energy than focus it?'[100] Paradoxically, Biggs is simultaneously celebratory of the feminist movement, and dismissive of it. Insistent as she is on the need for feminism to have a strong intellectual voice, her article lacks reference to any academic feminist writing or prominent feminist theorists post-Simone de Beauvoir. In fact, she seems to suggest that post-1978 there has been no feminist movement at all, writing that the fourth wave of feminism is 'a young wave, untempered by previous generations (partly because they ran out of steam after the last national women's liberation movement conference of 1978 in Birmingham).'[101] The claim that the fourth wave of feminism is without history, or has seemingly arisen from nowhere, is also made with reference to Laura Bates and the Everyday Sexism campaign, which is mentioned in the introduction of this thesis.

Biggs' argument advocates for a feminism that unites around 'universal' aims, something which she fails to name, apart from to suggest that '[t]he demands of the 1970s [...], don't feel irrelevant: equal pay, equal job opportunities, free contraception and abortion on demand and 24-hour nurseries.'[102] Although she has suggested that the feminism of the 1970s 'ran out of steam',[103] by claiming that the demands of this time are still relevant to feminists today, Biggs raises two important questions. Presuming that the feminism did run out of steam in the 1970s, a statement that is certainly contestable; surely the question is why did the feminist 'movement' or 'wave' ebb if its demands were not met, and if these are the issues that the fourth wave should organize around, what then sets this apart from previous 'waves'? Unlike others such as Cochrane and Criado-Perez, Biggs does not suggest the

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[98] Ibid., p.1.
[99] Ibid., p.2.
[100] Ibid., p.2.
[101] Ibid., p.2.
[102] Ibid., p.4.
[103] Ibid., p.2.

difference is linked to technology or online opportunities for feminist activism. In fact, Biggs stresses the need for a more 'traditional' format; 'a big book that will sell thousands and draw letters from the modern equivalent of de Beauvoir's sexual maniacs who wrote on lavatory walls.'[104] However, the popularity of 'big' books such as Caitlin Moran's *How to be a Woman*, have certainly not led to any universal agreement on feminist and women's aims, despite the all encompassing nature of the title.

On the contrary, Moran is often cited as a controversial figure within contemporary feminism, who promotes a vision of a unified female experience over the inclusion of minority voices. Caitlin Moran's recent proclamation on Twitter that she '"literally couldn't give a shit about"'[105] the lack of women of colour in the new American television series *Girls*, has added weight to the view that Moran is intent on promoting a singular, white vision of feminism as universal. Moran's *How to be a Woman*, and Lena Dunham's *Girls*, have each been hailed as definitive examples of contemporary feminism, which is, in fact, a large part of the problem. Rather than taken as examples of individual woman's experiences, both *How to be a Woman* and *Girls* are assumed, or at least presented as, speaking for a generation of women. This issue is reminiscent of that raised by bell hooks in *Ain't I a Woman?*, referenced at the beginning of this chapter. Namely, that although writing solely about white women is not in itself racist or indeed problematic, presenting this as the definitive or universal experience of all women is.

Moran's text is described by its publishers as, a rewrite of '*The Female Eunuch* from a bar stool [...].'[106] However, unlike Germaine Greer's polemical manifesto, and despite the pretentions of universalism evident in the title, *How to be a Woman* is overtly autobiographical, describing exclusively Moran's experiences of being a woman, rather than presenting a feminist zeitgeist. Despite its popularity though, *The Female Eunuch*, and Greer herself, were also far from unproblematic. Writing on the reception of *The Female Eunuch*, Segal suggests that it was 'both despite and because of its snipes at women and feminism,'

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[104] Ibid., p.4.

[105] Rebecca Omonira Oyekanmi, 'Caitlin Moran's comments are just one example. Too often our media sees only shades of white,' in *The Independent*, http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/caitlin-morans-comments-are-just-one-example-too-often-our-media-sees-only-shades-of-white-8224880.html [accessed 1st February 2014].

[106] Caitlin Moran, *How to be a Woman*, (Chatham: Random House Publishing, 2011).

that it 'became an instant bestseller in mainstream culture'.[107] Camille Paglia's enduring media appeal can also be attributed, to an extent, to her dismissive pronouncements on the 'excesses of academic feminism'[108] and the easy co-opting of her writing to suit a dominant post-feminist, media position, as suggested in the previous chapter. Although Paglia attributes her media success to 'the enthusiasm of several sophisticated women for another woman's book,'[109] rather than, as she describes, what 'some have ludicrously claimed, as a neoconservative plot by the patriarchy to set feminism back.'[110] Whether or not her writing is admired by 'sophisticated women,' her position on academic feminism, as well as issues such as 'date-rape,' discussed in the previous chapter, support the notion of feminism as having gone too far, or being out of touch with women's needs and experiences. It is in addressing these ideas, and advocating for the continued relevance of feminism to women's lives, even in its most basic guise of offering 'a quick way of working out if you're a feminist. Put your hand in your pants. a) Do you have a vagina? And b) Do you want to be in charge of it? If you said "yes" to both, then congratulations! You're a feminist'[111] that Moran's book is most successful. Despite, or perhaps because of, this incredibly simplistic definition of feminism, Moran has been successful in popularizing the concept of feminism; with one reviewer claiming it ought to be 'obligatory reading for all teenage girls.'[112]

In contrast to Moran's predominantly autobiographical, *How to be a Woman*, Imelda Whelehan suggests, *The Female Eunuch* concentrated on 'raising universal feminist consciousness'.[113] This is evident in part in Greer's decision to organise the book around apparently 'universal' themes such as the body, soul, love and hate, although these themes are perhaps not as universal as Greer assumes. Notably Greer's views on women's bodies in relation to transgender women, expanded upon in her follow up text, *The Whole Woman*, have been criticised by feminists who regard gender as a performance rather than biologically determined. Again, the at times uneasy relationship between feminism and postmodernism becomes relevant. Marea Mitchell suggests that '[s]ome of Greer's strongest polemic is

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[107] Lynne Segal, *Making Trouble: Life and Politics*, (London: Serpent's Tail, 2007), p.144.

[108] Camille Paglia, *Sex, Art, and American Culture*, (London: Penguin Books, 1993), p.305

[109] Ibid., p.306.

[110] Ibid., p.305.

[111] Caitlin Moran, *How to be a Woman*, (Chatham: Random House Publishing, 2011), pp.79-80.

[112] Katy Guest, 'Caitlin Moran's How to be a Woman Review,' in *The Independent*, http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/how-to-be-a-woman-by-caitlin-moran-2305805.html [accessed February 10th 2013].

[113] Imelda Whelehan, *Modern Feminist Thought: From the Second Wave to 'Post-Feminism'*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), p.76.

reserved for the concept of being post-gender [...] for the role of medicine in the production of faux women.'[114] These debates, far from being settled, have spilt over into recent activism with questions raised over whether transwomen should be included in women-only spaces and Reclaim the Night marches, leading to the accusation that feminism is failing transwomen.[115]

Although Moran's text is marketed as a rewrite of *The Female Eunuch*, Greer had already re-visited many of its themes in her own sequel, *The Whole Woman* (2000). A book Greer declared she would 'never write',[116] *The Whole Woman* is presented as her challenge to both post-feminist, and postfeminist, assumptions. With regard to post-feminism, she claims 'it would have been inexcusable to remain silent' when confronted with feminists asserting 'with apparent seriousness that feminism had gone too far'.[117] Greer stridently refutes the notion of post-feminism that, as cited in the introduction to this thesis, 'registers, time and again, the seeming gains and successes of the second wave of the women's movement, implying that 'things have changed', so feminism is now irrelevant.'[118] However, she also argues against postfeminism as associated with postmodernism and the undoing of biological understandings of gender. Greer writes:

> [p]ost-modernists are proud and pleased that gender now justifies fewer suppositions about an individual than ever before, but for women still wrestling with the same physical realities this new silence about their visceral experiences is the same old rapist's hand clamped across their mouths. Real women are being phased out; the first step, persuading them to deny their own existence, is almost complete.[119]

Here Greer's criticism of postfeminism shows similarities with the concerns raised by Seyla Benhabib on the impact of postmodernism on feminist praxis, although Greer's critique suggests a far stauncher resistance to adopting a postmodern feminist approach. Returning to the theme of intergenerational co-operation, or lack of this, Greer also suggests that, in part, her reluctance to write *The Whole Woman* was based on her belief that 'each generation should produce its own statement of problems and priorities'.[120] However, she was stirred

[114] Marea Mitchell, 'Ambitious Women and Strange Monsters: Simone de Beauvoir and Germaine Greer,' in *Hecate*, (May, 2000), pp.98-106, p.101.

[115] Quinn Capes-Ivy, 'Why cis attendees of RTN are letting trans women down,' on *The F Word*, http://www.thefword.org.uk/blog/2010/10/why_cis_attende [accessed 5th February 2014].

[116] Germaine Greer, *The Whole Woman*, (London: Transworld Publishers, 2000), p.1.

[117] Ibid., p.1.

[118] Angela McRobbie, 'Beyond post-feminism,' in *Public Policy Research*, (September/November 2011), pp.179-184, p.180.

[119] Germaine Greer, *The Whole Woman*, (London: Transworld Publishers, 2000), p.3.

[120] Germaine Greer, *The Whole Woman*, (London: Transworld Publishers, 2000), p.1.

into action by the apparent failings of this generation to recognise the problems still facing women, let alone challenge them. The arrival of the fourth wave, and the emergence of projects such as Everyday Sexism, would seem to suggest that this generation was now less reluctant to rise to this challenge, albeit 15 years after the publication of *The Whole Woman*. However, as previously discussed with regard to the second and third-waves, this generation's 'statement of problems and priorities' bears remarkable resemblance to that of previous generations.

Though Greer's polemical rhetoric goes some way to challenging the notion of post-feminism as a dismissal of feminist values by contemporary culture, *The Whole Woman* does not seriously address the possible benefits of the relationship between postmodernism and feminism. The partial view offered by Greer maintains a clear, white, Western focus on feminist issues that does not take into account the intersections of race or class. As Benhabib concluded, despite her concerns over a 'strong' reading of postmodernism's influence on feminism, postmodern theory can still be a valuable tool for feminists seeking to challenge essentialism. Ann Brooks suggests that rather than dismissing postmodernism and poststructuralism outright, '[t]he question facing feminist theorists is how far feminism should go in engaging with contemporary theoretical debate around postmodernism and poststructuralism.'[121] Brooks argues that the assumed threat to feminist coherence from postmodern and poststructuralist perspectives, in fact, only challenges a feminism that is 'superficially characterised by coherence' but is, in reality, 'internally riven by divisions based race, ethnicity, class and sexuality.'[122] Thus, rather than challenge the unity of feminism and feminist praxis, postfeminism as associated with postmodernism exposes this unity as a superficial 'grand narrative' and a romanticized myth.

Online feminism, suggested as a defining feature of the fourth wave is also, as I have argued, fractious and problematic, presenting a challenge to those that wish to imagine the feminist movement as unified or coherent. A recent article published in *The Nation* went as far as to declare *Twitter* feminism as 'toxic'. Michelle Goldberg writes, 'even as online feminism has proved itself a real force for change, many of the most avid digital feminists

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[121] Ann Brooks, *Postfeminisms: Feminism, Cultural Theory and Cultural Forms*, (London: Routledge, 1997), p.44.
[122] Ibid., p.46.

will tell you that it's become toxic.'[123] Goldberg likens what she describes as the 'online trashing'[124] of feminists by one another, as earlier mentioned in relation to Caroline Criado-Perez, to the second wave when 'feminist groups tore themselves apart by denouncing and ostracizing members who demonstrated too much ambition or presumed to act as leaders.'[125] Online 'trashing' is now more commonly associated with the call to 'check your privilege,' than with denouncing those who are presumed to have shown too much ambition. However, as mentioned in chapter 2 of this thesis, 'privilege checking' can also be linked to platforms, and particularly media platforms, and whether these are perceived as being utilized to further feminist aims or simply individual's careers.

Goldberg suggests that the very public online disagreements between feminists go '[b]eyond bruised feelings'.[126] Citing the example of the response from *Twitter* feminists to the #Femfuture campaign, Goldberg argues that '[t]he controversy was all most people knew of the project, and it left a lasting taint.'[127] Somewhat ironically, the #Femfuture project was based on continuing a discussion on the importance of online feminism, started by the '#FemFuture: Online Revolution'[128] report, published by the Barnard Center for Research on Women. In a preface to the report, its writers, Courtney E. Martin and Vanessa Valenti, are said to have been driven by:

> a compelling vision to make the landscape of feminist writers and activists online stronger; to create a substantial force that would build on existing alliances among feminist movements and between online feminists and their institutional counterparts; and to develop an infrastructure of support for these important voices.[129]

Despite these aims, Goldberg highlights one feminist writer and online activist as being particularly negative about the project. Mikki Kendall, whom she claims 'compared #Femfuture to Rebecca Latimer Felton, a viciously racist Southern suffragist who supported lynching because she said it protected white woman from rape.'[130] Goldberg describes much

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[123] Michelle Goldberg, 'Feminism's Toxic Twitter Wars,' in *The Nation*, http://www.thenation.com/article/178140/feminisms-toxic-twitter-wars [accessed 13th February 2014].

[124] Ibid.

[125] Ibid.

[126] Ibid.

[127] Ibid.

[128] Courtney E. Martin and Vanessa Valenti, *#FemFuture: Online Revolution*, Barnard Center for Research on Women, http://bcrw.barnard.edu/wp-content/nfs/reports/NFS8-FemFuture-Online-Revolution-Report-April-15-2013.pdf [accessed 13th February 2014].

[129] Ibid., p.2.

[130] Michelle Goldberg, 'Feminism's Toxic Twitter Wars,' in *The Nation*, http://www.thenation.com/article/178140/feminisms-toxic-twitter-wars [accessed 13th February 2014].

of the critique as 'full of bad faith and stubborn misinformation,'[131] particularly with regard to representation and race.

Although #Femfuture has been criticised for 'racial insensitivity',[132] Jamia Wilson, a black feminist involved in both the initial research and the *Twitter* project that followed, disputes this critique. Goldberg describes how Wilson 'watched on incredulously as white women joined in the pile on about #Femfuture's alleged racial insensitivity. One self-described white feminist tweeted at her to explain that no women of color had been at the Barnard meeting'.[133] This, of course, is untrue as Wilson herself attended. In response to criticism of the project, authors of the report, Martin and Valenti, write that although there has 'been a ton of important and necessary critique' there have 'also been glaring inaccuracies'.[134] In particular, Martin and Valenti argue that 'being misquoted, personally attacked, having our work blatantly mischaracterized, or having our friends and colleagues invisibilized,'[135] cannot simply be characterized as 'critique'.[136] Wilson notes the irony of being rendered invisible by white feminists who profess to be intent on supporting women of colour and anti-racist feminism, saying '[s]omehow, activists who prided themselves on their racial enlightenment "were whitesplaining me about racism"'.[137]

Goldberg paints a rather bleak picture of online feminism, where a space that Martin credits with having 'transformed the way advocacy and action function within the feminist movement',[138] has now become dysfunctional and even hazardous for women activists. Furthermore, she suggests that the perpetrators of this 'toxic feminism,' charged with causing the slip into dysfunction, are the very women that online feminism can benefit. Problematically, Goldberg's displeasure at *Twitter* feminism could be read as advocating for the inclusion of minority voices only when those voices support the majority position.

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[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Courtney E. Martin and Vanessa Valenti, 'Guest Post: #femfuture: Learning in pursuit of sustainability,' on *Feministing*, http://feministing.com/2013/05/30/guest-post-femfuture-learning-in-pursuit-of-sustainability/ [accessed 13th February 2013].
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Michelle Goldberg, 'Feminism's Toxic Twitter Wars,' in *The Nation*, http://www.thenation.com/article/178140/feminisms-toxic-twitter-wars [accessed 13th February 2014].
[138] Courtney E. Martin, 'Online Revolution Introduction' in Courtney E. Martin and Vanessa Valenti, *#FemFuture: Online Revolution*, Barnard Center for Research on Women, http://bcrw.barnard.edu/wp-content/nfs/reports/NFS8-FemFuture-Online-Revolution-Report-April-15-2013.pdf [accessed 13th February 2014].

Although this is perhaps too strong a reading of Goldberg's critique, Martin and Valenti make an important distinction in asserting the difference between valid criticism and 'online trashing.' Who decides which is which, however, is yet another cause for contention. In a movement where the personal is political, challenges to deeply held beliefs can easily become personal attacks. Although rightly critical of when these personal attacks impact on a feminist author's ability to find work, or, as with #Femfuture, the tendency to overlook the importance or viability of a feminist project in favour of focussing on the stereotypical ideas of 'catty' women and a dysfunctional 'sisterhood', Goldberg's analysis, with its headline grabbing title of 'Feminism's Toxic Twitter Wars', is hardly doing anything to combat these stereotypes or the reductive reporting in the media of often valid differences amongst feminists.

Goldberg, Martin and Valenti each emphasize the influence of intersectional feminist theory on online feminist communities. Under the subheading, 'Creating Space for Radical Learning,' Martin and Valenti suggest that 'the Internet has allowed for a more open space of accountability and learning, helping to push mainstream feminism to be less monolithic.'[139] They credit an intersectional approach with helping to challenge mainstream feminist views, writing '[i]ntersectionality is today a well-known and often-discussed theory of practice within the online feminist world.'[140] Although Martin and Valenti highlight the positive influence of intersectionality on online feminism, not least because the approach encourages feminists to 'hold one another accountable,'[141] Goldberg considers the misuse of intersectionality as part of the problem. What Goldberg describes as the tendency for intersectionality online to be 'mainly about chastisement and rooting out individual sin,'[142] has already been discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis, particularly in relation to disagreements over the validity of an intersectional approach, and how this theory is at times reduced to the internet meme of 'checking your privilege.' Suffice to say though, that Golberg's assertion that there are more than 'bruised feelings' at stake suggests not only the powerful influence of online feminism, but also some of the dangers of such a public 'call out' culture.

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[139] Courtney E. Martin and Vanessa Valenti, *#FemFuture: Online Revolution*, Barnard Center for Research on Women, http://bcrw.barnard.edu/wp-content/nfs/reports/NFS8-FemFuture-Online-Revolution-Report-April-15-2013.pdf [accessed 13th February 2014], p.17.
[140] Ibid., p.17.
[141] Ibid., p.17.
[142] Michelle Goldberg, 'Feminism's Toxic Twitter Wars,' in *The Nation*, http://www.thenation.com/article/178140/feminisms-toxic-twitter-wars [accessed 13th February 2014].

Despite the issues with intersectional feminism online, neither intersectionality, nor indeed online feminism, should be ruled out for what they can offer the fourth wave of feminism. Each provides a valuable tool for feminist activism that seeks to move beyond boundaries of location, class, race and sex. That each is also prone to misuse and abuse should not discount them. However, neither can they be thought to unproblematically signal the arrival of the fourth wave. Predominantly, this is because both intersectional analysis, as theorized by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, and to an extent, the emergence of the internet and media savvy feminists, have already been claimed as defining factors in previous feminist 'waves'. For example, Michele Beyers and Diane Crocker's research into the differences and similarities between feminist waves and cohorts found that many who identified as third-wave feminists, and also those more commonly associated with the second wave, 'are open to adopting media and new technologies to address the changing social climate.'[143] Parallels can also be drawn between Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality and postfeminism, suggesting that, although those participating are not always aware of the theoretical lineage, the discussions and debates that occupied the feminisms of the 1970s, 80s and 90s, continue to dominate the fourth wave.

Reinforcing the notion that intergenerational awareness and co-operation are key to the fourth wave, Wittig's essay, first published in English in 1981, is still distinctly relevant to contemporary discussion of feminism. She raises the crucial and publically much debated question of '[w]hat does 'feminist' mean?'[144] This question has been the subject of newspaper articles, a YouGov poll and even an online *netmums* survey that apparently found 'six out of seven women have rejected the term feminist'.[145] Wittig suggests that the decision to call herself 'feminist' was 'not in order to support or reinforce the myth of woman, nor to identify ourselves with the oppressor's definition of us, but rather to affirm that our movement had a history and to emphasize the political link with the old feminist movement.'[146] Sadly, the tendency to present the fourth wave as entirely without history, as discussed throughout this chapter, coupled with frequent media debates surrounding the

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[143] Michele Byers and Diane Crocker, 'Feminist cohorts and waves: Attitudes of junior female academics,' in *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol.35, issue 1, (January/February 2011), pp.1-11, p.3.

[144] Monique Wittig, 'One is Not Born a Woman,' in *Psychoanalysis and Woman: a Reader,* ed. Shelley Saguaro, (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), pp.282-289, p.285.

[145] Sally Peck, 'Feminism Means Equality Between Men and Women, and We're Not There Yet,' in *The Telegraph*, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/9617732/Feminism-means-equality-between-men-and-women-and-were-not-there-yet.html [accessed 17th February 2014].

[146] Monique Wittig, 'One is Not Born a Woman,' in *Psychoanalysis and Woman: a Reader,* ed. Shelley Saguaro, (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), pp.282-289, p.285.

question of whether feminism needs to 're-brand,' suggests that the importance of emphasizing the history of feminism is often lost. Not only does this obscure the great wealth and diversity within feminist thought, as suggested earlier, it also leaves each generation to believe they must start feminism anew. Although there have undoubtedly been changes in how gender is perceived and theorized, as well as how sexism and misogyny are manifest within society, there is also evidence of persistent and recurring themes. For example, within academia, the discipline of 'porn-studies,' with the creation of journals dedicated to publishing research on the influence of pornography on both individuals and society, is regarded as relatively new. However, feminist discussions and theorizing over the influence of pornography is certainly not new. Indeed, in1980 Adrienne Rich declared the 'function of pornography as an influence on consciousness is a major public issue of our time, [...].'[147] This is not to claim that porn-studies is, in fact, irrelevant or in any way passé, but rather to suggest that the establishing of a 'new wave' of feminism should not be theorized as the conclusion of the last.

The fourth wave of feminism may indeed offer possibilities for feminist theory and praxis that exceed those of previous generations. Social media platforms such as *Twitter* certainly encourage the inclusion of multiple, and often previously unheard, voices, allowing for greater diversity within feminist debates. *Twitter* can also be a powerful tool in raising global consciousness, increasing awareness of feminist campaigns and activism. However, although online resources can encourage wider engagement with feminist issues, the brevity that these resources often encourage seems to necessitate that feminism becomes increasingly simplistic, rather than increasingly complex. Thus the fourth wave must balance the benefits offered by online media with the need to engage with the ideas discussed and evolved in previous waves, and stress the importance for intergenerational cooperation between feminists, rather than proudly claim to have no knowledge of previous waves. In order to move feminism forward and avoid simply re-tracing the cycle, leaving each generation to discover for themselves what Friedan described as the 'problem that lay buried, unspoken, for many years',[148] the fourth wave of feminists should embrace the history of feminism and the debates that have already taken place, rather than fear that they cast feminists as too divided or even too radical. This is not to argue for the privileging of 'academic' feminism over

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[147] Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', in *Blood, Bread and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979-1985,* (London: Virago Press, 1987), pp.23-75, p.39.
[148] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, (London: Penguin Books, 1965), p.13.

feminist activism, but rather to suggest that the two cannot, or at least should not, be so easily separated. As seen with Femen, discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis, activism without any attention to theory, or to the history of feminism, can be as alienating as it is liberating. Equally, as suggested by Benhabib with regard to the relationship between feminism and postmodernism, theory that pays no attention to the importance of practice can lead to paralysis. Perhaps one of the biggest challenges to the fourth wave of feminism is to embrace an intersectional approach through social media that allows for the inclusion of a multiplicity of voices and experiences. In doing this though, feminists must resist being reduced by this online media and the alluring calls for unity that seek to hide the diversity and longevity of feminist thought, rather than celebrate it.

Conclusion

Initially conceived as a response to Ayaan Hirsi Ali's assertion that Western feminists were failing Muslim women, this thesis has, in the writing of it, both confirmed and challenged many of my assumptions about Western feminism and Western feminists' right to seek to address the various issues facing Muslim women. Throughout this thesis I have argued against a cultural relativist position that suggests Western feminists should refrain from commenting on cultures and experiences outside their own. Thus to an extent, I agree with Hirsi Ali, at least in stating how important these cross-cultural feminist discussions are to contemporary feminism. However, I would also stress that Hirsi Ali's position and argument is deeply problematic. Not least because, in asserting the need for Western intervention, her rhetoric is full of assumptions about what it means to be a feminist in the West, suggesting a homogenous view of 'Western' feminism that neither matches my experience or understanding. As suggested in the introduction to this research, her position has also frequently been aligned with aims that are in opposition to the liberal values she has claimed to so admire. Of as much relevance to this project as her assertions about how Western feminists are failing Muslim women, has been how these assertions, and others like them, are being utilized or co-opted into larger discussions of national identity and the perceived problems of multiculturalism.

Despite, (in print at least), Hirsi Ali's ideas being relatively easy to problematize and challenge, legitimate questions over how feminists should seek to act across cultures remain. Throughout writing and researching for this thesis, it has become increasingly apparent that this question has been occupying feminism for some time, although the contexts within which these debates are taking place have changed. These changes have, I would argue, been influenced by multiple factors, but primarily from the perspective of this thesis, by a withdrawal or 'backlash' against multiculturalism. Thus we see: the co-opting of feminist rhetoric to bolster support for the 'war on terror' following the terrorist events of 9/11 and 7/7; the persistent and pervasive notion of 'post-feminism' prevalent in the Western media; and an increased feminist presence in online spaces. Although I cannot claim to have resolved this issue of how feminists should practice across the boundaries of culture or difference once and for all, (and in fact I would argue that finding a singular and finite solution was not just highly improbable, but also undesirable), this thesis does present an

original contribution by bringing established feminist theory to current debates. Rather than suggest definitive conclusions, I offer a view on contemporary feminism in the West, which, taking into account the various contextual shifts I have mentioned, presents a particular focus on the importance of cross-cultural feminist dialogue during a time of increased local and global tensions over encounters with the 'other.' Continuing to address difference, whilst maintaining the possibilities for feminist practice and transformation across boundaries, I would argue, must be central to fourth-wave feminist analysis and debate. Key to this thesis is the assertion that we are currently experiencing a backlash against multiculturalism, and, post-9/11, a climate of fear surrounding those who are considered 'other' that is manifest not just in Islamophobia, but also in the often subtler conversations surrounding the perceived importance of establishing and maintaining national identity. The link between cross-cultural feminist analysis and national identity has already been noted by others, as I suggest in the introduction of this thesis with reference to Carolyn Pedwell who claims cross-cultural analysis may be 'appropriated by both government and media to diffuse the discomfort that cultural and ethnic diversity seem to produce',[1] however, I would argue that this study shows evidence of the opposite taking place. Feminist rhetoric and analysis are being utilized to increase tensions, rather than diffuse them.

Furthermore, although there is a considerable amount of cross-cultural feminist analysis taking place within academia and, as I have already suggested, questions surrounding difference and ways of interacting with those who are 'other' have a long and well-established history within feminism, relatively little of this complexity can be found in media accounts of both feminism and multiculturalism. The decision to utilize a wide range of textual sources, from autobiographical accounts, political and polemical writing, academic texts, journalistic writing and fictional novels has been in order to both show the complexity and variety of opinions on these issues, but also to address the distinction or 'gap' between discussions taking place within academia, and those taking place within 'popular' culture. As I have suggested in the introduction to this thesis, the wide variety of sources has also encouraged the process of 'thick description,' allowing for a multiplicity of voices to be heard that encourages looking at gender in a variety of shifting social and political contexts.

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[1] Carolyn Pedwell, *Feminism, Culture and Embodied Practice: the Rhetorics of Comparison*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), p.3.

Awareness around the issues this thesis addresses, such as FGC/FGM, have also increased significantly since the inception of this research, with high profile campaigns involving politicians such as Lynne Featherstone, who announced, as minister for International Development, 'a £35million UK Government programme'[2] towards seeking an end to FGM. Although this increased awareness has led to more people discussing FGC, as I argue in chapter 4, media representations continue to present a polarized view of this issue, largely ignoring the practice of what Carolyn Pedwell refers to as 'cross-cultural analogy',[3] whereby comparisons are drawn between the practice of FGC and labiaplasty, for example. Thus, as I have suggested, despite Pedwell rightly suggesting that the process of '[d]rawing commonalities between embodied practices understood to be rooted in different cultural contexts has become prevalent in a range of feminist literatures',[4] and her discussion of the various limitations of these types of analogies, the kinds of nuances that this offers debates on FGC, however limited, are largely absent from both media discussions and government policy. Therefore, although feminist discussions within academia may have moved on from stressing the importance of cross-cultural analogies as a tool to combat cultural essentialism, to problematizing the limits of such analysis, I would argue that discussions taking place outside of academia have yet to engage with this process thoroughly.

The criticism made in chapter 4, of how the rhetoric of feminism is used to denounce FGC, yet support forms of unnecessary cosmetic surgery, particularly in relation to the language of 'choice' and the focus on 'agency,' is not to reduce the notion of harm that FGC does to women, or to argue that all cosmetic surgery is unnecessary and ultimately harmful. Instead, I contend, framing FGC solely through terms such as 'barbaric,' 'out-dated' and 'traditional,' inhibits community action against this practice, alienating the very women that these campaigns profess to be trying to help. Furthermore, implicit in the criminalisation of FGC, when coupled with the widespread acceptance of FGCS as evident in a recent

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[2] Lynne Featherstone, 'Join My Campaign to End FGM in a Generation,' http://www.lynnefeatherstone.org/2014/02/join-my-campaign-to-end-fgm-in-a-generation.htm [accessed 25th February 2014].

[3] Carolyn Pedwell, 'The Limits of Cross-Cultural Analogy: Muslim Veiling and 'Western' Fashion and Beauty Practices,' in *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism* and Subjectivity, ed. Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp.188-199, p.188.

[4] Ibid., p.188.

newspaper report's claim that labiaplasty has become the 'third most sought-after surgery'[5] in the UK, is that what is highlighted as criminal is that the procedure is taking place in unsanitary and unregulated conditions, and frequently practiced on minors. This fails to address the attitudes that support FGC on the grounds of 'hygiene' or as an attempt to control or limit women's sexual freedom. Without acknowledging these contradictions, campaigns against FGC become campaigns for more sanitary conditions, tighter regulations and age restrictions, rather than to eradicate this procedure 'in a generation',[6] as Lynne Featherstone claims.

The focus is increasingly on the fact that many young British girls are undergoing FGC, raising issues of national identity and suggesting the possibility that these girls may be being lost between competing discourses surrounding immigration and notions of what it means to be 'British.' When the same newspaper can run one article titled 'The Unspeakable Practice of Female Circumcision That's Destroying Young Women's Lives in Britain,'[7] and another 'British Women Hanker For Designer Vaginas: Labiaplasty Sees 109 Per Cent Rise to Become Third Most Sought-After Surgery,'[8] women are clearly being subjected to different rules, and indeed laws, depending on assumptions about the influence of their 'culture' or assumed lack thereof. In an uncomfortable subversion of the notion of cultural defence, a 'British' women's assumed lack of cultural influence is presented as the defence of her right to 'choose' to undergo labiaplasty. In a piece of journalism that belittles this motivation to a 'hankering' and suggests that '[l]ady bits are the latest area of concern to women,'[9] the only opinion sought on this procedure is that of a male cosmetic surgeon, who suggests that '50 per cent [of women] want it purely for aesthetic reasons and to boost their

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[5] Deni Kirkova, 'British Women Hanker for Designer Vaginas: Labiaplasty sees 109 per cent Rise to Become Third Most Sought-After Surgery,' in *The Daily Mail*, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2395641/British-women-hanker-designer-vaginas-labiaplasty-sees-109-cent-rise-sought-cosmetic-surgery.html [accessed 25th February 2014].
[6] Lynne Featherstone, 'Join My Campaign to End FGM in a Generation,' http://www.lynnefeatherstone.org/2014/02/join-my-campaign-to-end-fgm-in-a-generation.htm [accessed 25th February 2014].
[7] 'The Unspeakable Practice of Female Circumcision That's Destroying Young Women's Lives in Britain,' in *The Daily Mail*, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-505796/The-unspeakable-practice-female-circumcision-thats-destroying-young-womens-lives-Britain.html [accessed 25th February 2014].
[8] Deni Kirkova, 'British Women Hanker for Designer Vaginas: Labiaplasty sees 109 per cent Rise to Become Third Most Sought-After Surgery,' in *The Daily Mail*, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2395641/British-women-hanker-designer-vaginas-labiaplasty-sees-109-cent-rise-sought-cosmetic-surgery.html [accessed 25th February 2014].
[9] Ibid.

self-confidence.'[10] No analysis of what may be impacting on women's self-confidence to such a negative extent that they would 'choose' to undergo a costly and painful procedure is offered.

In contrast, FGC is described as 'a barbaric act of ritualised cruelty',[11] and although the title of this article acknowledges that the practice is taking place in Britain, the young women are not referred to as British. In fact, in distinctly orientalist terms, one is described as having 'the fine-boned elegance typical of her native Somalia'.[12] Despite the expression of shock that FGC is being practiced in the UK, no questions are raised over how the shift in location may impact on the meaning attributed to this practice, which is simply described as taking place 'for a variety of reasons.'[13] A Detective Inspector is quoted as remarking '"I met one group of Somalis and got the message that cutting was even stronger here than in Somalia, [...] it seems, they feel the need to keep their traditions going"'.[14] Thus, to a limited extent, raising the issue that context may affect this practice. However, what may influence FGC being employed as a form of defiance or resistance, rather than simply a submission to cultural demands, is distinctly absent. As with the character, Tashi, in Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, who underwent the process of FGC in an attempt to display her allegiance with her tribe and resist the pressures of colonialism – already discussed in chapter 4 of this thesis – the motivations behind FGC are neither fixed nor stable. Although undertaken as an act of resistance, Tashi came to understand FGC as a form of patriarchal cruelty masquerading as a traditional cultural practice. Tashi's experience, though fictional, demonstrates how complicating the practice of FGC, and acknowledging the multiplicity of meanings that FGC can embody, far from providing an excuse for this practice, can actually help eradicate it.

I argue throughout this thesis, that reliance on cultural stereotypes present the liberated Western woman as not simply the binary opposite of what Chandra Talpade Mohanty has

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[10] Ibid.

[11] 'The Unspeakable Practice of Female Circumcision That's Destroying Young Women's Lives in Britain,' in *The Daily Mail*, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-505796/The-unspeakable-practice-female-circumcision-thats-destroying-young-womens-lives-Britain.html [accessed 25th February 2014].

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

termed the 'average Third World woman' who 'leads an essentially truncated life',[15] but in fact creates this 'liberated Western woman' through an insistence on what she is not, namely a victim of her culture. Thus the 'average Third World woman' and the 'liberated Western woman' become discursive, politicized categories that are mobilized to promote specific aims. With regard to discussions around FGC, although the stated aim is to protect vulnerable women and girls, the lack of any prosecutions of those who practice or insist upon their daughters undergoing FGC raises the question of whether the mobilization of these categories is in fact helpful, or whether they are instead fulfilling the task of discrediting multiculturalism and increasing cultural tensions.

As I have already stated, increased media interest in FGC, and 'honour'-based violence should not be considered as separate or unrelated to increased global and cultural tensions following the terrorist attacks of 9/11and 7/7, not least because these issues are all too easily co-opted into Islamophobic attacks on Muslim communities. As suggested in chapter 5, the sensationalizing of 'honour'-based violence in relation to reporting of domestic violence, both supports the notion of the West as somehow 'post-violent' with regard to violence against women, and feeds in to Islamophobic stereotypes of Muslim men as being inherently violent and Muslim culture, inherently bad for women. The notion of cultures outside of the West as inherently patriarchal or bad for women is also discussed in chapter 1, particularly with reference to Susan Moller Okin, who goes as far as to claim that some women may be 'much better off if the culture into which they were born were [...] to become extinct'.[16]

Uma Narayan challenges the concept of the global South, or Eastern cultures as being more inherently violent than Western cultures, in her comparative analysis of 'dowry' murders and American gun violence against women. She concludes that 'although the majority of women murdered by partners are in fact murdered with firearms, gun control has not emerged strongly as a U.S feminist issue'.[17] Narayan suggests that the explanation for this is that 'while Indian women repeatedly suffer "death by culture" [...] American women seem

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[15] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity,* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2003), p.22.

[16] Susan Moller Okin, 'Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?' in *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?,* Susan Moller Okin, ed Joshua Cohen, Matthew Howard and Martha C. Nussbaum, (Chichester, West Sussex: Princeton University Press, 1999), p.22.

[17] Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism*, (Oxon: Routledge 1997), p.117.

relatively immune to such analyses'.[18] Following the events of 9/11 and 7/7, and more recently the murder of British Fusilier, Lee Rigby, in Woolwich, motivation for maintaining the idea of the West as 'post-violent' and women from other cultures, particularly Muslim, as at almost constant risk from 'death by culture,' has increased. As argued in the introduction to this thesis, drawing from Laura J. Shepherd's analysis of the language used by the Bush administration in an attempt to produce a 'legitimate narrative of war',[19] the notion of women as victims of their culture can serve to reinforce the argument for both an aggressive foreign policy, and a less benign form of multiculturalism where the focus has shifted from integration to assimilation.

Furthermore, it is my contention that, with regard to 'honour'-based violence, as with FGC, the consistent framing of women as victims of their culture inhibits communities from speaking out against these acts. As I argue in chapter 5, women are presented with a false choice between their communities or culture, and living without violence. This fails to acknowledge the plurality of cultures, assuming them as simply static sites of traditional, and thus assumedly patriarchal, norms. It also refuses to acknowledge that for many women these communities and families are equally a source of support, as oppression. As Hazel Carby has argued from a Black British perspective, '[w]e would not wish to deny that the family can be a source of oppression for us but we also wish to examine how the black family has functioned as a prime source of resistance to oppression.'[20] In the current climate of Islamophobia and the backlash against multiculturalism, family groups and community can arguably be seen to offer women, and particularly British Muslim women who have become to be seen as the essential, and crucially, highly visible, embodiment of the 'other,' a much needed support network.

By discussing 'honour'-based violence in the same terms as domestic violence, the intention is not to lessen the responsibility of the community and families in valuing women and protecting them from the violent actions of others, but rather to allow for greater

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[18] Ibid., p.117.

[19] Laura J. Shepherd, 'Veiled References: Construction of Gender in the Bush Administration Discourse on the Attacks on Afghanistan post – 9/11,' in *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, vol.8, Issue 1, (March 2006), pp.19-41, p.19.

[20] Hazel Carby, 'White Woman Listen! Black feminism and the boundaries of sisterhood,' in *Black British Feminism: A Reader*, ed. Heidi Safia Mirza, (London: Routledge, 1997), pp.45-53, p.46.

community engagement with these issues without insisting that entire cultures must be denounced. As Arjun Appadurai argues in his essay 'Dialogue, Risk and Conviviality':

> [t]o be effective, dialogue must be to some extent about shared ground, selective agreement and provisional consensus. When foundational convictions come on to the table, the improvisational element of dialogue is endangered and the stakes become impossibly high, since basic convictions have to be made commensurable. One major example of this risk is the current dialogue between the Islamic world and the Christian European world, in which dialogue too quickly moves to doctrinal and ethical foundations, without paying attention to more specific and limited areas.[21]

Acknowledgment of the prevalence of domestic violence in the West in discussions on 'honour'-based violence does not diminish either of these crimes, but, instead, allows for the acceptance of 'shared ground' from which active theories of how to end this violence can be drawn without the unnecessary vilification of one culture, or conversely, the acclaim of another.

Appadurai suggests, '[a] struggle over headscarves in schools need not become a struggle over competing views of human universality.'[22] However, this requires that the multiplicities of meanings behind wearing a headscarf are acknowledged, as well as how these meanings are impacted upon, and liable to change depending on location, rather than the simplistic assumption that veiling is always a mark of oppression. It is not enough for Western feminists straightforwardly to propose that the veil is no more oppressive than the diet industry, for example. Again, as Pedwell has stressed, '[i]t is crucial to ask, for instance, what such cross-cultural constructions of commonality may leave out, or cover over.'[23] Namely, that depending on various factors such as location of enunciation, veiling can be as much as a mark of resistance as submission. Similarly, although strict adherence to Western beauty and fashion norms can, in the West, be seen as submitting to oppressive standards imposed upon women, for some they can also act as a marker of rebellion. This returns to the notion that, in order to theorize the multiple, and increasingly subtle, forms of oppression affecting women across cultures, fourth-wave feminists must adopt a fluid approach to agency that does not insist on a static, Western definition. However, it also requires a return to acknowledging the influence of social factors in any analysis, rather than predominantly focussing on individuals. Although acknowledging women's agency is, I believe crucial to

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[21] Arjun Appadurai, 'Dialogue, Risk and Conviviality,' in *Can There Be Life Without The Other?,* ed. António Pinto Ribeiro, (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2009), pp.1-13, p.2.

[22] Ibid., p.2.

[23] Carolyn Pedwell, *Feminism, Culture and Embodied Practice: the Rhetorics of Comparison,* (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), p.6.

any feminist analysis that is seeking to avoid representing women as simply passive victims of culture or patriarchy, the presence of agency should not simplistically be mistaken to mean the absence of oppression. As with the Rochdale case discussed in chapter 5, although the young women victims had arguably made 'choices,' these 'choices' were not made in a context of their own making or control; nor should they been seen to negate or trivialize the young women's status as victims.

As explored in chapter 3 of this thesis, Rosalind Gill questions the viability of making agency, autonomy and 'choice' central to feminist research, asking 'how well such terms serve contemporary feminism.'[24] Gill advocates instead for what she terms, 'critical respect,' an approach that does not dismiss women's own assertions of agency but also does not fail to interrogate the social frameworks that shape and inform these choices. This seems to provide a useful solution to navigating between 'agency' and 'oppression.' Critical respect allows for the recognition that individuals may be making choices within conditions that can be considered oppressive. However, just as the fact that choices are being made does not necessarily imply that the women exercising agency are entirely free from oppression, nor does the existence of oppressive frameworks or social structures negate the importance of recognizing choice. In adopting this view of critical respect, the fourth wave must attempt to strike a balance between acknowledging the agency and experiences of individuals, while addressing the oppression and needs of groups. This is central to addressing cross-cultural issues and the claims of multiculturalism that can, at times, risk privileging the rights of minority groups over the rights of individuals, and particularly women, within that group. However, in tipping the balance too far the other way, the success of individuals can be held up as representative of the possibilities afforded to all within the group, leading to the kind of 'power' feminism, or increasingly, post-feminism, as discussed throughout this thesis.

Although navigating difference is, and should be, a key concern for fourth-wave feminism, as it arguably has been since at least the latter half of the second wave, this should not be at the expense of theorizing any shared experiences or common ground based on gender. This is not to say that the experience of gender oppression is the same for all women. However, in seeking to ensure, quite rightly, that race, class, sexuality, sex and ability are all considered in mainstream feminist analysis, feminists should not go so far as to remove

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[24] Rosalind C. Gill, 'The Difficulties and Dilemmas of Agency and 'Choice' for Feminism,' in *European Journal of Women's Studies*, vol.14, (London: Sage Publications, 2007), pp.69-80, p.72.

gender from the equation altogether. These tensions can also be found in accusations that intersectional feminism, is in fact a return to identity or 'race' politics that undermines any coherent feminist practice, rather than a method for allowing a more nuanced analysis of the multiple axes that influence women's oppression. The pitting of 'white' feminism against intersectional feminism in online discussions implies 'white' as an uncomplicated and homogenous identity that ironically reinscribes racial stereotyping, suggesting the possibility of a pure 'other,' just as identities are becoming increasingly mixed and hybrid. This in turn leads to white feminists dismissing notions of white privilege as they are unable to recognize themselves and their actions personally in the description of white feminism. Conversely, accepting the existence of white feminism as a homogenous category without question can lead to white feminists being unable to move forward from a position of simply acknowledging their complicity and expressing their guilt. In response to the *Twitter* debate that was developed under the hashtag #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen, started by Mikki Kendall, Sarah Milstein wrote '5 Ways White Feminists can Address Our Own Racism.' This contained some practical, and arguably common sense advice for the practice of anti-racist feminism, such as '[l]isten to people of color'[25] and 'identify when people of color are underrepresented or misrepresented, and speak out about this.'[26] However, Milstein also more problematically argues that as a white feminist you must 'recognize that even when your intentions are truly good, that's totally meaningless.'[27] Although somewhat ironically, Milstein's intentions may be good in advocating for this position, in reality what she is suggesting is recognizing race above all other factors as the most salient feature in legitimizing discourse. This seems at best an example of what Paul Gilroy has termed 'cheap pseudo-solidarities',[28] and at worst a reinforcing of the notion of people of colour as a homogenous group. In reality what may be problematic for Black feminists within a mainstream, white feminist analysis, may not be the same as the issues a Muslim feminist would raise. Returning to Anne Phillips' notion of an 'aspiration towards universality',[29] as mentioned in the preceding chapter, I believe sets out a pragmatic approach to balancing the

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[25] Sarah Milstein, '5 Ways White Feminists Can Address Our Own Racism,' in *The Huffington Post*, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sarah-milstein/5-ways-white-feminists-can-address-our-own-racism_b_3955065.html [accessed 28th February 2014].
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Paul Gilroy, *Between Camps: Nations, Cultures and the Allure of Race*, (London: Routledge, 2004), p.6.
[29] Anne Phillips, 'Universal Pretensions in Political Thought,' in *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates,* ed. Michèle Barrett and Anne Phillips, (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992), p.28.

needs of acknowledging difference, whilst maintaining the possibility for 'radical transformation.'[30]

I have argued for the importance of an intergenerational approach throughout this thesis, stressing the need to return to the past in order to move feminism forward and for its contributions to be meaningful. I have also advocated for a theory that, although complex and rich enough to avoid presenting a one-size-fits all approach to feminism, which in reality fits no one particularly well, is still practical enough for purpose. The impetus that feminism must do something should not be lost. However, as simple as that may sound, the demands of imagining a feminism capable of avoiding essentialism and colonial-inscribed universalisms, whilst maintain the ability for action, has, as I have suggested, been troubling feminists for decades. What is striking is both how many of the discussions taking place within and about feminism now are so deeply reminiscent of those taking place in previous 'waves,' and also how necessary and essential these discussion still are. In the previous chapter I have suggested that fourth-wave feminists must balance the benefits offered by social media, and media engagement in general, with the tendency that these media have in presenting an overly simplistic and homogenous view of feminism. Within this thesis, I have sought to balance the importance of recognizing the efforts and victories of previous generations of feminists who have undoubtedly made gains for women, with the necessity of problematizing post-feminist rhetoric that seeks to present feminism as concluded or irrelevant. This returns to discussions of postfeminism and post-feminism. Despite suggesting that fourth-wave feminists can benefit a great deal from engaging with the debates that led to the notion of postfeminism, care must be taken to avoid slipping into post-feminism. This is not simply because without the hyphen each becomes a homonym, whereby although looking and sounding the same, each in fact has a rather different meaning. It is also because postfeminism's problematizing of the category 'woman' can all too easily lead to post-feminist assertions that the time for a theory which places gender at its centre has passed.

Challenging this vision of post-feminism, as well as wresting feminism from those who seek to employ its rhetoric to support their own, often distinctly 'un-feminist' aims is, I believe, also a primary concern for fourth-wave feminism. This involves both an intergenerational approach to feminism that allows feminists to learn from one another,

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[30] Ibid., p.28.

benefiting from feminisms' rich and varied past, and the fostering of stronger relationships between academic feminism, or those producing theory, and feminist activism. As I suggest in chapter 2 with regard to Femen, feminist activism that lacks a coherent theoretical background or awareness of previous feminist debates, risks presenting incoherent and inconsistent action. In an attempt to tackle the current challenges facing women, feminists should not shy away from looking back towards past theories and activism, to learn from both its victories and defeats. However, neither should those with an interest in activism refuse to engage with academia.

As cited in chapter 1, bell hooks stresses the need to move beyond an either/or approach to theory and practice, suggesting that the shift from "'I am a feminist" to "I advocate feminism,'"[31] allows for a greater engagement with feminism as a political movement rather than a marker of identity. This in turn could 'encourage greater exploration in feminist theory.'[32] hooks also stresses, however, the need for theory to be more inclusive of women of colour and minorities in its production. This means drawing women of colour and from minority groups into academia, rather than simply producing theory that has these women as its subject. With regard to this thesis, there are areas where this research could be further developed to engage with women across cultures both inside and outside academia. For example, developing practice-based gender studies courses for those working within areas such as domestic violence outreach or immigration outreach programmes, could enable the dissemination of cross-cultural feminist research in order to influence a wider audience and avoid enshrining these debates within academia. I would argue that this was particularly relevant with regard to 'honour'- based violence and FGC, where the language of feminism is frequently invoked in order to 'educate' people about these issues. Yet this is often at best a distinctly partial view of feminism that pays little attention to the complexity of feminisms' history. Furthermore, practice-based courses would also enable feminists predominantly located in academia to learn from those who are confronting these issues facing women on the ground, providing the scope for collaborative projects that do not position women of colour or minority backgrounds as tokens to include in academic research but allow academics to learn from and with these women, establishing them as co-creators. A lack of education or awareness of these issues is cited as a reason for failing women at risk from both FGC and 'honour' based violence, as discussed in chapter 5 with regard to the murder of

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[31] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory From Margin to Center*, (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p.32.
[32] Ibid., p.32.

Banaz Mahmod. Thus, the importance of feminists from across cultures and generations in ensuring women, and those charged with protecting them, have a strong understanding of postcolonial, anti-racist feminist theory and history, can hardly be overstated.

Issues around the validity, or indeed usefulness, of adding another white, feminist voice to topics such as veiling, FGC and 'honour' based violence, have been at the forefront of my mind whilst undertaking this research. Certainly there are many powerful voices speaking out about these issues online who have first-hand experience, that deserve far greater amplification then they already receive. Nimko Ali, to name just one, writes and campaigns consistently against FGC and yet it is only recently that her activism is getting recognition, and possibly not least because a white woman, Lynne Featherstone, has now been engaged in her cause. There are also examples of white feminists engaging with these issues to deeply problematic effect, such as Femen's topless jihad, discussed at length in chapter 2. However, although I have often felt the need to proceed with caution in commenting on these complex and highly contentious issues, I do not agree with the position that one should refrain from commenting entirely on matters outside of their own culture. In fact, I would argue that taking such a position only serves to reinforce the notion of cultures as sealed or fixed, promoting what Narayan has referred to as the 'package picture of cultures.'[33]

Furthermore, practices that may have previously been commented on from a comfortable distance, or even ignored as irrelevant to Western feminism, such as FGC, are now, in part due to multiculturalism, inherently cross-cultural, both in analysis and practice. As Narayan suggests, [m]any "Third-World women's issues" are no longer geographically confined to communities in Third-World nations, as immigration transfuses many of these issues across national boundaries.'[34] This reinforces the view, stated in the introduction to this study, that multiculturalism is blurring the boundaries between third-world feminism and Western feminism, and highlights that these two are no-more hermetically sealed than 'cultures.' Thus, as place ceases to be a defining factor for 'third-world feminism' or 'Western feminism,' closer attention should be paid to how these groups are constructed both through and against one another. Not only would this begin to unravel an unhelpful binary,

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[33] Uma Narayan, 'Undoing the "Package Picture," of Cultures' *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society,* vol.25, no. 4, (2000), pp.1083-1086 p.1084.

[34] Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism*, (Oxon: Routledge 1997), p.153.

which, as already suggested with reference to Mohanty's writing on the 'average Third World women', defines each group through the negative of what they are not in relation to one another, it would also allow for a more robust declaration of solidarity that was predicated not on place, but on politics. 'Western feminism' and 'third-world feminism' then become less markers of identity and more a way of identifying particular patterns of practice.

Shifting the focus from identity to actions, as well as highlighting feminism as a political engagement, as suggested by hooks, also offers a way of moving beyond the paralysis caused by white guilt, as discussed in chapter 2. Linda Alcoff's suggestion that fracturing a homogenous view of white identity may further the production of anti-racist feminist theory can equally apply to 'Western feminism.' Stressing the diversity within this broad umbrella term allows space for the kind of hybrid identities advocated by theorists such as Homi Bhabha, and realized in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*. This is not to deny the history of Western colonialism, or even to dispute the fact that white women benefit from an often unseen and unacknowledged white privilege. It is to suggest, however, that if feminism is to move beyond the recognition of difference and allow for practicing solidarity across borders, not just of race, place or culture, but also of class, sex and sexuality, each of these markers suggests only a partial view of a person must also be recognized. Women's experiences are never solely defined by their race or class. Furthermore, as previously suggested with regard to the role of family, what could be of benefit to women in one situation, may be the root of their oppression in another. In a sense, this creates a version of what Bhabha has termed 'the Third space.' Bhabha suggests '[t]he intervention of the Third space, which makes the structure of meaning an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation [...]. Such an intervention quite properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force'.[35] I would argue that the fourth-wave of feminism must occupy a position within this 'Third space,' in order to move beyond notions of cultural insiders/outsiders and adopt a theoretical position that is dynamic enough to respond to changes in meaning created by a shift in the time or place of 'enunciation'.[36] It must also allow for movement between the boundaries of culture, class, sex or race. As Bhabha asserts,

[35] Homi K. Bhabha, 'Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences,' in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader,* ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, (Oxford: Routledge, 2006), p.156.
[36] Ibid., p.156.

'by exploring this hybridity, this "Third Space", we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves.'[37]

Increasingly, throughout the writing of this thesis, the question of how 'insider' voices may be privileged or assumed to lend 'authenticity' to cultural critiques, especially when those voices support a Western position of superiority, was raised. Again, I return to Hirsi Ali; although initially her assertions about the failings of Western feminism in addressing issues that impact on Muslim women provided a catalyst for this research, the presentation of her ideas as somehow infallible due to her position as an 'insider' quickly became of equal interest. As suggested in the introduction to this thesis, the promotion of the writing and ideas of Hirsi Ali can be seen as an example of the West amplifying those cultural 'insiders' whose views support Western concerns. Although by Milstein's 'rules,' Hirsi Ali's pronouncements on Islam should be held above anything written by a white, non-Muslim feminist, Hirsi Ali's views can hardly be considered representative of all Muslim women. Though it is clearly important to acknowledge feminist critique and activism taking place from within a culture, and thus Hirsi Ali's views on Islam should not be dismissed, to refuse to comment on any culture other than your own also suggests that there are no areas of cross-over or common concern. Ironically, it would also be counter to Hirsi Ali's insistence that Western feminists must engage with the issues facing Muslim women. Furthermore, questions should be raised when those 'insider' voices gaining the majority of exposure and support are adopting a similar position to the dominant group, or indeed reinforcing the idea of the dominant group's superiority. As suggested at the beginning of this chapter, much of this thesis was dedicated to questioning Hirsi Ali's assumptions about Western culture, as well as exploring the assertions she offers about Muslim women.

As cited in chapter 3, with regard to debates taking place around Muslim women's right to veil, Sawitri Saharso suggests that 'the arrival of new cultures in Europe could also be an opportunity to self-critically interrogate European interpretations of the liberal tradition [...] let's not miss that opportunity.'[38] This research was undertaken very much in the spirit of celebrating this opportunity and, rather than focusing on the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism as a source of tension, looking forward to what this

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[37] Ibid., p.157.

[38] Sawitri Saharso, 'The veil as a case of value diversity and European Values,' in *Politics, Religion and Gender: Framing and regulating the veil*, ed. by Sieglinde Rosenberger and Birgit Sauer, (Oxon: Routledge, 2012), pp.205-217, p.214.

relationship may offer feminists. For example, if, as already suggested, Lugones' theory of 'playful "world"-travelling' offers a way to advance feminist anti-racist theory, multiculturalism ensures that feminists need no longer travel very far in order to learn from women whose experiences may be quite unlike their own. Furthermore, the prevalence of online feminist debates means that discussions can take place across cultures and indeed across the world, allowing for frequent encounters with those who are 'other' or whose experiences vastly differ from one's own.

There are, of course, many areas that this research has not thoroughly covered. Perhaps a topic whose partial exclusion is most notable is that of religion. Although within this thesis I frequently address the position of Muslim women and indeed Muslim feminists, in relation to contemporary feminist debates, I have predominantly chosen to focus on what could be seen as the 'cultural' elements of these complex and nuanced identities, rather than the religious. This has been influenced by my intention of exploring how those in the West, and particularly Western feminism, are responding to issues raised, or perhaps more accurately, projected onto, Muslim women, rather than of interrogating how Muslim women, or any other women of faith, balance their religion with a feminist identity. As I have proposed in relation to the opportunity that Saharso suggests is offered by the interaction between cultures, this thesis was conceived as taking the opportunity to turn a critical lens on 'Western' culture, and specifically assertions of post-feminism, through the debates that often centred on Muslim women, rather than offer a justification for Muslim feminism. Also, returning to Appadurai's notion of dialogue and risk, steering away from religion was an attempt to highlight shared ground and avoid positioning these debates as conflicts over 'foundational convictions'.[39] However, I do appreciate that there is certainly a place for exploring religion within many of the issues raised by this research, not least with regard to the debates over veiling that have taken place in France, where as well as the rhetoric of feminism and a concern over women's rights, secularism is invoked as providing a rationale for the decision to ban the veil in public spaces. Religion may also play an interesting role in rethinking 'agency.' It is not enough simply to suggest that 'agency' can be found in acts more commonly associated with submission, but perhaps 'submission' also needs to be rethought. This is certainly an area for further thought and research.

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[39] Arjun Appadurai, 'Dialogue, Risk and Conviviality,' in *Can There Be Life Without The Other?,* ed. António Pinto Ribeiro, (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2009), pp.1-13, p.2.

Many issues of sex and sexuality have also been absent from this thesis, creating a largely heteronormative view. This again has partly been due to a lack of space, but also to a decision to anchor this work in the context of a post-9/11 exploration of feminism and multiculturalism. Although, of course, lesbian or transgender experiences would differ from those I discuss in multiple ways. The shift created by 9/11 did not, arguably, thrust these groups into the media spotlight in the same way as it emphasized, and I would claim, sought to exacerbate, tensions between feminism and multiculturalism. However, during the course of writing this thesis, issues pertaining to sexuality have been given considerable media attention, most notably the revising of the Marriage act in 2013 to allow for the marriage of same sex couples in England and Wales.[40] There has also been a noticeable rise in online discussions of issues regarding transgender women, specifically in relation to the high levels of abuse and violence they face, as well as to their often-perceived exclusion from mainstream feminism. Increasingly, intersectional analysis is turning its attention back to sex as a major influence in women's oppression. Just as debates around Western feminisms' response to Muslim women have reignited discussions of colonialism and race within contemporary feminism, questions over transgender women's experiences and rights could see a return to discussions of biological essentialism and the performativity of gender. This is briefly touched upon in the previous chapter, however, further research could provide valuable insights into how far feminism has – or hasn't – come from discussions of the sex/gender dichotomy. Again, as with media and internet discussions of fourth-wave feminism and 'intersectional feminism,' discussions over tensions between transgender feminists and what are online referred to as TERF's (Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists), are frequently without any acknowledgement of the history of these debates.

Within the final chapter of this thesis, I have tentatively advocated for the role of the internet, and specifically social media sites such as *Twitter*, in advancing feminist concerns. In fact, without the internet and the almost constant access this allows to global news, this research would have taken a very different shape. It is also true to say that through engaging with feminists on *Twitter* whose experiences, and often politics, radically differ from my own, I have both adapted and revised my position making it a valuable tool for learning and research. This process of adaptation has been at times uncomfortable, and frequently confrontational, leading me to sympathize to an extent with Michelle Goldberg's

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[40] 'Marriage (same sex couples) 2013' on Legislation.gov.uk, http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2013/30/contents/enacted [accessed 28th February 2014].

pronouncement, discussed in the preceding chapter, that *Twitter* feminism is 'toxic.'[41] However, it has also been an affirming experience to be surrounded, albeit virtually, by women who proudly assert that they are feminists and engage in debates from a feminist perspective, especially in these supposedly post-feminist times. Although the internet may not always be the most productive or comfortable space for feminists, it is somewhat reassuring to know there are at least still feminists there. However, I would caution against claims that suggest the internet and social media can solely be credited with the rise of the fourth wave, not least because of the tendency that this has in presenting feminism as ahistorical. Also, as I have emphasized in the previous chapter, at a time when feminism should be at its most complex, challenging homogenizing views of race, culture and class, the fourth wave must resist attempts to simplify it.

Online feminism, and specifically *Twitter,* may, however, go some way towards circumventing some of the perceived tensions between multiculturalism and feminism, as suggested in chapter 1 with reference to Okin's essay, 'Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?' In part Okin's problematizing of the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism stems from the viable concern that those who speak on behalf of minority cultures are dominant members of those groups and thus frequently male. As Okin suggests, 'the more powerful, male members are those who are generally in a position to determine and articulate the group's beliefs, practices, and interests.'[42] However, I would like to suggest that *Twitter* allows for a disruption to this, providing a space for those who are perhaps not usually heard or considered spokespeople for their groups, to air their views. It also provides a platform for those minority voices to directly challenge cultural or political leaders who may have previously been able speak on their behalf without fear of interruption or disagreement. Crucially, the relative anonymity available to *Twitter* users allows these challenges to be made without fear of reprisals from community or family members. This allows minority members to speak freely, removing to an extent, the concern that their views may be influenced by coercion. Writing on forced marriage and the importance of making it 'easier for people to get their voices (not someone else's) heard',[43] Anne Phillips suggests

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[41] Michelle Goldberg, 'Feminism's Toxic Twitter Wars,' in *The Nation*, http://www.thenation.com/article/178140/feminisms-toxic-twitter-wars [accessed 13th February 2014].
[42] Susan Moller Okin, 'Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?' in *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?,* Susan Moller Okin, ed Joshua Cohen, Matthew Howard and Martha C. Nussbaum, (Chichester, West Sussex: Princeton University Press, 1999), p.3.
[43] Anne Phillips, *Multiculturalism without Culture*, (Oxfordshire: Princeton University Press, 2007), p.178.

'[g]uarantees of privacy and anonymity are usually crucial components when there is an issue of coercion, [...].'[44] I would argue *Twitter* can be seen to provide a 'safe' space for unheard or marginalized members of minority groups to challenge both those from within their groups, that may seek to talk over or misrepresent them, as well as those from outside, who may assume the dominant voice to be the authority on the groups' needs and practices, taking minority voices' silence to equal collusion or consent. This potentially alleviates the issue, raised by Okin, of engaging solely with the patriarchal, dominant, elements of groups and cultures, as well as encouraging moving away from the view of cultures as homogenous or static. As with the #mulismahpride response to Femen, mentioned in chapter two of this research, *Twitter* can also provide a platform for challenging those from outside a culture who, although they recognize that dominant cultural voices may be misrepresenting minorities, project their own ideas of what may benefit these people rather than allow those who they are seeking to help, speak.

I suggest this solution tentatively, however, due to awareness that anonymity online, and specifically on *Twitter*, despite having definite benefits, can also raises certain concerns. For example, as discussed in the previous chapter with regard to the prevalence of online misogyny, and particularly the experiences of Caroline Criado-Perez, Stella Creasy and Mary Beard, anonymity has proved to be problematic in dissuading people from being abusive and threatening. Although *Twitter* can suspend the accounts of those behaving in an abusive manner, there is nothing to stop an individual simply setting up a new account. There is also the important question of what counts as 'abuse' and what is valid disagreement or vehement discussion. Although with Criado-Perez, Creasy and Beard, there were definite, and in the case of Criado-Perez, criminal, instances of abuse, these cases are not always easy to clarify, especially when related to how much offence they cause. For example, as stated in the previous chapter, although two people were prosecuted for sending abusive messages to Criado-Perez, she has suggested that a large amount of her distress was caused by disagreement from fellow feminists, rather than those acting illegally. Similarly, although Michelle Goldberg cites 'Toxic Twitter feminism' as part of the problem rather than solution,

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[44] Ibid., p.178.

as Courtney E. Martin and Vanessa Valenti, have suggested, there is an important distinction between valid critique and abuse.[45]

I would argue that despite the difficulties and potential problems raised by anonymity on *Twitter*, the value that this offers in allowing minority voices to speak out should not be underestimated in any judgements of how to make the internet 'safer' for women. Although the importance of tackling online misogyny, rape and death threats should not be underplayed, the risk of causing offense should equally not be allowed to silence dissent. The relationship between feminism and the internet is clearly a place for further research that must address various questions. For example, why, in an environment that can offer a gender and sex neutral space where people can present themselves as 'unembodied,' does such misogyny still prevail? And if online media is truly to be central to the fourth wave of feminism, how can these norms be transcended, allowing for the potential of online media to be utilized in a way that moves feminism beyond the boundaries of previously established debates? Key to my thoughts on the direction and possibilities of the fourth wave in moving beyond these boundaries are the concepts of 'world'-travelling, critical respect, and occupying the 'Third space.' Each of these concepts can be practiced and furthered by a positive engagement with online feminism and multiculturalism, celebrating the opportunities that these offer feminism, both in encouraging more frequent encounters and collaborations with the 'other,' but also in utilizing these encounters continually to re-evaluate and invigorate feminism.

The events of 9/11 and the subsequent backlash against multiculturalism, which has frequently involved invoking a very specific, Western view of feminism in an attempt to support a more negative view of cultural difference, have also served to turn the spotlight of public attention on to feminism. Although perhaps not a form of feminism preferable to many, or indeed recognizable to some, this nonetheless provides an opportunity to move feminism forward. Though certainly as fraught as other waves, the fourth wave of feminism must again navigate the difficult territory of gender, culture, sex, race, class and difference, not to argue for a one-size-fits-all feminism that presents a surface appearance of unity, but at the very least, to insist that amongst discussions of race and culture, gender still matters. In

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[45] Courtney E. Martin and Vanessa Valenti, 'Guest Post: #femfuture: Learning in pursuit of sustainability,' on *Feministing*, http://feministing.com/2013/05/30/guest-post-femfuture-learning-in-pursuit-of-sustainability/ [accessed 13th February 2013].

these supposedly post-feminist times, feminism, in all its complexity must be discussed, fought over and debated, as publicly and frequently as possible, even if only to reclaim it from those who seek to use it as a cynical tool of colonial imperialism.

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