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**THE POLITICS OF HIJAB IN AMERICAN CULTURE**

by

**NOHA F BEYDOUN**

**DISSERTATION**

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

2020

MAJOR: ENGLISH

Approved by:

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Advisor

Date

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**2020**

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**DEDICATION**

*To my mother and my daughters—  
the sky and its stars*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I begin in the name of God, the Lord of all beings big and small.

I sincerely extend my appreciation to my dream team dissertation committee: Dr. Sarika Chandra, Dr. Lisa Winters, Dr. Chera Kee, and Dr. Evelyn Alsultany. They were incredibly knowledgeable, kind, and flexible. I am indebted to the invaluable wisdom offered to me by the most inspiring director a graduate student could ask for. Working with Dr. Chandra has been a truly enriching experience both academically and personally. Dr. Alsultany influenced my scholarly interests far before the pursuit of this degree—and has extended her help in ways far beyond the typical role of an outside reader. I am so grateful.

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## INTRODUCTION:

In this project, I examine the relationship between the politics of hijab in contemporary American culture and United States imperialism. Historically, the United States government has created a well-known narrative that people who identify as Muslim are uncivil, premodern, and a threat to western civilization<sup>1</sup>. This narrative is propagated through modes of popular political and cultural media and has been necessary to legitimizing American global hegemony<sup>2</sup>. Post 9/11, the so-called “war on terror” has depended on creating the war through the construction of Muslim terrorist figures. So, too, was the creation of the “Muslim woman” figure both domestically and overseas as a symbol of subjugation in need of liberation. The strongest example supporting the narrative that Muslim women need “saving,” media emphasizes, is that they are especially oppressed, as evidenced by the presence of a head covering—her hijab (Abu Lughod, 2002). Propagating across various U.S media outlets are images and discourse creating an “uncivilized Muslim man,” and, more commonly visible, the oppressed “Muslim woman<sup>3</sup>” figure burdened by a black hijab--face covered and voiceless. Many scholars have considered this construction of a Muslim terrorist<sup>4</sup>, and, importantly, the oppressed Muslim woman, as a government strategy that justifies overseas practices to secure national resources and geopolitical interests. Accordingly, constructing a culture domestically—within the United States—directly serves and informs US

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<sup>1</sup> Jack Shaheen has published multiple articles tracing the ways Arabs and Muslims have been vilified in American popular media and culture both pre and post 9/11. See for example, “Media Coverage of the Middle East” (1985), “Rules of Engagement”: A Highwater Mark in Hollywood Hate Mongering With U.S. Military “Cooperation” (2000), “Hollywood’s Muslim Arabs” (2000), “Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People” (2003).

<sup>2</sup> In *Orientalism*, Edward Said famously coins the term “orientalism,” in which 18<sup>th</sup> century travel writers described the Middle East as barbaric and uncivil. Said argues this discourse was essential to establish “Western” hegemony over Eastern parts of the world.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Elia (2006), Droogsma (2007), Maira (2009), Alsultany (2013)

<sup>4</sup> Mahmoud Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*. New York: Pantheon Books. 2005. Print.

imperial interests abroad. The politics of liberating the “oppressed” Muslim woman figure within the US, for example, entails that the West can somehow save her from veiling and forced marriages she is supposedly subjected to in the East; such rhetoric that entails protecting particular freedoms of choice for Muslim women in the US mask governments simultaneous engagement in practices of disciplining Muslim men (such as through surveillance) in Muslim communities (Maira, 641). Furthermore, such narratives that operate domestically also shape the public’s understanding of Muslim majority countries, and directly service the justification of US imperial practices. Imperial feminism, for example, assumes that the United States can take its “freedoms” to other parts of the world, to liberate oppressed Muslim women, even if it is through means of war (Maira, 641). Accordingly, notions of liberation and freedom are often negotiated through the hijab of such constructed Muslim women figures, and the narrative of their oppression, as I will show, is used to justify US government’s imperial practices beyond the nation’s borders.

Yet, migrations of Muslims into the United States (from as early on as the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> from countries including Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Palestine, fleeing their homelands from war<sup>5</sup>) continues. As the population of Muslims in the US continues to grow, their increasing presence in the US, as an otherwise “foreignized” civilization, cannot be ignored. Technology and cultural mediums have given Muslims their own platforms to speak (through popular mediums such as fiction, political advocacy groups, memoirs, activism, political media, etc), and creating this narrative of “othering” has become far more complicated than the typically depicted scenes of the imperiled Muslim woman figure. Immigration, in particular, for example—of people of “deviant” cultures and “origins” that have otherwise been “othered” by the United States government and media—has necessitated the creation of cultural values that ensures the continued

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/feature/islam-in-america/>



subjugation of people<sup>6</sup>. Activists, scholars, and ordinary Muslims Americans within the United States have pushed back against the stereotyped social constructs of the iconic “Muslim woman<sup>7</sup>” figure created by popular media, and these narratives will be the subject of this dissertation. Accordingly, in order to legitimize their place in American society, women who identify as Muslim find themselves in various cultural venues to (re)write their stories particularly focused on conversations and misconceptions around hijab. Such narratives are products of self-representations intended to combat misrepresentation, and often push back against media depictions on hijab as oppressive<sup>8</sup>. Currently, the dominant conversation in American cultural discourses regarding Muslim women—one that can be identified from even a simple internet search—centers around notions of freedom, oppression, and choice in relation to hijab<sup>9</sup>. While many scholars acclaim such works as voices in representation against and even resistance to popular media depictions<sup>10</sup>, I caution that they are inadvertently validating a specific type of “Muslim-American woman” as a category that is acceptable to national interests. Yet, emphasis on and discourse creating a Muslim woman that is invested in hijab and identity analysis offers an important vantage point by which to understand the ways American culture functions as an integral component to imperial strategy.

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<sup>6</sup> Wendy Brown (2015), for example, discusses the construction of “tolerance” as a way to maintain subjugation of minority races, religions, and sexualities, etc.

<sup>7</sup> Here, by using the term “Muslim American,” I am not interested in the preservation of this category, but rather demonstrating how its associated discourse is used to discipline specific types of people while rewarding others.

<sup>8</sup> See for example, Precious Fondren, “Head strong: Muslim women say the hijab is a symbol of faith, not oppression” (*Toledo Blade*, 2019), Hanna Yusuf, “My Hijab has Nothing to Do With Oppression. It’s a feminist statement” (*The Guardian*, 2015).

<sup>9</sup> A quick Google search on Hijab in America will turn up, for examples, Aymann Ismail and Jeffrey Bloomer, “Hijab Choice in America Through One Muslim Woman’s Experience” (*Slate*, 2017). Jacqueline’s Saper’s “Hijab: An empowering choice in U.S., a symbol of oppression in Iran” (*Seattle Times*, 2019), Loren Marks, “Why do Muslim Women Choose to Wear Hijab in American” (*BYU Magazine*, 2018), David Smith “‘My Choice’: Illhan Omar becomes first to Wear Hijab in US Congress” (*The Guardian*, 2019).

<sup>10</sup> See for example, Elia (2006), Raihanah et al (2015), Ancellin (2009), Newns (2018), and others.

By examining narratives on hijab, I analyze the ways in which US imperialism has taken on new and complicated forms to maintaining its global foreign practices, such that people inadvertently invest in their own oppression. I will unfold this argument momentarily, but, here, I define imperialism as it will be used throughout this dissertation. I understand imperialism to be government's economic, social, and cultural apparatuses that it employs in other territories beyond the US to secure financial gain and political domination. Yet, I also draw upon the term as defined by Amy Kaplan, who notes that imperialism is no longer a "unilinear assertion of power in remote colonies" (Kaplan, 14). Kaplan's definition of imperialism is appropriate for this project since one premise of my work rests on the construction of culture of the "foreign" within the United States as an integral factor to how the US justifies its practices overseas to the public. Kaplan notes that imperialism is no longer just about direct contact with the colonized (physically occupied countries and territories through militancy and force). Rather than being a fixed system of dominating powers of colonizers over the colonized<sup>11</sup>, it is a network of power relations that changes, destabilizes, and presents ambiguities over space and time—through notions of conflict, discipline, and fantasy (Kaplan, 14). Notably, Kaplan distinguishes her own understanding of imperialism through the collapse of boundaries of the US border—as not operating as a binary concept of the influence of power of "here" and "there" with respect to its borders. As I have noted migrations of Muslims in the United States, I emphasize the importance of the complicated ways imperialism with respect to the US's interest in Muslim majority countries is collapsed as what it is situated as "foreign" (the oppressed Muslim women in hijab, for instance) is here in the United States (visible through popular mediums). For this project, imperialism extends to the economic, political, and

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<sup>11</sup> For instance, through oppressive economic and political practices.

historic mechanisms the United States employs to ensure its interests overseas (in securing resources, for example) are both met and justified<sup>12</sup>.

In political conversations that have happened since 9/11, hijab is increasingly emerging as a marker and symbol of Muslim identity in the United States—one that must be presented as, contrary to media narratives, a liberating and empowering practice compatible with American values of freedom and modernity. Accordingly, notions of choice and freedom often work through the hijab through a binary of liberated/dominated woman. Cultural analyses on hijab understand imperialism to be something that restricts and dominates the choice of a group of people to practice culture or wear hijab. For instance, scholarship on hijab in American culture reflects its increasing presence in the American cultural context as modes of resistance to cultural narratives and American imperial practices<sup>13</sup>. Yvonne Yazback Haddad, for example, discusses narratives of Muslim women who wear hijab in the United States as a symbol of protest to colonial practices in Muslim majority countries and resistance to anti-Islamic sentiments that exist within the United States. Such arguments that define hijab as resistance emphasize the freedoms of choice in the US that Muslim women have to practice hijab. As the United States media pushes the narrative of the “oppressed Muslim woman,” other scholars have also discussed how the hijab practice works; that hijab is a form of liberation—one used to resist dominant narratives and cultural expectations<sup>14</sup>. For instance, MD Mahmudul Hassan notes that discourse on hijab is often sharply polarized between those who regard the practice as oppressive, and others who “see it as an enabling tool for dignity, self-worth and freedom” (24). He argues that hijab is a form of freedom for Muslim women. He says hijab is “a tool of liberation from multiple forms of exploitation and from external

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<sup>12</sup> For more on the particulars of how imperialism operates with regard to securing oil in countries overseas, for example, see Harvey (2005).

<sup>13</sup> Examples include Haddad (2001), Cooke (2007), Alghafli (2017),

<sup>14</sup> Others include Abu Lughod (2002), Khader (2006)

and undue pressures; as it is a means of anti-colonial resistance, staunch religious resilience in the modern world and assertion of Muslim identity” (31). That is, Hassan argues against the notions that hijab oppresses Muslim women—instead, he says, is actually a form of liberation for Muslim women from cultural exploitations (such as sexualization) women are subjected to. Yet, situating hijab as the opposite of oppression—as a form of liberation—is only the second side of the same coin. My analysis will show the limitations to these models. For one, we see how through these works, the analysis of hijab is limited because it examines the practice through cultural frameworks that remain circumscribed to discussions on how Muslim women are represented. That is, as scholars define hijab through notions of freedoms of choice, what emerges is a binary of liberated/dominated Muslim women—thereby investing and perpetuating imperial (and, as I will show, neoliberal) discourses of “freedom” that are necessarily used to justify United States imperial practices of domination abroad. Remaining within cultural frameworks that aim to push against media representations overlook the economic and historic understandings that can elucidate the ways such dynamics (the discourse as service to imperialism) is taking shape.

Rather than examining hijab through cultural frameworks that pertain to how Muslim women are represented, or defining the practice through notions of freedom and choice, my own analysis will demonstrate the important ways contemporary American imperialism is mobilized through a liberated/dominated opposition that is operating through notions of the practice. I argue that the notion of choice that governs the opposition of liberated/dominated woman for which hijab is central rests on capitalist notions of market freedoms—such freedoms, as I will define momentarily, include the freedom of individual choice and the freedom to consume. In fact, the politics of liberating a society is domination through capitalist structures—capitalist in the sense that it is a society that depends on the accumulation of wealth. Without this latter perspective,

cultural analysis remains circumscribed to discussions of how Muslim women are represented. The notions of capitalist freedoms provide the language for Muslim women's liberation, leading towards an inevitable embrace of imperialist forces and a desire for inclusion into the US mainstream. My analysis makes clear that this representational inclusion accompanied with choice and freedoms is to be better understood materially through a socio-political and economic framework<sup>15</sup>. For my own theoretical approach, I align myself alongside scholars such as Mahmoud Mamdani and Moustafa Bayoumi, who urge scholars to move past cultural frameworks in examining political outcomes and the marginalization of Muslim Americans in the US. As I will detail later in this introduction, Mamdani notes that “culture talk,” masks complicated historical realities and complex economic dynamics behind identity constructions within the U.S. I extend their work to look at the ways gender, along with race and culture, works through hijab through a binary of a liberated/dominated Muslim woman figure. Throughout this project, I attempt to show the limits of cultural analyses that discuss narratives of Muslim women within cultural frameworks of representation; I point, instead, towards economic and sociopolitical ones that interrogate the forces of US culture to reveal the ways in which identity politics are necessary to securing government (essentially capital) interests.

In this project, I examine the ways in which Muslims self-represent hijab in modes of popular mediums of contemporary American culture—mediums, as I will show, make unlikely alliances with imperialism. In specific, I examine contemporary narratives created mainly post 9/11, but take note to the ways in which the socio-political situation of Muslim women pre 9/11—that is, the ways US government positions Muslim women and hijab in popular media before 9/11—has been largely the same. I will offer a more detailed overview of the chapter break down

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<sup>15</sup> I am indebted to Dr. Chandra, chair of my dissertation committee, for helping me structure my argument as such.

shortly, but, for instance, in Chapter 2, I note that in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, Kahf imagines the social condition for Muslims in the US in the 1980s similarly to the post 9/11 US imagined by Warah in *Where Jasmine Blooms*. Accordingly, while 9/11 may have exacerbated media constructed narratives of “uncivil Muslims” that are a threat to American democracy and in need of liberation--playing on the public’s heightened sense of fear--I demonstrate that United States imperialism with Muslim majority countries in specific was not onset by the tragic events—and instead has formed (and continues to form) through a long history of cultural formation<sup>16</sup> to which constructions of oppressed Muslim woman figure has been integral. I look at the ways Muslim women themselves have responded to such identity formations.

Discourse on hijab produced by those who identify as Muslim within the United States can reveal that they have been conditioned into thinking that ideological constructs (ie, freedom and modernity) of American imperial agendas can serve their interests or represent the values they seek to identify themselves by. Not recognizing the reality that, throughout history, American imperialism has constructed descriptions for ideological hegemony that coincides with international policies, women who identify as Muslim within the US have identified their place in American society within the same framework they attempt to push back against. Rather than completely rejecting the frameworks that have constructed false representations of “Muslim women,”—for example, constructs that suggest Muslim women are “oppressed,” and/or “backwards”--women who identify as Muslim within the United States have been pushed into producing reactionary narratives that define the practice of hijab based on the same neoliberal constructions of modernity and freedom that marginalize them. The result is a binary of a liberated/dominated Muslim woman that operates through hijab, and ultimately an inadvertent

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<sup>16</sup> See McAlister (2001).

acceptance of an American neoliberal ideological hegemony that simultaneously serves a domestic colonialization of marginalized groups within the US--and justifies its global practices abroad. Such practices include economic policies that secure financial gain and war.

As I will show, by investing in the same notions of freedom and modernity mediated through their hijabs in narratives of self-representation, Muslim women are being conditioned to support ongoing US imperial projects that depend on the guise of spreading “freedoms” to other parts of the world. US imperialism has taken shape such that it subtly masks itself as spreading American values of freedom and civility to the rest of the world, while imperial projects replace historical forms of overt colonial occupations of territories and countries through war and force. As I will show, colonialism has taken on new mechanisms to maintain its national narratives and to continue to manage groups within the United States. Accordingly, women who identify as Muslim are now involuntary soldiers inadvertently accepting and propelling notions of freedom and modernity solely defined and determined by American neoliberal agendas, thereby contributing to their own colonization within the United States—a domestic colonization that survives by discourse on hijab, and that guarantees United States government imperial interests in Muslim majority countries continues to be justified and operate. By analyzing narratives produced by women who identify as Muslim within the United States within a framework that pushes beyond identity politics towards historical, economic, and social ones will reveal that hijab that is described in “cultural” terms (i.e. identity, etc) is actually deeply tied to capital economic gain, and that Muslim women are actually being oppressed when they invest in the neoliberal rhetoric of “freedom.” Important to note, here, on the scope of this project, is that I am specifically interested in analyzing discourses in which hijab is understood through notions of freedom (liberation/oppression). It is this dominant conversation—where hijab is defined through notions

of choice—which I assert is mobilizing neoliberal constructs of freedom that the United States depends on to serve its imperial interests.

Examining the ways that women who identify as Muslims are themselves investing in their own colonization one could only ask, are more marginalized groups doing the same? Accordingly, how does society within the United States consent to imperialism without realization? As I will outline over the next pages, while extensive scholarship has demonstrated that imperialism operates along different cultural products, social constructs, and racialization of marginalized groups—examining how it has taken shape through hijab offers a unique vantage point by which to examine the ways marginalized groups are conditioned to protest through the same language that oppresses them. Hijab, as I will explain in further detail later on in this introduction, is a unique vantage point by which one can draw the connections between US government and imperial projects as it is a singular site in which concepts of race, culture, and gender—all constructs which have been historically used to identify the nation—are mediated through simultaneously.

Though scholars such as Leila Ahmed have noted that, historically, hijab has been a practice not exclusive to Muslim women<sup>17</sup>, I use the term hijab throughout this project to refer to the visible presence of a head covering (headscarf), practiced by women who identify as Muslim all over the world. This project should not qualify the reasons why many Muslim women wear hijab, or why others do not—whether personal, religious, etc. In fact, as it will become clear through this project, as imperialism takes shape through the binary of liberated/dominated woman through hijab, hijab really becomes not a question of visible marker but rather works through the ideological discourse surrounding the practice. Instead, I am interested in the way imperialism has

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<sup>17</sup> In *A Quiet Revolution*, Ahmed notes that up until the colonial era in Egypt (late 1800s) “Jewish, Christian, and Muslim women covered their heads and wore some version of what we today call the veil” (36). Ahsraf Zahedi (2011) also notes, “although the veil is associated with Islam, research indicates that veiling, as a status symbol, was practice in Persia and the Byzantine before the advent of Islam” (187).



taken on new forms through discourse on hijab as an operational site necessary to ensuring a domestic colonialization of “Muslim-American women” within the United States for international gain. Such narratives emerge in the forms of advocacy groups, novels, memoirs, and political iconography; looking at the ways hijab is presented through such forms, especially for their distinctive relationships to imperialism, will reveal that Muslim women themselves are subjugated even as they attempt to resist. Over the course of this introduction, I will establish the concepts of freedom and modernity as defined through neoliberal and capitalist frameworks—ones that largely shape the binary of liberated/dominated Muslim woman figure, and are integral to understanding the ways women who identify as Muslim have been conditioned to legitimize their identity through such false conceptions. I will also provide an overview of scholarship on colonialism, imperialism, and hijab that informs my work as I situate this project as a perspective in American studies. Finally, I give a brief breakdown of the chapter content.

### Neoliberal Freedoms and Cultural Modernity

Integral to this project, as I argue that discourse on hijab mobilizes a binary of liberated/dominated Muslim woman, is to first understand notions of “freedom” as defined by neoliberalism (and to define what neoliberalism actually is). Throughout this work, I examine the ways a binary of liberated/dominated Muslim women that propels US government imperial practices abroad operates through the site of hijab in various cultural narratives. Importantly, I am not imposing a binary reading of representations of Muslim women, but am arguing that by mediating notions of freedom through hijab, what emerges is a binary of liberated/dominated Muslim figure. At times, this opposition takes seems more apparent in the form of freedom/unfreedom—while the two are connected, they are slightly different. The liberated woman figure is one who achieves neoliberal freedoms—either by reconciling hijab with free

market capitalism or moving away from hijab as an oppressive or traditional practice. She is liberated in the sense that she, through the protections of American value systems, has somehow overcome the oppression she is otherwise subjugated to from by traditional constructs of Islam in the media (i.e. oppressive men figures who subjugate her, forcing her into domination and submission of “uncivilized life”). The liberated/dominated discourse can interchange with respect to hijab—the figure can be liberated through hijab (through freedom of choice to practice in American spaces) or liberated from hijab (through also freedoms of choice liberate women from having to practice). Either liberation, nevertheless, serves the same imperial purpose: which is to justify the quest to liberate (through dominative practices) her otherwise dominated (unfree) counterparts. Yet, as I will show, as these binary figures emerge (when notions of freedom are negotiated through hijab), liberation nearly always implies a contrast to counterparts (other Muslim women) who are still dominated. This project will show that these pushback to stereotypical figures created by popular media leads to the creation of a “liberated” Muslim women figure who inevitably reconciles her interests according to freedoms prescribed by free market capital values.

As the narrative that Muslim women are oppressed (or more essentially, need to be liberated) is continuously perpetuated, and has been magnified post 9/11, many scholars writing on Muslim American women have taken to define notions of freedom as it pertains to cultural relativity—to different cultures and through feminist frameworks. However, it is not the scope of my own current work to define freedom as it should or should not pertain to Muslim women—or society in general. Rather, I am interested in the ways it is defined through neoliberal frameworks, the ways it is reduced to freedoms of choice through hijab, and the ways in which Muslim women inadvertently validate such notions. That is, defining freedom as it pertains to Muslim women in relative terms (that is, culturally in different parts of the world) only situates freedom as something

that differs from place to place, from societies to societies, rather than questioning the forces that construct such notions of freedom and liberation. For instance, Abu-Lughod (2002) and Serene Khader (2016) have explored concepts of freedom as defined by different feminist scholars. Abu-Lughod notes that freedom is defined by Western ideologies, and argues that “cultural relativism” is limited when thinking about whether or not Muslim women in the Middle East are oppressed. Khader, on the other hand, defines “Enlightenment Freedom” as a “positive freedom according to which the acceptance of traditional dictates constitutes an impediment to self-realization” (732). Her main point is that being a feminist and adhering to tradition are not mutually exclusive categories for Muslim women (as some scholars suggest). Beyond cultural relativities, neither instances of scholarship recognize that Western ideas of freedom as neoliberal constructions are specifically crafted to maintain global dominance. Rather than engaging with defining freedom as relative to “culture” or what it means within scholarly disciplines (feminism), I turn to an understanding of the constructs of freedom as defined by American neoliberal ideologies—ones that create narratives within the nation that serve imperial purposes overseas.

Instead of defining freedom as it pertains to Muslim women, I move beyond cultural frameworks to understand freedom as a construct of capital interests. That is, I do not seek to define freedom, because I am not particularly interested in what it means for Muslim women in relative terms. Rather, I am interested in the ways it is reduced as the choice to practice hijab for Muslim women under a neoliberal system. As I argue that discourse on hijab is fueling neoliberal constructs of freedom needed to justify practices of domination abroad, I first define neoliberalism in its function in capital society. Here, David Harvey offers a useful framework that connects constructs of neoliberal rhetoric of “freedom” and the ways it serves capitalist interests. Creating a concept of “freedom,” which I will define momentarily, he argues, has been essential to

mobilizing neoliberalism—a project Harvey defines as essentially “the financialization of everything” (33). A neoliberal state is one that functions to secure the “freedom” of capital accumulation within the US and beyond. For this project, I employ Wendy Brown’s definition of neoliberalism as a “distinctive mode of reason, production of subjects, ‘conduct of conduct’, and scheme of valuation” (4). This mode of reasoning is central to capital states—governments that operate in the interest of securing wealth and capital accumulation. Of course, as Brown notes, neoliberalism is often “clumsily” used to blanket its multiplicity, origins, and practices (2). Importantly, she says that neoliberalism takes shape differently in different countries and economies, but its characteristically normative reasoning “extends market metrics and practices to every dimension of human life” (5). That is, neoliberalism’s intent to secure capital, or to ensure that capital is produced and that individuals consume permeate every facet of one’s existence. In different situations, such intent takes form through different rhetoric, systems, and ideological values that are employed as normative modes of reason. For instance, as the US secures its interests both domestically and beyond through neoliberal logics, I show how the rhetoric of freedom is used to justify the spread of US capitalism beyond its borders. When neoliberalism is employed as a form of governance, for example, it disguises itself through political rationality. Brown explains,

When it takes shape as a political rationality, this form [neoliberal ideas as political rationality] of normative reason displaces other modes of valuation for judgement and action, displaces basic liberal democratic criteria for justice with business metrics, transforms the state itself into a firm, produces every day norms of identity and conduct that configures every kind of human activity in terms of rational self-investment or entrepreneurship (5).

Thus, modes of neoliberalism are so far reaching and permeate every facet of the social existence in which free market capital governments operate. For the United States, such neoliberal logic began roughly around the mid twentieth century (Harvey, 2005). Modes of neoliberalism disguise

themselves as so common place that they are often hardly recognizable. For instance, Brown notes that neoliberalism simultaneously claims to free individuals from state regulation, while ensuring that individuals are banded to and engulfed in every neoliberal institutionalized facet in which they engage (4). In a neoliberal system, everyone is “human capital”—the *self*-transformed into an individualized firm, with practices (i.e. mate selection, education, etc) configured by the state as “self investment,” and “work” and “citizenship” are configured as belonging to the “business” (4). In this state, everyone is capital in which all investments, including those masked as self-investment ultimately serve the nation at large. The United States larger business interest is masked as interest in citizenship, multiculturalism, pluralism as all modes of belonging to the larger business disguised as the nation. Accordingly, Muslims in the United States advocate for belonging, citizenship, and defining themselves against the grains of popular media, but these constructs are pre-determined institutionalized mechanisms that ensure neoliberalism’s survival.

Establishing a rhetorical and ideological value system through the concept of “freedom,” not just through the particulars of the term, but in implied general value systems, is integral to securing free market capital interests and characteristic of a neoliberal governing system. As I will demonstrate throughout this project, for Muslim women, notions of freedom are reduced to individual choices—as the choice to wear hijab or not, for example—while the binary of liberated/dominated Muslim woman figure reconciles her interests through values of free market capital<sup>18</sup>. However, such value systems mask the reality that US government guarantees individual freedoms in exchange of ensuring free market freedoms at any expense—a logic of neoliberalism that operates through actors involved in creating government policies and corporate interests.

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<sup>18</sup> Here, I want to emphasize, again, that Muslim women are not this binary of liberated/dominated, but the that the logics of neoliberalism produce a binary Muslim woman figure peddle when they specifically negotiate notions of freedom through the practice of hijab.

Harvey explains, “the assumption that individual freedoms are guaranteed by freedom of the market and of trade is a cardinal feature of neoliberal thinking, and it has long dominated the US stances towards the rest of the world” (7). Accordingly, the logic of neoliberalism operates such that it reduces the freedom of choices to the choices to ultimately consume—and moves the interests of the accumulation of wealth for corporations, businesses, and government entities forward. Harvey draws upon the works Karl Polanyi in tracing valued freedoms in the free-market capital economy of the US— notions Polanyi laid out in 1944. As Harvey explains, the same economy that produces highly prized freedoms—such as “freedom of conscience, freedom of speech, freedom of meeting, freedom of association, and freedom to choose one’s own job” (Polanyi qtd in Harvey, 36)—are the same markets, however, that produce evil freedoms. Evil freedoms are as Polanyi lists: “the freedom to exploit one’s fellows, or the freedom to make inordinate gains without commensurable service to the community, the freedom to keep technological inventions from being used for public benefit, or the freedom to profit from public calamities secretly engineered for private advantage” (Polanyi qtd in Harvey, 36). Importantly, the meanings and notions of freedom valued in complex societies are in exact contradiction to their practices (36). That is, in a complex society such as the United States, the freedoms valued come at the direct expense of oppression (or taking freedoms) from others. Individual freedoms of choice are culturally constructed as unregulated but necessarily guarantee that they come at the expense of the freedom to exploit (others, lands, etc). The freedom of choice, as mobilized by discourse on hijab, masks larger freedoms that the United States uses to justify its imperial practices under the same general guise of freedom. For Muslim women, such justification for United States imperial practices is being mobilized through discourse on hijab—through freedoms of choice to practice hijab, for example. When Muslim women invest in notions of such freedoms, they inadvertently

create a liberated Muslim woman figure who is free under American value systems. However, in actuality, such freedoms are governed by capital interests, and such figures are also used to justify the need to spread such “freedoms” elsewhere.

Here, notions of neoliberal freedoms promise to liberate Muslim women—they secure her freedom to consume--while the U.S uses practices of domination (war and invasion in Muslim majority countries) to both justify its quest to liberate her dominated counterparts (Muslim women overseas) while simultaneously dominating them themselves through imperial practices. Importantly, Harvey notes, that Polanyi’s concept of freedoms are particularly appropriate when applied to understanding the rhetoric of US leaders who have publicly discussed their obligation “to spread freedom” to the rest of the world. I offer an instance in which we can see the stakes that unfold when Muslim women narrate their choices to wear hijab in terms of liberation/domination. For instance, Harvey explains the ways the rhetoric of “freedom” was mobilized to justify practices of war was during George W Bush’s commissioning of the invasion in Iraq in 2003. There, under the guise of freedom, neoliberal measures imposed “a state apparatus whose fundamental mission was to facilitate conditions for profitable accumulation on the part of both domestic and foreign capital” (7). That is, the main mission of the war to actually spread the freedom to accumulate capital rather than the freedom from the tyranny of Saddam Hussein, or the threat of “weapons of mass destruction” as urged by the then president. To accomplish this goal—or essentially to ensure profitable conditions for the US even in a foreign country—mass media played a part in disseminating a false mission of spreading freedom to the nation of Iraq. Harvey notes, “the freedom of the market that Bush proclaims as the high point of human aspiration turns out to be nothing more than the convenient means to spread corporate monopoly power and Coca Cola everywhere without constraint” (38). Thus, in a neoliberal state, freedom is a reductive term where

“cultural” values can be assigned and appropriated arbitrarily by political leaders, or elites with private interests, to secure capital interest at the expense of others (i.e. war and occupation). These same values of “freedom” have been historically used by popular media to categorize Muslim women as oppressed (unfree) and in need of saving. The decades old narrative reads that Muslim women are “oppressed” as especially evidenced by their hijabs, and that by adopting American values, they can achieve “freedom<sup>19</sup>.” In this framework, the constructed “unfree” Muslim women perpetuated by popular media must be rescued to enjoy the “freedoms” of capitalism.

It’s important to note that, as I will show in this project, notions and values associated with freedom are not always explicitly stated as “freedom.” Rather, Harvey’s idea of freedom can offer an understanding of how elites of society, people with the greatest free-market interests, and government have emphasized individual liberties (and concepts associated) at the expense of oppressing others. Here, it is important to note that securing particular freedoms imperative to capital accumulation are often not implemented via coherent strategies that government unilaterally and cohesively decides on. Rather, neoliberalism offers an ideological basis by which to understand the logic actors operating within a capital world operate through. For “Muslim women” in America, what the US government has in mind for their freedoms, or liberties, changes from time to time. While I have already discussed the importance of moving past defining freedoms for Muslim women in the United States as such frameworks overlook historical constructs of the notion itself, it is still useful to note the ways government can shift what freedom means depending on colonial projects. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad notes,

Just as the liberation of women had a justification of European colonialism during the 19<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, it is now being used to justify new

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<sup>19</sup> Read such narratives in news media such as Rita Panahi’s “This is a symbol of Oppression, Please Don’t Celebrate It” (*The Telegraph*, 2015), Asra Nomani’s “Wearing the Hijab in Solidarity Perpetuates Oppression,” (*New York Times*, 2016), Slater Bakhtavar’s “The Hijab’s Progression to Symbol of Political Oppression” (*Forbes*, 2017), Clair V’s “Oppression, Violence, and Why Voluntary Hijab is Irrelevant” (*Medium*, 2018).



wars...The Western agenda of liberating the women of Islam is the constant, even in the answer to the question—“Liberation from what?” changes. The Puritans of the 19<sup>th</sup> century thought the Muslim woman needed relief from overindulgence in sex. It appears at present that the feminists of the 21<sup>st</sup> century think that she is in need of liberation in order to have more sexual freedom (260).

As mentioned earlier, narratives focused on hijab and liberation has focused on the freedom of choice—that Muslim women are forced to veil, and in need of Western saviors (Haddad, 259). As I will demonstrate throughout this project, beyond individual choice, neoliberal “freedom” for women who identify as Muslim entails that she be “rescued” from oppression to the freedoms of market capitalism. Neoliberalism operates as a system of logic and the rhetoric of freedom offers Muslim women “freedoms” to consume in the US in exchange for, on a larger scale, justifying the nation’s greater interests in dominating the world’s resources. Furthermore, and ultimately, the production of the “liberated Muslim women” in the United States is integral to the rhetoric that justifies “freeing” oppressed Muslim women overseas.

To understand the complex dynamic between neoliberal logics and the ways they secure US imperial interests, it is important to note that such logics are perpetuated through cultural mediums, but they are only given life by the actors them power/life. That is, logics of neoliberalism cannot operate without the consent of individuals who invest in its notions. Neoliberalism is a sociopolitical project that permeates throughout all facets of capital society—starting with the individual through identity politics and labor divisions, to larger government policies peddled by market interests. Yet, the fruition of neoliberalism depends on individuals who give such logics power by investing in its ideologies through various narratives in modes of cultural production. Individuals that ensure neoliberal fruition are both actors in government who promote policy (such as President Bush during the 2003 Iraq war), and the public who communicate their interests through neoliberal language even when they protest its constructs. These are the narratives I will

examine in this project, but now I make the connection to insist that as neoliberalism depends on notions of “freedom” that justify its interests in Muslim majority countries—such as Iraq and Afghanistan post 9/11—it can only survive when Muslim women themselves take on the logics of American “freedom,” even when reduced and blurred to notions of individual choices surrounding the practice of hijab. While there are countless narratives meant to “pushback” against the rhetoric hijab and oppression<sup>20</sup>, they communicate within the same language—that is the discourse of liberated/dominated Muslim women—and reinforce the constructs they intend to push back against. For instance, arguing that hijab offers women liberation or freedom, as opposed to being an oppressive practice, does not eliminate the serious repercussions of such media constructs that are far beyond stakes of misrepresentation or stereotypes. In fact, mediating freedom through hijab—one way or another, as either a tool of liberation or an oppressive practice—essentially validates that notion of freedom that rides on hijab all together. As the pushback-- narratives meant to dispel misrepresentations of hijab and oppression—that hijab is choice (as Muslim women emphasize their decisions to practice or not) larger notions of freedom become reduced to individual choice. Freedom, though, continues in large part to be the project of validating idea that Muslim women in the US enjoy ultimate freedoms, and while Muslim women in Muslim majority countries need to be saved and offered the same. I look specifically at how nuanced self-representations of hijab narrated by advocacy groups, authors, public figures and artists invested in Muslim American identity in influential cultural mediums. As the concept of freedom is changing and unfixed, such nuances often do not blatantly engage neoliberal logics of freedom, but through a close reading, I show the ways in which they inadvertently invoke and validate them.

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<sup>20</sup> For instance, Helena Andrews, “Muslim Women Don’t See Themselves as Oppressed” (*The New York Times*, 2006), Mariam Khan’s “For Women, Islam Means Empowerment, not Oppression” (*Newstimes*, 2017), Nadia Ahmed’s “Five Myths About Hijab” (*The Washington Post*, 2019), and Ahmadiya “The Hijab is Not a Symbol of Oppression” (*The Chicago Tribune*, 2019).

As neoliberal freedoms change for Muslim women from time to time, I ask how it is that Muslim women (those participating in the discourse of freedom mediated through hijab) have acquiesced to the false logics of freedoms as individual choice—logics they have been conditioned to partake in. Here, I draw upon the works of both Harvey and Gramsci as a framework to understanding how the phenomenon of “consent”—where classes under the elites essentially accept the false logics of neoliberal ideologies--continues to take shape in the contemporary world. Specifically, it offers the groundwork that can help explain why women who identify as Muslim within the United States have found themselves trapped within the logics of neoliberalism even when they attempt to contest it. Harvey draws upon Gramsci’s notion of “common sense”—or, “the sense held in common”—is constructed over a large spectrum of the population. Common sense can be “profoundly misleading obfuscating or disguising real problems under cultural prejudices” (Harvey, 39). Common sense ideals are anchored by cultural socialization and traditional values (such as values like the belief in God, or rights for women, and even fears such as from communism, immigrants, etc) that can be mobilized to mask realities behind vague slogans and empty rhetoric (Harvey, 39). For example, the word “freedom,” Harvey notes, is so deeply held by “common sense” notion of the nation that it can be used to nearly justify any practice (Harvey, 39). Again, such was the basis that George W Bush used in 2004 to justify the US invasion in Iraq, for example. The neoliberal state of the nation presents freedom to women who identify as Muslim as individual choices, reduced to a matter solely on the matter of the “choice” to wear hijab or not—as evidenced by their own rhetoric of I “choose” to wear hijab (or choose not). These small reductive freedoms masks larger “choices” people in the Middle East are denied when imperial involvement exploits facets of Muslim majority countries for their resources.

In this project, in addition to referencing neoliberal freedoms that become apparent when Muslim-women attempt to reconcile their interests with the nation, I also refer to constructs of modernity as employed by Muslim women to push back against narratives perpetuated by American media that depict them as “uncivil” or “backwards.” In this project, I will show the ways self-narratives of Muslims in the United States often assumes the “culture” of American modernity and value systems (liberated, successful, educated, and part of mainstream consumers), as they attempt to dispel the stereotyped images that are, as noted earlier, constructs themselves made to serve national agenda. Herein, at times, as discourse on hijab mobilizes a binary of liberated/dominated Muslim women, it also simultaneously mobilizes an opposition between traditional/modern. Where David Harvey offers an important framework for understanding the ways neoliberalism takes on notions of freedom to secure private market interests beyond the United States, Mahmood Mamdani demonstrates how “culture talk” has created notions of cultural modernity to which people who identify as Muslim have had to frantically adhere to. “Culture Talk,” Mamdani notes, “assumes that every culture has a tangible essence that defines it, and it then explains politics as a consequence of that essence” (17). Culture talk essentially attributes value systems to certain beliefs or values as part of a society’s “culture.” Here, the most notable example of this happening was the association of terrorism as part of Islamic “culture.” Culture talk divides the world into two: premodern and moderns. Simply put, modern people are in favor peaceful progressive existence, while the premodern are archaic, inclined to terror, and can be destructive (18-19). At various historical moments, like notions of freedom and imperial constructions, the narrative of modernity has changed; for example, there has been distinctions in US’s treatment of premodern and antimodern societies. As Mamdani explains, premodern were civilizations depicted as being in need of American modernity, while the antimodern societies were

posited as a threat to American modernity. For example, during heightened colonial interest in Africa, Africa was positioned as premodern and in need of civilizing; in contrast, when colonial interest in Muslim majority countries is heightened, such countries are depicted as antimodern and a threat to the nation. As Muslim women self-represent in various narrative modes, they emphasize the ways in which their value systems align with notions of American modernity—that they are civil, liberated, and live lives consistent with capital interests of the state. They emphasize that their practice of Islam—particularly through hijab—in no way contradicts or threatens the modern American world.

The concept of “culture talk” is an integral component to this project because as I look at the ways Muslim women narrate themselves, and the ways scholars have analyzed such works, I argue that they are peddling representational identity politics rather than understanding the ways history and economics that strategically shape such cultural attributes. Accordingly, I use the term “culture talk” throughout this project to identify symptoms in self-narratives that define the practice of hijab through notions of neoliberal freedoms and cultural modernity; I also use the term to understand the limits of scholarship that has yet to push beyond cultural frameworks that circumscribe discussion of Muslim women to representations. There are serious repercussions to investing in culture talk, and I will detail my own theoretical approach as aligned with Mamdani’s in the next section. Yet, for now, culture talk, for instance, was remobilized by anti 9/11 sentiments and pressured Muslims in the United States to quickly prove their allegiances to the nation. President Bush distinguished between “good Muslims” and “bad Muslims”—bad Muslims, of course, were responsible for the attacks on the World Trade Center. Good Muslims, however, were loyal citizens, “anxious to clear their names and consciences of this horrible crime and would undoubtedly support ‘us’ in a war against ‘them’” (Mamdani, 15). Culture talk created a binary of

“good” and “bad” Muslim that monolithically distinguished between the terrorist backwards Muslims overseas (bad) and the patriotic loving American Muslims in the US (good). Because so many Muslims were eager to clear their names and end Islamophobic hostilities towards themselves that resulted from the tragic events, they inevitably had to pledge their allegiances to American values—despite the reality that the terrorists themselves in no way ever represented Islam or its practices. The underlying idea was that unless proven otherwise—that one is a “good” Muslim—all Muslims were assumed to be the latter, and thus obligated to prove their allegiances to the US government by pledging support in the illusive war on terror (Mamdani, 15). Yet, because there was no in between the good and the bad Muslim, “good” Muslims inadvertently consented to subsequent war and imperial practices in Middle East. That is, President Bush notoriously noted that he was going to fight “bad” Muslims in the Middle East who were a threat to the nation’s ideals of freedom. The concept Mamdani lays out in tracing modernity and the quest to fulfill it as a “good Muslim” in the US is fundamental in understanding how Muslims within the US were manipulated into consenting to wars—by investing in “culture talk” narratives that pushed them into consent of war for fear of otherwise being labeled as a “bad” Muslim. “Culture talk” concerns itself with representational practices while masking United States histories of colonialism, imperial practices, and economic strategies.

Mamdani asserts that concepts of cultural modernity--as opposed to free markets (capitalism) or the state (democracy)--have taken on the role in US government’s explanations on the determining factor between people in society who are in favor or peaceful existence and terrorism (Mamdani, 18). Mamdani references George W. Bush’s culture talk that created the “good” modern Muslim in the United States versus that “bad” archaic oppressor that needed to be saved overseas. Harvey mentions that same rhetoric, of nearly the same historical moment, when he

discusses George Bush's intent to spread "freedom" to oppressed people in Iraq. Accordingly, rather than regarding either freedom or modernity as constructs that operate independently in the context of United States capital interests, I believe that they have worked together and operate simultaneously. Importantly, I am not interested in questioning or defining concepts of freedom relative to other nations or parts of the world, nor get into a philosophical discussion on the long history of postmodernity. Rather, I am interested in ways, in this contemporary moment, neoliberalism has mobilized different forms of freedom and cultural modernity through discourse on hijab-- as a promise of reductive individual liberties that mask larger evil "freedom" projects of unregulated free market capitalism overseas. Furthermore, this project is interested in the ways women who identify as Muslim in the US are actually working within this neoliberal framework—validating neoliberal projects--when they attempt to protest media constructed misconceptions of hijab. Mamdani's work will prove additionally useful, as I will further discuss in later sections, in establishing my own historical theoretical approach in examining the narrative forms in each of my chapters.

### Domestic Colonialism, Imperialism, and Hijab

With laying the groundwork on the particularities of neoliberal freedoms and cultural modernity that I will reference throughout this project, I can now turn to scholarship pertinent to bridging the relationship between domestic colonialism, imperialism and hijab. I situate this project as an emerging perspective that seeks to bridge a scholarly gap between scholarship on domestic colonialism, American imperialism, and Muslim American studies in attempts to offer a more cohesive understanding on the new ways the US is able to maintain global dominance. As I will outline in this section, each of these fields have been useful in allowing me to make connections between scholastic references and how now hijab is being used for material gain.

As I argue that women who identify as Muslim are inadvertently contributing to their own domestic colonization, I draw upon the ways in which domestic colonialism<sup>21</sup> has historically operated on indigenous people to understand how it takes new forms today. The concept of domestic colonialism (as in, colonization within the nation) is not new, and I am particularly interested in the strategies of domestic colonization as previously theorized by scholarship in Native American studies<sup>22</sup>. The concept of domestic colonialism offers historical context as building blocks to understand how the phenomenon of domestic colonization occurs. Scholarship in Native American studies has examined the ways indigenous people are colonized within their own territories through force, law, rhetoric, and culture. For example, Glenn Morris examines the works of Vine Deloria Jr. that contributed to the mobilizations of a revolutionary strategy to combat United States law that colonized indigenous people. Morris traces the history of semantic strategy that contributed to colonizing the lands and minds of Indian people. To achieve this, colonizing practices include a purposeful “colonization of minds” to whitewash indigenous people of their original practices, securing American territorial, political, and cultural interests—these practices began as early as the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, as Christopher Columbus, for instance, assigned European names to both Indian people and territories. Imperative to colonization was to create a discourse that consisted of the "correct" universal values that ultimately suppressed and erased the interests of the indigenous population. Morris notes that "The operation of settler state governments requires the construction of a normalized or 'correct' language use. The use of which establishes the standard for acceptable discourse. The "correct language" becomes a kind of code

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<sup>21</sup> Here, I used the term both as the physical occupation of territories through force and violence in the traditional sense, and new forms of occupations (such as intellectual occupation) to maintain marginalized groups. I am interested in colonialism that has operated on indigenous people as the US has shaped its borders, but also the ways it has taken on new shapes in the contemporary world to manage marginalized groups ideologically.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Ground's *Native Voices American Indian Identity and Resistance* (2003) and George E. Tinker's *American Indian Liberation* (2008).



within the settler society that is reinforced in law, policy and the educational system" (120). Most importantly, it appears that this law is objective in social facets of society, but it in fact establishes a rationale for further colonization (12). This work informs this project as I demonstrate the ways in which the rhetoric of neoliberalism, similar to the semantic strategies employed by government on indigenous doctrines and other facets of social life, has informed identities of women who identify as Muslim in the United States as they self-narrate.

While the work of Morris traces the ways domestic colonialism operated to erase the identities of indigenous peoples, other scholars demonstrate new forms of colonialism operates within the United States today. As I argue that discourse on hijab is contributing to a domestic colonization of Muslims within the United States, understanding how race and marginalized groups (through liberal rhetoric) have also been historically colonized within the US provides the foundation upon which these practices continue. Joe Turner, for example, examines the ways colonialism targets racialized groups within the United States and mobilizes liberal ideals that marginalized groups invest in. In tracing colonial historical colonial practices and how they continue to inform dominance over racialized groups within "modern" nations such as Britain, Joe Turner defines internal colonialism as a framework that "stresses the ongoing dynamics of colonizing practices that constitute 'domestic space' [within the nation] as always/already *imperial terrain* and sites of racialized<sup>23</sup> 'regimes of truth'" (Turner, 770). That is, Turner notes that colonialism is "here and now" rather than a historic practice of the past (770). He notes that scholars and activists such as Malcolm X, from as early as the 1960's, identified internal colonialism's effects on black communities, as they argued that "settler colonialism created a network of internal colonies that were spatially and functionally distinct but tied to a wider logical

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<sup>23</sup> Internal colonialism is also addressed by various scholars in Black Studies. See for example, Nikhil Paul Singh *Black is a Country* (2004).

of imperial capitalism and transnational racism” (770). Colonial practices within the United States on black groups of people ultimately served larger imperial purposes in African countries. Internal colonial practices within the United States were evident in racialized spaces of ghettos and inner-city suburbs within imperial nations, and were heavily governed by “disenfranchisement, labor exploitation, and violent policing”—strategies reminiscent to the historical colonial practices in Africa (Turner, 770). Hence, as blacks were racially targeted within the nation—disenfranchised, underfunded, and exploited—such exploitation tactics ultimately served larger colonial agendas abroad. Considering the current ongoing political interest of Muslim majority countries across the world especially post 9/11 (i.e. Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria), Muslim women are undoubtedly the subject of domestic colonization as the US must maintain its narrative to justify its interests. It is not far-fetched, then, that colonial forces within the United States takes shape on the site of hijab and Muslim women—with particular emphasis on gender. In specific, the rhetoric of freedom that is imposed onto discourse on hijab serves as a form of intellectual colonialism that is meant to maintain dominance of Muslims as a marginalized group in the United States. Accordingly, when Muslim women within the United States invest in rhetoric of freedom with regard to their hijab, they inadvertently contribute to their own domestic colonization within the nation’s borders.

Alongside colonial practices that have operated in the US on communities based on race, Turner also notes domestic colonization is not limited to geographical location within the US. Turner, importantly, extends the notions of internal colonialism not just as geographical or spatial territories within imperial states such as Britain; he notes the colonialism can also be through ideological government control over minorities behind the guise of liberalism. Turner’s work is especially pertinent for understanding the ways women who identify as Muslim are ideologically being conditioned to invest in notions of liberated/dominated Muslim women figures narrated

through hijab. A premise of this project is that the domestic colonization of women who identify as Muslim in the US is happening not based on geographical location, but rather happening ideologically--as Muslim women are forced to reconcile their interests within neoliberal value systems as defined by the nation. Accordingly, Turner examines one way that internal colonialism operates on minorities within Britain through ideological constructs of liberalism—constructs that also operate within the US. Liberalism, ideological formations that can be traced back to the 1960's, appears to challenge colonial practices of racial and gendered violence through the politics of recognition; it offers minorities a voice of inclusion. Turner argues that liberalism subtly appears to challenge colonialism, but actually sustains it. He says, “older forms of racialized-sexualized violence are recalibrated and attuned to later liberalism and this highlights the shifting operation of internal colonization” (Turner, 772). Accordingly, he notes that more violent previous colonial strategies that once took place explicitly through race and gender take on new subtle forms in internal colonization through notions of liberalism. Such notions include “the central promise of inclusion in late liberalism’s future society-to-come relies of assertions of value, temporality and carnality, which remain animated by ‘national and civilizational tense’” (Turner, 772). Such values include “race blind logics of temporality, freedom, commitment to LGBT rights, and notions of ‘love’ become means of distinguishing who has value in later liberalism” (Turner 773). Liberalism’s particularities appeal to marginalized people because it promises them inclusion in national narratives where they are otherwise excluded. Though I resist analogizing, Turner’s theory offers a way to understand the ways in which American value systems may appeal to Muslim women who are otherwise largely stereotyped, marginalized, and excluded from the American national narrative. Turner notes that investment in liberalism informs British government’s (and more largely, practices across the UK) historical colonial practices used outside

of the nation. Internal colonialism takes new forms through ideological constructs, managing differences behind the mask of unity and liberalism. While on the one hand, for example, it promises marginalized groups such as Muslims inclusion, on the other, it subjects them to surveillance procedures and other targeted practices to maintain their subjugation.

I emphasize an important point of difference between scholarship on domestic colonization and the scope of this project. I extend the framework on settler colonization of indigenous groups to understand how women who identify as Muslim within the US are now being colonized within their own spaces--be it intellectual or geographical--in the US as well, but I look at the ways in which marginalized groups themselves are investing in such colonial practices. That is, it is important to note that while I draw upon these works, the ways in which settler colonization has occurred on indigenous groups is different than the ways Muslim women in the United States are conditioned to invest in their own domestic colonization (being colonized within the United States, today). Such scholarship examines settler colonialism through government forces (i.e. through US law, language of doctrine, white washing cultures, surveillance programs, security procedures etc) operating on marginalized people<sup>24</sup>. These are strategies of domestic colonialism that enable an understanding on how colonialism continues to operate within the United States. Yet, I am interested in specifically examining the ways notions of neoliberalism have been recalibrated to the extent that people labeled as minority have accepted and invested in such themselves (within marginalized groups, as internal colonialism is already taking place). That is, domestic and internal colonialism operates not only through identified government influences onto internally colonized

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<sup>24</sup> Most recently, Bacon and Norton (2019) argue that “the relationship to Native people and tribes as envisioned and created by US law and policy, historically and today, is not in its central features an anomaly, but rather an empirically demonstrable and even paradigmatic case of a world-historically prevalent form of political power: formal colonial power” (302). Their main argument is that, contrary to popular notions that suggest the colonization techniques of indigenous peoples were anomalous, the US employed formal colonial power techniques typical of Britain and other European nations.

groups, but through ensuring the consent of the marginalized by adopting such value systems themselves. In the US especially, in light of its ongoing war-on-terror and the media's obsession with Muslims across the world, people who identify as Muslim in the US have been trapped into these fallacies of inclusivity, and have invested in creating narratives that demonstrate their allegiance to neoliberal values.

### Race, Culture, Imperialism, and Hijab

As it becomes clear that domestic colonialism as it takes forms in today's world depends on both the racialization of people and cultural constructs of neoliberalism, I define race and culture as they will pertain to my discussions on the ways discourse on hijab has been used to ensure American identity politics. Concepts of "race"<sup>25</sup> and "culture"<sup>26</sup> function together to create identities within the US, to label groups of people as "minorities," and play essential roles in constructing the promise of liberalism. As I will show momentarily, scholars note the ways hijab has been racialized<sup>27</sup> and culturally constructed through media representations especially post 9/11. As I have discussed concepts of modernity associated with cultural discourse, for clarity, culture, Mamdani notes, is "the language of rulers..." (2), meaning it is constructed by those who have power. Scholars<sup>28</sup> have examined the ways racism is institutionalized in every facet of society in order to create social and hierarchical divisions between people. I draw upon the conception of race as defined by Michael Omi and Howard Winant, who contend that while, indeed, race can be

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<sup>25</sup> In *Racial Formation Theory*, for example, Michael Omi and Howard Winant, for example, propose their own theory of understanding racial formation and the ways the concept of race is created and its implications; racial formation theory, they note, is the "socio historical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed and destroyed" (55). From this perspective, "race is a matter of both social structure and culture representation" (56).

<sup>26</sup> Donald Pease (1993), for example, defines culture to include "ways of life, symbolic actions and representations, contradictory forms of common sense, social practices, and networks of social institutions" (27).

<sup>27</sup> It is worth mentioning that Alia Al-Saji (2010) has examined the racialization of hijab from a Canadian context, particularly as it was dealt with during the "hijab" ban in France.

<sup>28</sup> For example, Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994), Nikhil Paul Singh (2004), and Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2012).

generally based on genealogy—it largely depends on social factors that informs the social conditions of marginalized people. That is, race is ever changing, and they take on a *racial formation* theoretical approach, where “race and race meanings are neither stable nor consistent” (Omi and Winant, 3). While both race and culture are social constructs by which to categorize people, race in particular, is “a concept that signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies” (Omi and Winant, 110). George Lipsitz, for instance, has traced the ways “public policy and private prejudice work together to create a ‘possessive investment in whiteness’ that is responsible for the racialized hierarchies of our society” (vii). Such intellectuals have done prolific work in creating our understanding of how deeply ingrained racism is in the creation of the “nation.” For Lipsitz, the concept of “whiteness” he notes is a “cultural fiction that like all racial identities has no valid foundation in biology or anthropology” (vii). For Lipsitz, race can also be a cultural construction. Islam and its associated practices (specifically, hijab) have been, as I will continue to parse out in this section, referred to in both racial and cultural terms—depending on historical moments and national interests. While race and culture are distinctive constructs, I note that race distinctively works to create labels on groups of people (such as in ethnic terms), while culture works to formulate shared notions of value within the US (such as the idea of terrorism).

I enter this project from the perspective that hijab has been constructed racially<sup>29</sup>, culturally<sup>30</sup>, and gendered<sup>31</sup> by US government and popular media. Momentarily, I will further discuss the importance of gender as it pertains to this project: particularly in the context of

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<sup>29</sup> For example, Alia Al-Saji (2010) has examined the racialization of hijab from a Canadian context, particularly as it was dealt with during the “hijab” ban in France.

<sup>30</sup> For example, Stabile and Kumar (2005) discuss how the oppression of Afghani women only became a prominent news topic of U.S. media coverage when it was strategically necessary to justify militancy for imperial agendas.

<sup>31</sup> Chakraborti and Zempi (2012) have noted the ways the veil (hijab), increasingly narrated by Western societies as a visible symbol of gender inequality, contributes to gendered dimensions of Islamophobia. Particularly, they note that Muslim women who wear the veil are the highest number in victims of Islamophobic attacks.

constructing US international identity and imperial projects through the “good” Muslim “bad” binary by Mamdani. Yet, for now, I note these factors (race, culture, gender) do not compete independently on the site of hijab, but rather work together to ensure the continued marginalization and othering of Muslim woman within United States culture. Omi and Winant write that, “It is not possible to understand the (il)logic of any form of social stratification, any practice of cultural marginalization, or any type of inequality or human variation without appreciating the deep, complex, comingling, interpenetration of race, class, gender and sexuality” (106). Accordingly, to understand the continued marginalization of Muslim women in the United States, all such factors of social stratification need to be understood as working together to maintain the “othering” of Muslim women in the US. To that end, hijab is a single site of the intersectionality of all such comingling constructions imposed onto this personal practice by United States government and historical imperial practices. Importantly, I want to clarify that, as noted, I am not interested in the representational politics of “Muslim Americans” as a category or how these aforementioned social constructs effect Muslims living in the United States. Rather, I am interested in historicizing the products of imperialism (in this case, narratives produced by women who identify as Muslim in the US) to examine the material relations that create investments in categorial identity analysis necessary to justifying imperialist projects. Though many scholars examine the complicated ways that culture, race, and religion are used as venues for imperial and social projects to take form, the imperial project continuously evolves. My work will focus on how the colonized absorb the narratives constructed for them by imperial agendas.

A premise of this project is that the investments of Muslim women in categories of identity that directly engage notions of freedom through hijab directly service US imperial project. While scholars have noted the ways race and culture have informed concepts of the nation within the

United States, other scholars<sup>32</sup> in the field of American Studies have analyzed the ways race and culture have functioned in relation to American imperialism overseas—specifically, how the United States has managed to create domestic cultures and racialize people in order to justify overseas practices. These works have importantly established the ways cultural narratives within the United States are created within the United States and are directly linked to government agenda overseas. These mechanisms inform an understanding on the ways in which a liberated/dominated discourse has been created by American imperialism through hijab, and has been perpetuated within cultural narratives within the US and serve imperial purposes outside. Such scholarship informs an integral premise of this project which is that U.S. culture (domestically) is strategically shaped (by popular media) to justify government interests and practices abroad<sup>33</sup>. Amy Kaplan, for example has noted the importance of creating a domestic United States culture in its quest for empire abroad (culturally). Kaplan explains the ways in which discourse creating a foreign world outside of the US is used to create a culture of domesticity within the United States, which is then used to justify imperial expansion elsewhere. Kaplan notes that in this context, “domestic” takes a twofold meaning, referring to both the nation and household simultaneously, but also heavily intertwined in issues of “foreign.” I extend Kaplan’s framework on the ways American culture is shaped largely by US imperialism to include the oppositional framework of the liberated/dominated Muslim woman figure operating through hijab in the service of imperialism. A liberated Muslim woman figure that can achieve freedoms within the United States is now peddling the basis for which Muslim overseas must be liberated by United States interventions.

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<sup>32</sup> For an extensive collection address race and culture as it relates to US imperialism, see *Cultures of United States Imperialism* ed by Donald Pease and Amy Kaplan.



Such cultural narratives have been constructed to particularly normalize the United States relationship with the Middle East. The United States media, even before the September 11 attacks, has had a long-standing history of creating the savage that identifies as Muslim—and normalizes war practices. Melanie McAlister, for example, argues that cultural conditions have produced popular post-Oriental depictions for American audiences. Her work has informed my understanding of the ways U.S media can normalize militancy practices with respect to the Middle East—and Muslim majority countries. These normalizations happen subtly and over long periods of time. As I argue that the culture within the United States is justifying imperial practices, this work builds on an understanding established by McAlister and the likes<sup>34</sup> that have already made such connections. Accordingly, she traces the historical instances in popular culture that have shaped American audiences' interpretations and perceptions of the Middle East. Such cultural productions and movements, she argues, has normalized the exercise of United States militancy in the Middle East, and have used the Middle East to produce American identities. Even when such depictions have indeed stood to contest U.S. supremacy power over the Middle East, such atypical depictions have nevertheless functioned strategically in policy making. Such works do not, however, look at the ways people within the United States have been conditioned to perpetuate such narratives themselves—as I will demonstrate in each of following chapters.

This project will build on the works of Mahmood Mamdani and Moustafa Bayoumi, who have made scholastic contributions to the historical ways the United States has constructed Islam both culturally and racially, respectively, in the interest of its imperial practices. I extend this scholarship to consider an important factor they have overlooked: the ways in which gender, as I have noted, also interacts at the intersection of all competing forces to construct the nation. In the

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<sup>34</sup> See also Alsultany (2013).

context of Western historical colonial practices and Muslim women in colonized territories, Meyda Yegenoglu notes, "...the very construction of national difference is possible only through the mediation of woman, a mediation which nevertheless has to be repressed" (Yegenoglu, 126). Gender is especially important as the United States depends on discourse of hijab to construct monolithic binaries between liberated/dominated Muslim women figures. Still, Mamdani and Bayoumi have identified the ways Islam has been culturally constructed and racialized, respectively, depending on United States imperial interests. For instance, Mahmoud Mamdani notes that post 9/11, narratives depicting oppressed Muslim women overseas intensified<sup>35</sup>, as United States response to the World Trade Center attacks centered around cultural rhetoric that justified overseas wars and imperial projects. He demonstrates the ways President George W Bush and the media created a national rhetoric of "good Muslim" vs. "bad Muslim" after the events of September 11. As noted, the "good" Muslim was the civilized, popular culture loving American-- the "bad" Muslim was the savage overseas who needed to be "freed." Moustafa Bayoumi has examined the ways the religion of Islam has been strategically and institutionally "raced" at different historical moments depending on the United States' relationship overseas. He explores the ways in which immigration laws and policies have been used to discriminate between Arab immigrants. In this case, Bayoumi takes a historical look at various cases of immigrant naturalization in the US court systems to note that the US government has racialized the religion of Islam depending on its foreign practices and interests at the time. Bayoumi and Mamdani consider the ways foreign policy is justified domestically through the strategic perpetuation of such narratives, and yet this narrative is further complicated when *gender* is specifically considered. While they trace the important ways race and culture are constructed to justify United

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<sup>35</sup> For example, Stabile and Kumar (2005) discuss how the oppression of Afghani women only became a prominent news topic of U.S. media coverage when it was strategically necessary to justify militancy for imperial agendas.

States policies, they do not consider how gender<sup>36</sup> impacts such dynamics—and how such cultural constructions have necessarily taken place through national conversations pertaining to Muslim women. The products of both “culture-talk” and racialization of the personal practice of hijab can reveal not only US strategy in accomplishing its imperial objectives, but the resulting internal colonization taking place through inadvertent consent.

I extend Mamdani’s theory on the binary of “good” Muslim/“bad” Muslim to the “liberated” Muslim woman/“dominated” Muslim woman to consider the ways gender and hijab is servicing US imperialism. Importantly, my own theoretical approach over the next four chapters will align with those of Mamdani and Bayoumi—who urge that cultural and racial criticisms can only take one so far in understanding American identity politics within with the country in relationship to US global dynamics. I push the approaches of the likes to examine my chosen sites within sociopolitical (historic) and economic contexts to show that what is happening now through hijab is directly connected to imperial strategies before it, and linked to United States neoliberal free market capital interests in the contemporary world. Mamdani notes that “culture talk” linking Islam and terrorism has turned “religious experience into a political category” (766). He argues that approaching United States’ (media and government rhetoric) treatment of Muslims within the United States through constructs of culture can mask deep rooted historical practices that can have more profound implications in understanding how this dynamic unfolds itself today. He notes historicization can demonstrate that the “war on terror” is actually a modern construction—rather than, as suggested by government and popular media, a current fight against an actual threat to the “modernity” of the US (Mamdani, 2002). Bayoumi suggests that Islam has been racialized at

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<sup>36</sup> Chakraborti and Zempi (2012) have noted the ways the veil (hijab), increasingly narrated by Western societies as a visible symbol of gender inequality and contributes to gendered dimensions of Islamophobia. Particularly, they note that Muslim women who wear the veil are the highest number in victims of Islamophobic attacks.

various historical moments. For example, he historicizes US immigration practices and law to demonstrate the ways religion determines race in the US's treatment of naturalizing citizens. Without such historical references, Bayoumi's argument, for example, would be limited to contemporary examples without awareness that racialization of Islam has also been deliberate and based on foreign interests. Importantly, in no way am I offering comprehensive sociopolitical or economic readings on the any of the narrative forms presented forth. Instead, I intend to identify the limits of cultural analysis currently, and to allude to sociopolitical and economic understandings in order illuminate a point central to my argument: that if scholars remain within cultural framework, discourse on hijab will continue to serve consequential imperial purposes.

With such an approach, I depend on historical scholastic references that validate the notion that hijab has been used by Western imperial practices to ensure domination over colonized groups. Such historical references will elucidate the ways in which colonial strategies have depended on hijab and will allow an understanding of the ways colonial and imperial practices have constructed discourse on hijab through notions of liberation/domination. In *Colonial Fantasies, Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism*, Meyda Yegenoglu traces the relationship between European imperialism and Muslim majority countries throughout history. Importantly, she notes, "The visible cultural effects one can induce by veiling or unveiling woman makes it a convenient signifier for the contending parties to fight out their differences through manipulating this highly charged symbol" (Yegenoglu, 126). She notes the ways hijab (or she refers to as the veil) was used both in colonial and anti-colonial pursuits of the West and East (respectively). Furthermore, she traces the ways Western nationalism has been constructed on the backs of women, particularly through a fixation of difference as mediated through the veil in East. Leila Ahmed also historicizes the material relationship between hijab and history. In *A Quiet Revolution and Women and Gender*

*in Islam*, Leila Ahmed divulges the history of veiling (a practice, she notes, was not exclusive to Muslim women) in the Middle East countries as far back as the late 1800s. She explores the ways British colonialism used hijab as a tool to solidify the presence of colonizers as necessarily “civilizing” an otherwise barbaric Middle East. Ahmed explains that colonization included a social project that worked through propaganda surrounding hijab. Ahmed’s work is important to understanding the historical relationship that traces hijab’s role in Western colonial conquests overseas. However, these works notably do not explore how such strategies continue to take form in new ways today—and the ways women who identify as Muslim in the United States are conditioned by deep historical practices to invest in their subjugation themselves.

Though I am only offering a general insight on the pertinent scholarship that informs this project, my goal is to create a necessary entrance into this important conversation. Examining hijab in the narrative forms of advocacy groups, fiction, memoirs, and political iconography—with particular respect to their forms of cultural production and the respective relationships to imperialism—can reveal new ways imperial strategies are taking shape socially and economically within the US.

#### Narrative Forms and Chapter Overview

I am interested analyzing narratives that are produced by individuals connected to or identify as Muslims within America. Over the course of the next four chapters, I will focus on four different dimensions of United States American cultural production through which such relationships/tensions between hijab and the identity of Muslim women are manifested: political media, fictional literature (novels), “nonfictional” print memoirs, and political iconographies that circulate to the masses. These four sites seemingly make unlikely alliances with imperialism, but as I will demonstrate through each chapter, narrate nuances of the hijab in American spaces

through the language of neoliberalism and “culture talk.” One constant, unchanging factor, in each narrative form is that the identity of a Muslim woman necessarily centers on her relationship with hijab. My argument focuses on the ways hijab is used to work through notions of freedom/unfreedom by mobilizing binary liberation/domination Muslim woman figures. Accordingly, my analysis looks at how women who identify as Muslims invest in neoliberal discourse constructed that ensures their subjugation. This phenomenon can only be understood by demonstrating the limits of “culture” talk, and offering references that point towards more comprehensive sociopolitical, historical, and economic frameworks. I will explore how each form uniquely services government interests and imperial agenda by mobilizing neoliberal rhetoric, even when the context appears to resist popular depictions of Muslim women perpetuated by media.

In Chapter One, I will focus on hijab as it is mediated in the discourse of political organizations in concentrated Muslim communities in the United States. Here, I am concerned with how political advocacy groups and PACs (political action committees) whose missions are to advocate for the civil rights and protections of the Muslim Americans in the United States narrate hijab in their discourse. There are many political organizations in the United States aimed towards advocating for the rights and recognition of “Muslim Americans.” I choose these site—political advocacy groups and political action committees—because such groups purport to protect the rights of Muslims within the United States. However, as it will turn out, many such advocate within the same rhetoric that constructs notions of modernity and freedom. By mediating Muslim women in hijab in the US as educated, modern, and patriotic, such organizations inadvertently mobilize monolithic binaries of the liberated/dominated Muslim woman figure by emphasizing the freedoms Muslim women can achieve in American spaces. Such allegiances to American cultural

values and patriotism implicitly contrasts them with what media constructs as dominated Muslim women overseas. Their hijab is defined as either a choice, or in the context of American patriotism. I will demonstrate how competing images of ideal Muslim women in hijab circulate, taking note to the “politics of respectability” that takes precedence in determining which “type” of Muslim woman can achieve political prominence and a place in the public sphere of political representation. The relations that manifest themselves within political organization in the Muslim community no doubt illuminate the deliberate tension created by imperialism and its focus on the identity of Muslim women. Historicization of the colonial strategies of direct and indirect rule reveal a history of the ways colonizers were able to intellectually control colonized people and manipulate them into adopting value systems of the colonizer.

While Chapter 1 will examine the ways in which the political narrative of the Muslim American woman is constructed in the US, Chapter 2 will examine the ways that the hijab is imagined and situated through American literature. I chose this form because, as many scholars have established<sup>37</sup>, its distinct relationship with imperialism. Here, as authors take to this narrative form to offer nuanced imaginations of hijab in American spaces, not only do they mobilize a binary of liberated/dominated Muslim woman figure, an additional binary emerges in this genre in particular nuanced form: a binary of the traditional versus the modern Muslim American woman figure. I argue that such narratives often offer monolithic versions of women who wear hijab in American spaces—even when they are seemingly complex dynamic characters that interrogate US imperial histories. I will examine the works of Mohja Kahf’s *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* and Holly Warah’s *Where Jasmine Blooms*. Here, hijab is dealt with in two ways: it must either be reconciled in the American cultural context as a mediated balance between old tradition and the

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<sup>37</sup> For example Edward Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), John Carlos Rowe *Literary Culture and U.S. Imperialism* (2000).

new American free life, or it is pushed back into a history of old-times by a character of a new and “free” Muslim woman. In Mohja Kahf’s *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, for example, the protagonist is a complex veiled woman named Khadra, who struggles to balance the American life against the values of her “traditional” immigrant parents, and navigates a personal struggle from “backwards” tradition towards a symbolic transformation to modernity mediated through her hijab. Here, the binary of liberated Muslim woman is invoked through hijab as a nuanced portrayal of Muslim women entails that she can move past dominant forces (of gender roles of a traditional Islam for instance) to ultimately reconcile her place in modern American life through capital consumption. *Where Jasmine Blooms* depicts the immigrant experience of an older “old-fashioned” Palestinian woman whose sons, much to her dismay, married “American” women. The binary of liberated/dominated Muslim woman operates away from hijab—as “modern” Muslim women in the story notably do not practice hijab (only the old-fashioned mother in law does). Furthermore, the binary also works through nuanced critiques of domesticity of gender roles, as Warah critiques gender roles in relation to Arab/Islamic culture rather than understanding them through capital economic labor divisions. Kahf and Warah’s novels demonstrate the complexities of Muslim women in hijab, but I move past such cultural analysis and point towards the relationship between gender dynamics and economic understandings. Such readings can illuminate the ways these narratives attempt to distinguish between Arab culture and Islamic practice not only reinforces “culture talk,” but also masks the reality that such dynamics have economic roots in securing labor dynamics in domestics spaces (in the household) in the US. I ultimately demonstrate the ways the novels offer nuanced imaginations of Muslim women that entail an inevitable embrace of American value systems.



Turning from fictional literature, in Chapter 3 I will examine hijab as narrated through nonfiction in the form of memoirs. Here, as scholars have discussed, immigrant memoirs take on the form of testimony when detailing with third world experiences. Hence, I will examine two very different, nearly polar approaches in memoirs by women with experience with the personal practice. Accordingly, I will examine hijab in Ayaan Hirshi Ali's *Infidel* and Ibtihaj Muhammad's *Proud*. Hijab is addressed in both accounts, as polarly a site of oppression for "Muslim women," or as emphasized as a choice that did not stop her from accomplishing her dreams. Each work narrates a different part of the liberated/dominated binary; Hirsi Ali peddles the notion that Muslim women are dominated by the practice of hijab, while Muhammad, through an emphasis of choice, mobilizes a discourse of liberation through the practice. Through the hijab, in this chapter, I argue that distance from the practice, as well as attachment to it as a liberating factor (in each author's pursuit of freedoms and achievements) are two sides of the same coin. Moving past culture talk, I demonstrate that the first approach can be best understood through historical colonial strategies that have taken shape through hijab, while the latter approach serves capital interests in quests to prove that Muslims are "just like everybody else." Hirsi Ali was raised in poverty conditions under colonized territories in Kenya, Saudi Arabia, and Somalia, and credits the Western world for being "civilized" and offering her "freedom." She does not, however, attribute the detrimental conditions of the countries, violence, and poverty she experienced as consequence of British and American colonialism operating in those countries. Instead, the "freedoms" she experiences are mediated through condemning the practice of hijab—even though she was never forced to wear one. Brief glosses at history will allow me to demonstrate that moving past culture talk can illuminate the ways in which Hirshi Ali's work employs similar practices to those used by British colonizers in Egypt—who regarded hijab as a social project necessary to ensuring that colonized Egyptian men

absorbed British value systems. Alongside Hirsi's novel, I will examine Ibtihaj Muhammad's *Proud*, who emphasizes pride in achieving her Olympic dreams as a black woman in hijab. As she emphasizes hijab as a *choice*, Muhammad is consumed with representational politics in popular media. She recalls her joy when approached by large corporations such as Nike, Mattel, and Visa for endorsement projects. While she notes that large corporate brands gave her an opportunity to dispel stereotypes on hijab, I demonstrate the ways (by pointing towards economic understandings of race and labor production) corporations have used athletes as spokes people for their "social justice projects." Behind the guise of inclusivity and diversity, such brands launch large campaigns that mask unethical labor conditions they employ overseas. Accordingly, in such "testimonies," investing in the identity politics of hijab—either for freedom or away from oppression—ultimately serves larger neoliberal projects of imperialism overseas.

While in my first three chapters, I focus on examining various outlets of print discourse involving hijab in America, in my final chapter I will turn towards examining a visual of hijab as widely received by women who identify as Muslims in the US. I will examine the popular and critically acclaimed poster by Shepard Fairey that emerged from his larger collection of work titled "We the People." The poster I am specifically referring to features an animated headshot of a woman covered in a hijab made of an American flag, captioned with "Are Greater Than Fear." I chose this form for my final chapter because of the "viral" nature it can take on in contemporary culture. Furthermore, through this form, we can see a visualization of a liberated/dominated discourse operating simultaneously on the body of a Muslim woman. In this form, I also argue that this is the embodiment of consequence that has resulted from decades of imperial discourses and the inadvertent investing in such. As the visual culturally invokes sentiments of the liberties the US offers Muslim women, it embodies the dominance of intellectual violence taking place

domestically within the United States on the site of hijab, and allowed to continue through consent when Muslim women replicate the visual in real life. While the image was produced by a white middle class artist, the original idea of dawning an American flag as a hijab can be traced to individuals who identify as Muslim. Notably, after Fairey's image circulated, there was a traceable and visible surge of women dawning the American flags as their hijabs throughout political protests in the US. Accordingly, I analyze the popular image as both a form of narrative, and in the context of its popular acclaim as a symbol of protest and belonging in the context of anti-immigration US policy. Here, against popular belief that dawning an American flag hijab was revolutionary for "Muslim women," the image narrated that American values can overtake any and all practices to make them more acceptable. Assigning the American flag to stand in for the hijab, and completely wrapping the image of a woman (only her face is showing) in the United States flag, is not revolutionary—it actually means that American values must necessarily engulf personal practices for acceptance. To offer a full understanding of the poster in its context, history can show that anti-immigration US policy is nothing new, and that the American flag itself has been repurposed at various historical moments to mask its colonial agendas.

Society is multifaceted and interconnected to the national dynamics of global interest. This project is intended to engage in the critical conversations in American Studies that examine how the discourse of imperialism manifests itself within the nation. The issue, here, is that there has been a strategic emphasis in the discourse of the American nation to paint binary images of Muslim woman: the oppressed traditional vs. the free and modern. Such dialectic enables larger reductive identities to perpetuate and reinforce divisions among communities. Here, we see the ways in which women who identify as Muslim themselves are conditioned to invest in their own subjugation. It is important to emphasize the fact that this work should not only pertain to discourse

of hijab, but that through examining hijab in American discourses, larger social problems pertaining to gender, identity, and even the state are revealed.

## CHAPTER 1: HIJAB IN NARRATIVES OF MUSLIM POLITICAL ADVOCACY GROUPS

### Introduction:

In November of 2018, Ilhan Omar (from Minnesota) and Rashida Tlaib (from Michigan) were voted into United States Congress—the historic election (as the first two “Muslim women” to serve in US Congress) was covered far and wide throughout countless media outlets. A focal point of such coverage was Ilhan Omar’s visible hijab, and it was often contrasted with its absence on representative Rashida Tlaib. For example, one article in the popular culture magazine *Vogue Arabia*—a branch of the highly coveted popular American culture outlet *Vogue* magazine—covered the election of the two new Congress women. The article was not written in Arabic, which one would expect since it circulates among a predominately Arab speaking audience. In fact, as is the majority of its coverage, it was written in English and easily accessible through a google search—denoting the fact that although intended to circulate to “Arabian” audiences, the magazine still consciously writes with its base readers (those of *Vogue* in the US) in mind. The article reads,

Twenty years after becoming a US citizen, Ilhan Omar made history in her adopted country. With her hand on her grandfather’s Qur’an, she was sworn into the US Congress, becoming the first hijabi member to do so. The scene was all the more poignant as it marked the lifting of a 181-year-old ban preventing anyone from wearing any kind of headwear in the chamber. Along with Rashida Tlaib (who doesn’t wear a hijab), she was also one of the first two Muslim women to enter Congress, and the first Somali-American (Gouveia, 2019).

Here, the contrast between the two Muslim women centers on the fact that one of the women (Omar) wears hijab while the other doesn’t. Furthermore, the magazine notes that the reason her election is historic is because she wears hijab—placing emphasis on the presence of her visible practice. The emphasis on hijab and its coverage in the media denotes the ongoing conversation about hijab in America. It is evidence of a widely accepted narrative constructed by government

and perpetuated by cultural mediums I have indicated in the introduction, one that emphasizes hijab as some sort of remarkable “difference” that clearly distinguishes the ideologies between the American and Eastern worlds—a difference marked by hijab that must be emphasized with Omar and Tlaib’s elections. Despite the fact that veiling is not exclusive to women who identify as Muslim, no other distinction in the media was made for other Congresswomen who were not veiled. The article emphasizes Omar’s hijab as visual spectacle. The writer notes, “Wearing her hijab allows her to be a “walking billboard” not only for her faith but also for representing something different from the norm” (Gouveia, 2019). Omar embraces the visible practice and lends it function. She tells the author, “To me, the hijab means power, liberation, beauty, and resistance” (Omar qtd in Gouveia, 2019). Importantly, though, she is not entirely clear on what liberation it affords her—whether such liberties are personal or if they embody larger concepts of freedom as defined by first world imperial nations.

In another article, in the original *Vogue* magazine (United States), Ilhan’s election is also featured—with the focus solely on her hijab. The headline reads, “Ilhan Omar Is Poised to Be the First Muslim Woman to Wear a Hijab in Congress Tomorrow.” The article begins with the author quoting a tweet by Omar. She writes, “No one puts a scarf on my head but me. It’s my choice—one protected by the First Amendment,” Ilhan Omar...tweeted in response to the furious interest in the head covering she will be wearing on the House floor starting tomorrow” (Yaeger, 2019). This tweet by Omar is in response to the longstanding, media conjured, narrative in the United States--that Muslim women are oppressed as evidenced by the practice of hijab. Here, in both articles, Omar defends her choice to practice hijab. What Omar faces is not unusual, as many Muslim women who move into public visibility are often cornered into discussing their hijabs into the already established narrative of freedom versus oppression. Her place in Congress is

automatically reduced to a single, visible religious practice. Importantly, in her defense, she insists—as opposed to the narrative of oppression—that hijab gives her *freedom*.

These two aforementioned articles (taken together from the same network of magazines) are among countless examples in which women who identify as Muslim in the United States are forced to explain their personal practice (of hijab) in order to normalize their place in public spaces. Rather than questioning the economic forces and historical strategies that have constructed Muslim women as oppressed, Omar, for example, is forced to resist such constructions. However, the pushback, as I will show, is through the same language that marginalizes her. Furthermore, Omar and Tlaib's election to US Congress is indicative of the active participation of Muslims in the United States in public service sectors. From posts of elected officials, government positions, and activism, Muslim Americans in the United States are actively engaged in political and public service domains. Their participation is also narrated through political advocacy groups that form from within Muslim communities across the US, focused on the civil rights of and promote better representation of Muslims living in the United States. As many of their narratives intend to pushback against stereotypical depictions that misrepresent Muslim women and hijab, the narratives produced are an integral site within which we can see the ways US imperialism operates domestically in connection with government policy and law to ensure its own interests. As the visibility of Muslim Americans, particularly women (through the exoteric marker), increases in public sectors, explaining the presence of hijab seems inescapable—and it is such types of explanations, reactionary discourses, and political identity formation surrounding hijab in public, political, domains that will be the subject of this chapter. Here, and as in others, notions of empowerment, choice, and freedom are emphasized in order to justify the presence of hijab (the visible marker of the Muslim woman) on a Muslim woman in public forums—inevitably leading

to the investment/creation of a “liberated” Muslim woman figure type, one that that inadvertently suggests that other Muslim women are dominated (and subsequently must be saved).

The relations that manifest themselves within political organizations of the Muslim community illuminate the deliberate tension created by imperialism and its focus on the identity of Muslim women. This chapter examines hijab and the politics of public participation--the ways people who categorically identify as Muslim Americans reconcile their interests in public participation in the government and the state. Scholarship focused on Muslim politically advocacy groups typically examines the urgencies 9/11 created for Muslim Americans to mobilize, and the subsequent visibility Muslims in the US have gained as a previously nearly unrecognized in group in the public sector. However, such scholars remain within cultural frameworks of identity and representation. For example, Bakalian and Bozorgmehr (2005) argue that increased Islamophobia within the United States resulted in Muslim American mobilization through advocacy groups, centers, education in record numbers. Cury (2017) argues that Muslim advocacy groups demand rights and engage in US foreign policy interests as minority organizations as they position themselves as a representative voice of the Muslim community in the US. She says despite organizations such as CAIR and MPAC’s failures to influence US policy regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, they have, through advocating for Muslim Americans in the US, acquired a voice and visibility previously out of reach. Zarrugh (2016) explores the response of political shock in forming, through political advocacy groups, Arab American racial identities in calling for recognizing their race outside “white” (2016). My analysis in this chapter will show the limitations of such models. Concerned mainly with the emergence of groups that are intended to inform the state, such scholarship is remiss to consider the ways political advocacy groups could be solidifying neoliberal fallacies of inclusion, tolerance, and freedom that have marginalized them



in the first place—especially with regard to public policy creation and civil rights. Rather than evaluating the extent to which political advocacy groups have effectively advocated for change, or addressed representations of Muslim Americans, rather than looking at the effectiveness of political advocacy groups in demanding recognition from US government, I point towards looking at advocacy groups in the context of a neoliberal state—towards economic and historic references that can reveal the ways in which they function in service to the nation, even when they attempt to push back against national narratives. I argue that discourse on hijab mediated through notions of freedoms in political advocacy groups leads to the binary of liberated/dominated Muslim woman figure—what emerges from such narratives is a liberated Muslim woman figure who must inevitably reconcile to capital interests for mainstream recognition. Many such organizations produce a prototypical “modern Muslim woman” (visibly, through the presence of hijab) and accept neoliberal “common sense” values of freedom as their own standards of value—standards which have been culturally constructed to ensure free-market consumption. My analysis will offer beginning entries of framework that pushes beyond cultural analysis that circumscribes discussion of Muslim women to representation, towards socio political and economic ones that can demonstrate the ways advocacy groups function in service to the liberal state, and the ways investing advocacy groups are validating neoliberal ideologies when notions of freedom are worked through discourse on hijab.

In what follows, I will examine discourses of Muslim political advocacy organizations and their use of hijab in the context of identity and combating stereotypes—but in relation to, importantly, their function as advocacy groups within a capital society. I will elucidate the ways notions of neoliberal freedoms and modernity are being mediated through hijab, even when this rhetoric is not immediately apparent. Contrary to scholarship that talks about the accomplishments

of political action committees and advocacy groups, I demonstrate the ways that, in a capital society, such groups form as necessarily serving the nation. I begin with a theory on the politics of locality to show the ways in a capital society serving the nation's interests begins the labor level, through an individual's workspace dynamics; as political advocacy groups form, they mimic workspace dynamics in competing for the government's recognitions. I will then analyze discourse on hijab from two political advocacy groups and one political action committee to analyze the ways hijab is being used to mobilize neoliberal notions of freedom by investing in the construction of a "liberated" Muslim woman figure that ultimately justifies US imperial practices. I look at discourse on hijab by the nationally recognized Council of American Islamic Relations (CAIR), Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), and the American Muslim Women Political Action Committee (AMWPAC). Each of these organizations aligns itself with a mission to advocate for the political interests and protect the civil rights of American Muslims living in the United States. Each of the organizations I will examine--MPAC, AMWPAC, and CAIR--will illuminate unique ways hijab is used to create and maintain a domestic national cultural narrative through the binary of liberated/dominated Muslim woman figure, and to normalize the category of "Muslim American women" as a regular consumer of the American economy. Public Service advertisements disseminated by CAIR, a political advocacy group that has both national and individual state branches allows for a discussion on the ways political advocacy groups market Muslim women as one with "choice" and compatible with national interests. MPAC, an internationally based group that claims to "make Muslims part of the solution since 1988"<sup>38</sup> (MPAC, 2017), allows for a discussion on the ways such political advocacy groups push for nuanced representations of Muslim women in cultural media by mobilizing not only liberated figures, but mobilize rhetoric of

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<sup>38</sup> Thereby validating that people who categorically identify as "Muslim" are, in fact, a problem for the United States.

tolerance to assert the validity of the practice of hijab. Discourse on hijab in MPAC elucidates the ways advocacy groups use foundational American values of “freedom” and “tolerance”—both constructs developed to actually maintain different groups within the United States. Finally, discourse on Muslim women in the US as narrated through American Muslim Women Political Action Committee—a political action committee for and by Muslim women established in 2016 with a particular mission of pushing targeted agendas through government policy. AMWPAC allows for a discussion on the ways patriotism and internal discipline work to reinforce gender codes of the liberated Muslim woman figure within the nation, as well as to position an American Muslim woman who enjoys freedom and protection in American spaces. I push cultural frameworks further to point towards historical reference that can demonstrate the subtle and strategic ways new forms of colonization are reproducing themselves and given life with the investment of those subjugated themselves. Such a historical understanding, though I am only offering examples and glosses, can elucidate the ways how and reasons why political advocacy groups today have been conditioned into operating within a language that has been constructed to dominate them, and the ways colonialism is still happening within marginalized groups—through discourse on hijab—within the United States today.

#### Local and National Spaces of Political Advocacy Groups

The function of political advocacy groups is to participate in a central national identity that is the dominant culture within the United States. Hijab, what was once an easily recognizable marker of difference between “us” (the US) and them (“the uncivil and oppressed Muslim majority countries) is now has a physical presence in the service of government that cannot be ignored. Ilhan Omar, for example, is an immigrant to the United States, practicing hijab while serving in the United States Congress. What was once an embodiment of marked difference between

“oppressed Muslim women” (a Muslim overseas in hijab) now serves in US Congress. Such previous strategies of differentiation between Muslims and American women are more complicated, women who identify as both American, Muslim, and practice hijab now have a seat in American legislative institutions. Accordingly, the ways in which the United States must continue to shape the justification of its practice has changed and taken on new forms. Yet, as I noted with the opening of this chapter, the United States government maintains this subjugation by shaping an internal culture such that the identities of Muslim women in the United States are more than often limited to discussion on their hijab. Importantly, this subjugation is ensured when Muslim women themselves invest in liberated Muslim woman figures determined by neoliberal constructions. As Muslim political advocacy groups form to push back against representation, they inevitably take on the conversation of hijab in order present Muslim women who may be deemed acceptable to national interests. Yet, before I analyze these particularities and narratives, I discuss here the formation of such groups with respect to capital societies—in a capital government such as the US, one that depends on labor to accumulate wealth, even the formation and competition of such groups will inevitably service the nation. Notably, in what follows, I establish the way political advocacy groups work as a form in free market economies, such that they ensure that service in advocacy of minority groups is ultimately service to the nation within which it serves. This will be evidenced by the ways in which workspace dynamics in free market societies are established to maintain difference even among individuals—as individuals form groups, they compete for interests and mainstream recognition by first establishing their allegiances to capital value systems.

As I will detail the missions of each group I look at in their respective sections throughout this paper, I first note that political advocacy groups work to inform public opinion and ultimately

influence policy for their particular interests. However, in a capital market society, such interests are dictated by those of the nation. Economic dynamics necessarily form the basis by which interest groups form and begin to advocate. At base, a society that operates with a class system ensures that people advocate for interests that secure group divisions, labor, and material gain. Peter Dickens explores the concept of locality in social, economic, and political relationships. His theory on the politics of locality demonstrates that the ways people work to secure their interests are ultimately set up contingent upon labor forces that ensure capital—they begin at the individual workspace level and ultimately service the nation. Dickens examines local and national dynamics of people in relationship to their workspaces and government in Britain. Since his work focuses on dynamics that result from relationships in middle-class physical spaces, thinking through this work to understand how groups of people navigate their social interests within the United States (which heavily operates on a class-based economy) will allow me to illuminate the ways political advocacy groups compete for their interests by first and importantly validating that of the nation's. Dickens notes, "The 'politics of locality' is becoming an increasingly important stake in the contests between dominant and subordinate groups" (4). That is, local politics between individuals in their workspaces directly inform how the nation at large operates to reward some groups while disciplining others. To that extent, Dickens defines locality in counterparts. He notes,

On the one hand, locality is the context of everyday activities, face-to-face relations and the diverse range of social and political activities and alliances in which people engage. On the other hand, it is precisely through these actions and coalitions that people are exploiting and changing wider social relations such as those between classes, between genders, or between owners and non-owners of domestic property (2).

Locality entails the daily contexts in which people engage in political and social dynamics that form their identities—many of which happen in places such as employment, local political activities, and even social groups. According to Dickens, individuals interacting in smaller social

settings directly influence wider social relations such as class differences, gender relations, and even capital ownership on which the nation operates. Dickens notes that the paid workspace dynamic can also elucidate the dynamic between "civil" and "social" society outside of the work force. Through workspace relationships, different groups of people attempt to reconcile their place in social society; they resist subordinating factors such as inequality and exploitation (Dickens, 90). Such resistance, however, inevitably comes at the expense of competing in a system that disciplines some while rewards others. Dickens points out a direct contradiction between a nation state dependent on labor forces--one, that in theory, should provide equal citizenship, rights, etc—and a successful economy that necessarily depends on the profiting from the "uneven development and inequality of citizenship" (187). Dickens theoretical framework here is important because he demonstrates that in a free market society, individuals compete for interests starting at the workplace level—interests that serve and ensure the accumulation of labor and capital. As political advocacy groups form, their formation at base has been already solidified to serve a system that profits from division. Thus, political advocacy groups operate similar to individual workspace dynamics in the sense that in order to resist subordination, they must first validate the larger government's interests in order to be recognized.

The reason I have chosen three advocacy groups that purport to push social change for Muslims from a national standpoint versus, for example, groups that target local politics can also be understood from Dickens theory on interest formation. For instance, Dearborn, Michigan, a city with largest concentration of Muslims in one area, contains numerous political advocacy groups. However, I have chosen CAIR, MPAC, and AMWPAC as opposed to AAPAC (Arab American Political Action Committee) in Dearborn because larger groups are more necessarily focused, as Dickens would suggest, on social justice issues. In fact, Dickens cautions the mistake in

emphasizing the importance of local groups with regard to democratic issues specifically motivated towards social change such as environment issues and anti-racism--especially considering the influence of change that's not being carried out through local voting elections (168-169). Furthermore, national interests were, for example, decided by "companies operating at a national scale on households in which gender relations were being negotiated on the level of the home or neighborhood" (145). Depending on interests, corporations have historically played an important role in gender interest formation—starting at the local, “home” levels which, in turn, ensured national gains. For instance, women are generally believed to care about social issues that involve their routines (Dickens, 168-169). To that end, the very mechanisms that bring about change (i.e. democracy) are the same ones that reproduce political and social situations. Accordingly, when Muslim political advocacy groups seek to bring about change to the discrimination Muslims in the US are facing, they must first appeal to interests predetermined by government and large corporate interests. In doing so, they must validate interests predetermined and narrated by corporate interests—interests designed to secure the investment in capital.

As political advocacy groups compete for the nation's recognition, they importantly invest in ideological constructs that are constantly taking shape as the world changes. As the presence of hijab (for example, now through women in service of US Congress, or through narratives that have emerged especially post 9/11) complicates the “us” versus “them” narrative on which the nation has constructed itself, cultural constructs must take on new forms to ensure its interests can continue to be met. That is, the “us” versus “them” binary of popular media is no longer as clear cut as the separation between borders of nations, though what it is to be “American” must be maintained. To that end, Gupta and Ferguson note that in a changing and fast paced world,<sup>39</sup> with

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<sup>39</sup> For example, mass migrations to different parts of the world, and technological advances that allow a person to be in one physical space while remaining connected to another.

the fluidity of national borders (people migrating across borders more readily than before), a new understanding of physical space with respect to power relations must be accounted for. They analyze the connection between traditional understanding of physical space, fixed communities, and their associated cultures as not fixed to geographical locations, but inform ideological dynamics across the nation. Ideological constructs such as freedoms continue to perpetuate and manage the movement of different people across the nation's physical borders. Nevertheless, as Gupta and Ferguson note, what it means to be "American" is still largely debated and changes at different historical moment. The American cultural narrative, generally shaped by states and elites, presents "national naturalisms" of identity and place as something solid and commonsense; but they are also fluid notions that are constantly shifting and changing (Gupta and Ferguson, 40). Accordingly, what was once a narrative of "oppressed" Muslim women in Muslim majority countries overseas, is now managed in a narrative of a liberated Muslim woman figure who is free in the US--based on American cultural constructs of freedom and modernity. As political advocacy groups compete for national recognition, they not only inevitably compete to secure their interests, but they invest in ideological constructs of "natural-isms" of what it means to be American even though those constructs are subject to change.

#### CAIR, Hijab and Freedom of Choice

With establishing the function of political advocacy groups as both servicing the nation because they form based on values dictated/shaped in the interest of free market labor, a clearer lens by which to understand how hijab mobilizes imperial discourse of liberated/dominated Muslim woman figures ensues. CAIR is a Muslim American political advocacy group that is both nationally based and maintains individual branches in various states across the United States. According to the organization's site's mission, "CAIR's vision is to be a leading advocate for



justice and mutual understanding. CAIR's mission is to enhance understanding of Islam, encourage dialogue, protect civil liberties, empower American Muslims, and build coalitions that promote justice and mutual understanding” (CAIR.com, 2015). I chose this organization because of its broad reaching scope in advocating for the rights of Muslims within the United States, and its own professed ambitions as the “leading advocate for justice and mutual understanding.” On the “About Us” page, the organization details its work in various domains, including civil rights work, government affairs, and media relations. Many of this work is centered around first validating American ideological values as the basis on which they seek to protect their civil rights. For instance, under the Civil Rights department, the description reads, “The department works to protect and defend the constitutional rights of American Muslims, thereby supporting the rights of all Americans.” Here, the US constitution is validated as the doctrine which should secure the rights of all people in the country. Furthermore, CAIR’s Core Principles, as listed on the page, explicitly invoke freedoms that allude to those constructed by American national values—ones I highlighted in the introduction in the context of neoliberal constructs. For instance, one core principle reads “CAIR supports free enterprise, freedom of religion, and freedom of expression.” Such notions of freedom also inform their commissioned ad campaigns that are targeted towards clarifying the image of Muslim Americans against stereotypes. These campaigns often include a specific emphasis on Muslim women in hijab as part of such projects. In this section, I demonstrate the ways their own emphasis on hijab continues to “other” Muslim women even at basic representational levels to emphasize a liberated Muslim woman figure informed by their core principles. Furthermore, such a packaging of hijab in political ad campaigns reduces concepts of freedom to individual choices—pushing larger notions of freedoms onto cultural terrains of practice.

CAIR's website includes educational toolkits and guidelines intended to educate the general public about who Muslims are and what their religious specific needs are in the United States. These toolkits are important to consider because I suggest that even foundationally, CAIR self-positions Muslim women in hijab as "different" than other women in society at large. While these toolkits are intended to be educational, however, CAIR is seemingly telling the general public "if you ever encounter a Muslim, here's what you need to know"--reinforcing to the public that there is indeed basis of the US media's constructs of the "us" versus "them" narrative. Such messages establish the difference between Muslim and other human beings at a foundational level. The suggestion, per their mission, may be inadvertent—but the presence of toolkits reaffirms national suspicions of difference, and suggests that such difference can be handled with the use of a "toolkit." For example, in a toolkit titled *An Educator's Guide To Islamic Religious Practices*, one part reads,

When in public, Muslim women wear loose-fitting, non-revealing clothing, known as hijab, or khimar. This attire, which may vary in style, includes a head covering. The wearing of a head covering may lead to teasing by other students. Teachers should prevent classmates from pulling on or removing a Muslim student's scarf (6, CAIR).

Not all Muslim women wear hijab. Many non-Muslim women elect to wear loose fitting clothing that is not considered hijab. Furthermore, perhaps teachers should not only prevent the physical contact from other students as the pamphlet suggests, but also the teasing in general and all together regardless of apparent religious practice. This toolkit in particular was published and available as early as 1997, circulating such ideas even before 9/11 exacerbated the oppressed Muslim women narrative.

Yet, even in recent times, CAIR's dealing with hijab in mainstream media raises serious questions on the fixation of the practice as an identity marker. Here, I refer to the ways CAIR

addresses hijab in various national public service announcement and newspaper advertisements launched post 9/11. According to their website, such campaigns, such as one titled “I Am An American Muslim,” were created as a “...result of growing demand for accurate and objective information about Islam and Muslims in America” (Cair.com, 2004). Accordingly, in order to pushback against the widely disseminated narratives that were exacerbated post 9/11, CAIR launched educational campaigns to represent Muslim Americans in new light. Many such narratives included that Muslim women overseas (such as in Afghanistan) were oppressed and needed saving<sup>40</sup>, and CAIR’s campaigns inevitably featured Muslim American women who practiced hijab. One ad among the many ads emerging from the campaign features a woman who identifies as Muslim. The caption of the ad reads,

My name is Manal Omar. I've earned a Master's degree from Georgetown University, and I've won several national public-speaking awards. I'm a development researcher for an international corporation. I vote. I'm active in politics, and I belong to several civic organizations. I'm an American Muslim woman and I wear hijab. I choose to wear hijab - a head scarf and modest attire - because the practice is integral to my religious beliefs, and because I am proud to be a Muslim woman. In Islam, both women and men are encouraged to dress modestly, thereby allowing a person to be judged on the content of his or her character, and not on physical appearance. To me, hijab is a symbol of my confidence and self-respect<sup>41</sup>.

Manal’s hijab is mentioned and situated amidst her list of countless accomplishments that would be deemed impressive for any individual. Among many things, she earned a degree from a prestigious university, she has been nationally recognized for her public speaking, and is actively engaged in research. From the second line, Omar addresses to narratives: that Muslim woman are uncivil (she is educated) and that Muslim woman are silenced (she has won several public speaking

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<sup>40</sup> Stabile, C. A., and D. Kumar. "Unveiling Imperialism: Media, Gender and the War on Afghanistan." *Media, Culture & Society* 27.5 (2005): 765-82.

<sup>41</sup> The text of this ad can be found on CAIR’s website:  
[https://www.cair.com/hijab\\_explained\\_in\\_national\\_ad\\_campaign](https://www.cair.com/hijab_explained_in_national_ad_campaign)

awards). The narrative of silence will be addressed later in this chapter, but for now, note that the silence of Muslim women (the narrative) is offset by Omar's speaking awards, and through her engagement in public politics. She also participates in public civic engagement, as her voting practices are highlighted. Amid her accomplishments, she notes that she is an American (first) Muslim woman—nearly to suggest that she is afforded these extensive accomplishments, such as an ivy league college degree, and her work for corporations, because she is American. It is only after these accomplishments and details about her life are established is her hijab then inevitably discussed.

For Omar, hijab is first situated as a choice, informed by CAIR's core principles, which are in turn informed by the nation's neoliberal constructs of freedom; yet remember, freedom of choice inevitably comes at the expense of "evil" freedoms, as outlined in the introduction, elsewhere. Most importantly, the discourse of this advertisement campaign invests in the constructs of the liberated Muslim woman figure to work in two ways: the first is that it emphasizes the freedom of choice that a liberated Muslim woman figure is afforded uniquely as an American, and, two, it reduces notions of freedom (in this case, individual choice) onto cultural terrains. For the first, amidst Omar's impressive accomplishments, she emphasizes her choice to wear hijab—as opposed to mainstream narratives by popular media that suggest that Muslim women are forced to wear hijab. Many Muslim women may share Manal's sentiments on why she chooses to wear hijab. However, problematic is the larger phenomenon of situating hijab amidst long lists of honorable accomplishments, and the emphasis that it is a choice. Like Ilhan Omar (last names are coincidental), hijab and choice are linked in the same sentence, and immediately follow one another. Furthermore, this link and emphasis of choice are deliberate. According to their website, CAIR executive director "This advertisement is designed to demonstrate that adopting modest

attire and personal behavior is a liberating and empowering choice for both men and women," (CAIR.com, 2003). The fact that choice is so heavily emphasized begs the question on whether the choice is reserved for her only because she is in American spaces—does it suggest that her counterparts abroad do not choose? More importantly, what is reserved as choice for Muslim women in the United States becomes centered around the freedom of choice--to choose hijab.

There are immediate cultural drawbacks to the monolithic binaries produced from such packaged nuanced representations of Muslim women. Dr. Evelyn Alsultany has discussed the packaging of Islam in such post 9/11 advertisement campaigns intended to dispel stereotypes and misconceptions about Muslims in the United States. Her argument is useful to understanding the ways in which specific types of Muslim women are packaged in such nonprofit campaigns—inevitably contributing to the exclusions of others. She notes that organizations such as CAIR situate Muslim-American identity in terms of American values that include diversity, patriotism, and inclusion in the United States. Here, she talks specifically about this post 9/11 CAIR ad campaigns, which imagines and redefines the Muslim-Americans living in the United States. For Manal Omar's ad in particular, she notes that CAIR presents a model Muslim woman, one who directly challenges clichéd stereotypes of oppressed Muslim women; Manal's hijab is "asserted as her choice and as an expression of her beliefs" (Alsultany, 607). Alsultany notes that the main message behind this ad and the likes are to demonstrate that Muslim and American values are compatible (607). Contrary to popular belief that insists that Muslim men force women to veil, Omar has willfully chosen to veil just as she has willfully earned all of her accomplishments. Alsultany notes that in pushing such narratives forward, however, unintended consequences emerge. Notably, they “participate in the formation of a particular exclusionary version of diversity that requires a patriotic sameness in order to gain access to cultural citizenship” (607-608). Here,

Omar express her allegiance in the form of not only emphasizing that she is American, but she also notably links her service to the nation in what being American entails. Omar must first present forth her extensive list of qualifications that distinguish her from the “backwards” constructs of dominated Muslim women figures. However, these sets of qualifications actually reinforce such constructs by giving them value and the merit of response. What for, then, the women who does not have a resume as lengthy as Manal, for example, who practice hijab? In this case, drawbacks of such types of advertising include producing a model type of American Muslim women in hijab that is modern, while others are excluded.

Yet in addition to the cultural drawbacks of such advertisement campaigns, I push Alsultany’s analysis further. She notes that such packaging of Muslim American women hijab can have repercussions in terms of access to cultural citizenship and diversity, and such a critique is useful to considering the immediate drawbacks in investing in identity politics—reductive binaries that serve larger interests continuously perpetuate and form. Yet, this investment of the liberated Muslim woman figure also services the government’s ability to push practices onto cultural constructs. In this case, the liberated Muslim woman’s freedom is pushed on what is positioned as an Islamic cultural practice—the hijab. In fact, in arguing to move beyond “culture talk” towards the interrogation of the colonial practices that shape cultural constructs, Mamdani notes that colonial governments have historically pushed notions of religion, law, and politics onto cultural terrains as a strategy of ideological domination. Chanock notes that governments throughout the world have maintained a long history of pushing rights and law issues, specifically of state and society, into categories of culture<sup>42</sup>. He says, “All that we say about culture comes from a history

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<sup>42</sup> According to Mamdani, culture specifically occurs at the “macro” rather than “micro” level of society. The latter refers to the daily practices and lives of people in local communities, while the former includes the operations of states and societies and is more resistant to change (35).

of imperialism, and from the current dual framework of ‘orientalising’ and ‘occidentalising’ in a world of globalized symbolic exchange” (35). Accordingly, culture has been historically formed based on imperial interests that reinforce the “othering” of cultures that are being subordinated. As this culture has notably formed in constructing difference between Muslim women in the Middle East and the United States, it now takes new shape in forming the construction of liberated Muslim women figures unique existing as part of American culture and afforded particular rights and privileges (as opposed to those still dominated). Yet, freedom for Muslim women has taken on the cultural representation of the religious practice of hijab—and is the main determining factor dictating a Muslim woman’s “freedom” of individual choice to practice in the US.

The implications of this advertisement directly aides the construction of the liberated Muslim American figure, especially if one considers the role of advertisement campaigns in shaping culture. Advertisement has played an important role in solidifying cultural narratives to serving United States economic interests. While CAIR releases ad campaigns meant to dispel stereotypes, it necessarily draws upon deep recognizable cultural motifs and rhetoric that have actually oppressed others and ensured labor and consumption on which the economy depends. Advertising is deeply involved “in questions of cultural essences” (Chanock, 24). This narrative is formed, as Chanock notes, “over long periods in relatively close and stable communities which generated shared patterns of behavior and belief that are comprehensible, communicable and legitimate to members of a group over long periods of time” (24-25). Culture, deep-rooted behaviors and belief systems, come to comprise a society’s identity. Chanock notes that the most successful advertising campaigns are able to invoke deep cultural motifs that are easily recognizable (25). Thus, successful advertising that appeals to masses of society tend to draw upon universal cultural motifs that people can easily identify and recognize. Omar is in hijab, and to

offset this unfamiliarity (or this stereotyped image), CAIR begins the text of the advertisement with her recognizably prestigious education from the very American Ivy League university (Georgetown University). Other recognizable motifs include that fact that Omar belongs to “civic organizations” and she says, “I vote”—the right to vote is considered an important marking in American history (women’s suffrage movement). She emphasizes her right to vote, which also demonstrates that she participates in the electoral processes of people that serve in government—that secure the nation’s interests. In American society, what it is to be American is linked to values of freedom, success through the American dream, and a working class that can see upward mobility.

Chanock work allows for a clearer understanding on the ways such political campaigns shape culture to validate government policy. He notes, “One can see a parallel in which the promoters of all cultural versions of rights ‘use’ the past as a way of lending verisimilitude to their versions” (26). Accordingly, one strategy of solidifying colonial agendas is to reference a more abhorrent past in comparison to the social condition at its current. A more recent cultural motif invoked in the advertisement, one that Dr. AlSultany also points out as well, is an allusion to Dr. Martin Luther King’s speech that one day people will be judge by the “content of their character and not by the color of their skin” (607). Invoking civil rights movements, Omar makes cultural reference to the past that is her own contemporary world. She alludes to the promise of progress—one that unifies the nation for a more hopeful world of overcoming difference. This allusion of progress the US has made as a society masks the reality that blacks in the US are still very much discriminated today. She alludes to the same type of progress, when many can argue that blacks continue to be the subject of abhorrent discriminative practices and new forms of enslavement. Accordingly, Chanock cautions the likening of different complex histories within dominant world



orders for recognition and respect. He says, “The need to fight for recognition of different historical experiences, as ‘reflected’ in different ‘cultures’, is even greater for the most vulnerable of indigenous communities, as well as for established non-Western societies” (27). Though Omar may be considered an American citizen, the “othering” CAIR responds to through these campaigns demonstrates a vulnerability Muslim Americans feel in the United States in that their place in the US is yet to be solidified. By and large, Muslim Americans’ in the US missions to validate their place demonstrates that even within the US they are still considered nonwestern people by the national narrative. Accordingly, as Omar alludes to civil rights movements, largely seen as the overcoming of racial discrimination in the United States, she reduces the struggles of marginalization of both blacks and Muslim Americans by alluding to complex histories as if they have been solved. Here, the liberated figure is hopeful in the American system and the American society that it will overcome discrimination of Muslim women in the United States.

#### Muslim Public Affairs Council

Whereas CAIR pushes larger concepts of freedom onto cultural terrains of choice in hijab and practice, MPAC focuses on the representation of hijab as freedom in connection with religious tolerance. Like CAIR, the Muslim Public Affairs Council is also a nonprofit organization dedicated to combatting stereotypical images of Muslims in the United States, and advocating to protect the civil rights of Muslim in the United States. Their website states, “Founded in 1988, the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC) is a national public affairs nonprofit organization working to promote and strengthen American pluralism by increasing understanding and improving policies that impact American Muslims” (mpac.org). Like CAIR, MPAC was founded before 9/11, and seeks to both dispel misunderstandings of American Muslims and advocate for pluralism in the United States. The organization is based both in Los Angeles and Washington D.C. Recall my

discussion earlier on the politics of locality; regardless of national or regionally specific location, they are all informed and ultimately serve the larger governments interests. Working within a government that creates national cultural values that include pluralism while simultaneously profiting from difference between citizens, it is exceptionally difficult for such organizations to accomplish their missions. MPACs mission continues,

We leverage our relationships with legislators, government agencies, executive departments, and thought leaders to improve policies on national security, civil liberties, immigration, public safety and religious freedom for all Americans. We also provide media analysis and messaging strategies to reporters and media professionals to inform public opinion and advise the entertainment industry on creating more humanizing and nuanced portrayals of Muslims and Islam (MPAC.org).

The organization has far-reaching goals that extend from government legislation to aspects of media depiction. In fact, MPAC has an entire Hollywood bureau dedicated to advocating and formulating what such nuanced portrayals of Muslims in America in popular media should consist of. Finally, on their About Us page, they note, “We promote the Islamic and American values of mercy, justice, peace, human dignity, freedom, and equality for all” (mpac.org). Under these values, a verse from the Quran that represents each value is listed, however, no discourse from the American Constitution that highlights such values is listed—and I am not sure that “mercy,” “human dignity” or “peace” are American values considering United States military involvement in countries abroad. More importantly, though, the values of “freedom and equality for all” are emphasized, my discussion in my introduction highlights the ways United States government has created rhetorical notions of freedom and its explicit and implicit values. As I will detail, such notions of “freedom” can be seen as invoked directly through hijab—reduced to calls for nuanced liberated Muslim women figures emerge with freedoms of choice, and calls for freedom to practice religion. Accordingly, MPAC does not question the specificities of freedom in American culture,

rather it reinforces that these specifics and works towards ensuring such undefined ideals set and determined by US government through American culture.

MPAC's mission to present "nuanced portrayals of Muslims and Islam" focuses on polishing representations of Muslim women. Like CAIR, such polished representations further perpetuate a binary of liberated/dominated Muslim woman because they obsessively emphasize figures that pushback against stereotypical depictions—ones that inevitably lead to first validating notions of American freedoms, and inevitably produce liberated Muslim woman figures acceptable deemed to national interests. Such representational missions align with scholarship (i.e. Shaheen, 2013) that also calls for more polished representation of Muslims in Hollywood. For instance, in addition to countless articles detailing the villainization of Muslims in Hollywood, Jack Shaheen (2017) delivered a keynote address detailing five ways to stop misrepresentations and stereotypical depictions of Muslims and Arabs in Hollywood. Shaheen says that the stakes are that such misrepresentations peddle prejudice. However, if we move beyond concern with representational practices, we can interrogate the forces that shapes such constructs. Important to note, MPAC has an office branch located in Hollywood, LA dedicated to advising mainstream movie productions on how best to represent Muslims in film and television more accurately. Their work is apparent in the organization's fixation on emphasizing the existence of model Muslim women who wear hijab. For example, this emphasis is embedded in a film review of *My Name is Khan*. It reads, "...his hijab-wearing psychology professor sister-in-law is the first to diagnose his Asperger's Syndrome<sup>43</sup>" (MPAC.org, 2010). To clarify: the intelligent professor who makes the diagnosis where hijab. The explicit emphasis on her hijab in relationship to her outstanding degree points to

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<sup>43</sup> "An Open Letter From MPAC About Honoring 'My Name Is Khan.' Muslim Public Affairs Council. 18 April 2010. Website. 4 May 2017. [www.mpac.org](http://www.mpac.org).

the same hyper-accomplished liberated figure imagined and perpetuated by CAIR (through the Manal Omar ad).

Political advocacy groups are notably overtly cautious about nuancing depictions of everyday Muslim women as model citizens—nearly superhuman in accomplishment—so as to ease the public fears that Muslim women would in any way be a threat to American civilization. Yet, as such nuanced representational practices emerge in the forms of liberated Muslim women figures, contradictions inevitably occur. In another instance, when an MPAC member is being accused of working for an “islamist” organization, an article reads, “Sarah, who does not wear hijab, could only smile at the obvious stupidity of such a remark” (Nayyer Ali qtd in MPAC.org, 2003). The single most important facet about Sarah that the author points out is she “does not wear hijab--” implying that she could not possibly be working for an “islamist” organization since she does not wear hijab. While likely unintended, though, it nearly assumes that only because she doesn’t wear hijab is the accusation absurd; if she did wear the hijab, maybe it wouldn’t be far-fetched that she works for an “Islamist” organization. My point is that serving these nuanced representations inevitably have many drawbacks, not just in contradiction, but in inadvertently propelling the justification of US imperial intervention. For example, an article titled “Women Empowerment,<sup>44</sup>” invokes the international need for world leaders to commit to empowering Muslim women. In a short statement, it notes, “Muslim women around the world are being disproportionately abused using outdated Islamic rulings and ages-old customs, while men who commit the same actions often go free” (mpac.org). Here, women’s oppression is blanketed as a symptom of outdated Islamic practice. Ignoring domestic issues of abuse, violence, poverty and injustice against women across races in the United States, this article presumes that the issue of

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<sup>44</sup> Appendix A

oppression has already been solved in the United States. It also implies that Muslim women in the United States are somehow better off and liberated. At the very top of the article is a picture of a woman in a blue hijab, standing sideways leaning directly on an American flag. The image presents a Muslim woman (evidenced by the exoteric marker of hijab), next to the most recognizable symbol of the United States (its flag). Accordingly, the image implies that Muslim women outside of the United States can be protected from “oppression” and “outdated Islamic rulings” by the United States—thereby reinforcing neoliberal imperial projects to continue in Muslim majority countries, while hardly addressing violence, poverty, and other issues that plague “women’s empowerment” within the country.

The image and article suggest that Muslim women in American spaces are better off than their oppressed counterparts overseas. Not only does it invoke a monolithic binary of liberated Muslim women in the US in opposition to dominated Muslim women outside of the US, but this binary services the nation’s own interest in its rhetorical project of “liberation.” As outlined in the introduction and throughout this chapter, such notions of domination and oppression have been strategically constructed to justify a false mission of freeing people in overseas US imperialism depends on. Such discourse normalizes women’s oppression within the United States, by reducing concepts of freedom and equality to culturally relative situations. It also presumes that the United States concepts of such larger issues--more essentially neoliberal constructions of freedom and equality--are the most sound and correct orders of the world. Through such self-investments, Muslim women inadvertently invite the US and advise it on how to continue its imperial practices.

The distinction between women who wear hijab and those who do not is continuously emphasized throughout articles related to their mission of providing “nuanced” portrayals of Muslims. These nuances are notably ones that must demonstrate a simultaneous modernity and

freedom—a liberated woman if visualized with hijab. In an article titled “Faith Front, So Where are the Muslims on ‘CSI?’,” Diane Winston reviews the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Media Awards sponsored by MPAC. The article features quotes from Sumaya Abubaker, a speaker at the awards ceremony, who argues that films and TV representations of Muslim Americans need to push back against media stereotypes. The award ceremony honored the films *Syriana* and *Paradise Now*. While Abubaker notes that the films deserve recognition, she recalls an incident she and a friend had coming out of the theater after seeing *Paradise Now*. Winston quotes Abubaker on the incident, where she and a friend<sup>45</sup> witnessed two men arguing about the film. One of the men in the argument had reduced the film to the typical notion that Muslims are backwards and uncivil. Winston, again, concludes the article with distinguishing hijab as a categorical distinction. In her view, she writes, “Obviously, we need more movies and television shows that reflect the complexity of the situation. Maybe a Muslim MD or lawyer, but please, no desperate housewife in a hijab” (MPAC.org, 2006). Here again, according to such organizations, the only Muslim woman worthy of depicting to the American public is one who is educated and accomplished—one in which hijab is linked with a woman who demonstrates notions of American liberation. She pleads, no desperate housewife in hijab who embodies the stereotypical traditional and backwards Muslim woman domesticated by her husband. Like CAIR, a modern Muslim woman upholds cultural American values: she holds a degree and is involved, at least to some extent, in the public sector, and she is not oppressed by her husband. Organizations such as CAIR and MPAC increasingly emphasize these qualities as the standard of Muslim women in America.

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<sup>45</sup> Winston has readers visualize the two women with an important distinction, “The two women, one wearing a hijab (a head scarf), heard two young men arguing about the film” (MPAC.org, 2006). Which woman was in hijab is not clear, but even more irrelevant is the fact that one of the woman wears hijab at all—they are two women carrying a conversation. Subtle instances referencing hijab such as this, however, reinforce an emphasis on hijab as an exoteric marker.

While the CAIR ad emphasizes Omar's hijab as *choice*, individual choice that gives her freedom, it also, like this article in MPAC emphasizes accomplishment surrounding the "Muslim American woman." Often, feminist discourses use gender to examine notions of modernity, and determine who is modern (Razack, 17). The nuanced portrayal of Muslim American women seems to be one that is highly educated and "modern"—liberated by all accounts in her ability to be educated, well rounded, and accomplished. Pressured into demonstrating their stark contrasts to dominated depictions of popular media, such organizations decide that the best ways to represent Muslim women's behavior in the public sector aligns with high caliber allegiances to American value system. As this type of "culture talk" is perpetuated in mass media, political advocacy groups strive to counter misrepresentations with picturesque depictions of modern Muslim women. These depictions, in their views, disarm people's fears they have as a result of false media depictions. However, what advocating and fixating on these specific singular kinds of representations of Muslims, especially women who wear hijab, does is further categorizes and perpetuates a binary of "modern" vs. "traditional" (or perhaps even "backwards" vs. "civil") they are desperately trying to fight. Most importantly, it maintains the domestic narrative that reduces Muslim identity to binary versions that are acceptable to society. The modern Muslim woman is depicted as someone good for society, and the creation of this type of Muslim women extends to Muslim women in the public eye. In this way, however, a specific type of Muslim woman is obsessively normalized by the organizations that advocate for her.

Not only do nuanced depictions of Muslim women in hijab mobilize the binary of liberated/dominated Muslim women figure, but MPAC's positioning of hijab in the US is reconciled and justified through other notions that serve state interests. That is, they also mobilize ideological notions of *tolerance*—as their right to religious tolerance through freedom of religion.

Such tolerance is discussed in anecdotal references to an act of perceived kindness towards a woman wearing hijab. In another article on MPAC titled “Don’t Forget to Thank Republicans” (and, no, the title is not one of sarcasm), MPAC discusses the necessity of extending appreciation to Republican government officials when they demonstrate civility towards Muslims in the United States. The article discusses how Republican senator of Utah Bob Bennett apologized, even during his last few days in office, for the anti-Muslim rhetoric of Donald Trump during the 2016 election season. The writer cites an instance Bennett told of seeing a woman in hijab in an airport, where he approaches her and tells her to feel welcome in America. While many might find what Bob Bennett did an act of kindness—a measurable gesture of tolerance—I do not believe that his civil gesture is necessary to validate anyone’s place in America. MPAC, however, argues that Muslims must extend gratitude towards these perceived acts of kindness. The writer says, “Especially in a time where a nuanced view of Muslims can be toxic for a Republican, American Muslims must show gratitude to conservatives who are bucking the trend of Muslim-bashing we so frequently hear of on the news” (MPAC, 2016). The article notes that most Muslim Americans lean left on the political spectrum, and thus when a right-wing politician does not “Muslim bash,” Muslim Americans should be ever so grateful for demonstrating tolerance. This exchange underscores the ways political advocacy groups can be inadvertently working against themselves. MPAC presents the scenario and offers recommendations on how Muslims should behave when they are presented with civility and tolerance. There are many important factors to consider that MPAC glosses over: first, and foremost, Bennet is a Republican senator, an arm of the state (and more largely, the national government) and directly works to ensure the capital interests of the United States. Second, the exchange takes place in a US airport, and while the woman is likely to have been a US citizen (likely born in the US), she is automatically “othered” as an outsider because she wears



hijab. He gestures that she is “welcome in this country” as if to insist that she otherwise belongs elsewhere.

The Republican official’s act of kindness towards a Muslim is emphasized especially because she was a Muslim woman wearing hijab. Approaching the Muslim woman (as identified by the exoteric marker of hijab) and telling her to feel welcome further implicitly alludes to the idea that there is religious tolerance in the United States. MPAC is not alone in advocating for the ideals of religious tolerance in America, as CAIR also explicitly demands this value of American society—and particular in connection with hijab. On a press release regarding a subsequent “I am an American Muslim” campaign<sup>46</sup>, CAIR director says, "Tolerance and mutual respect will flourish if Americans of all faiths get to know each other as real human beings, not as religious or ethnic stereotypes" (CAIR.com, 2004). Both organizations elicit tolerance as a core value in combatting stereotypes against Muslim women who wear hijab, and with distinct connection to hijab. In other places, they emphasize their core values of tolerance as a guiding principle of each organization. If we move past culture talk on representational practices of Muslims to rather interrogate these invoked American values, what emerges is the reality that such ideologies are constructed to maintain difference. That is, like the rhetoric of freedom, *tolerance* is but a notion established by American neoliberalism to contain difference among people while still dominating them. According to Wendy Brown, the concept of tolerance<sup>47</sup> has been a political ordering of difference in neoliberal societies—particularly in Western orders of the world. It has been used to create a political master narrative of acceptance (managing differences) while simultaneously

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<sup>46</sup> Subsequent to the campaign featuring Manal Omar (2003), launched directly one year later. This campaign featured Public Service Announcements intended to “help reduce anti-Muslim discrimination and stereotyping” (2004). See: [https://www.cair.com/cair\\_launches\\_i\\_am\\_an\\_american\\_muslim\\_campaign](https://www.cair.com/cair_launches_i_am_an_american_muslim_campaign)

<sup>47</sup> Officially she defines it as a “concept, a disposition, an ethos, an aspiration, an art of titration or delicate balances, a formula for religious or cultural pluralism, a moral virtue a political principle, a *modus vivendi*” (160).

maintaining dominance over groups (161). Originally created to privatize religion, Brown notes that the discourse of tolerance now extends to manage the discourses of liberalism, racialism, gender, and multiculturalism in order to maintain its subjects (161). She says all such engagements with various sites to which tolerance extends, “naturalize[s] as ‘difference’ the inequalities tolerance manages and secures the norms, bringing objects of tolerance into being in the first place” (161). For instance, she notes the contradictions for people who identify as Muslim must endure when they advocate for tolerance. That is, when they do so, they must first reference and combat the archaic Muslim archetype that has already been constructed by Western societies—thereby solidifying the false narrative it is fighting against for respect and equality (165). Ultimately, Brown says, “merely utilizing or critiquing dominant discourses of tolerance is inadequate to empower the marginalized” (168). In fact, the illusion of tolerance has been set up so that engaging its very discourse ensures that dominant government narratives are solidified.

Moving past scholarship on representational practices of Muslims not only reveals the construction of tolerance as a governing ideology to manage difference among people, but I point towards history to show that this is not a new strategy either. In fact, the notion of tolerance draws upon historical precedent—and has been explicitly linked to colonizing Muslim populations. Historically, promising religious tolerance, or more essentially religious *freedom*, has been a colonial strategy with specific regard to Islam from as early as 1850’s in Muslim majority territories in Indonesia. Such a historical reference point can demonstrate that tolerance today takes up new forms of the rhetorical guarantee of religious freedom previously utilized in colonial practices. This practice took place with the Dutch post 1857 in India, where imperial strategy took form from the Roman “divide and rule” to “define and rule” (42). According to Mamdani, early

theorists of indirect rule<sup>48</sup>, such as Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, redefined imperial practice as Dutch colonial forces encountered extensive resistance from Islamic insurgency in Indonesia. In order to colonize the Islamic society and integrate with Dutch colonial powers, Hurgronje began to distinguish between Islam as a religion and that as a political ideology. He noted that Islam as a political ideology could only be subdued and managed if "ordinary Muslim were assured religious tolerance<sup>49</sup>" (38). Mamdani notes, "he argued that a policy of neutrality towards religious life was prerequisite to for successful pacification and stability (39). Accordingly, this guarantee also ensured the silencing and acceptance of domination through colonial practice. More importantly, in response to this agenda, hijab has been mobilized to advocate for religious tolerance—a tolerance that is actually a strategy of colonial rule. Creating a new type of "Muslim woman," visibly recognizable through hijab, that is both compatible with American values and thus qualifies for protection under religious freedom in the United States is solidifying such new forms of internal colonial strategies.

#### American Muslim Women Political Action Committee

While organizations such as CAIR and MPAC seek to advocate on behalf of all people who identify as Muslim Americans in the United States, AMWPAC (or American Muslim Women

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<sup>48</sup> Mamdani notes American imperialism takes the form of indirect rule rather than direct rule. In the historic latter, cultural assimilative practices were intended to colonize groups of people. In the empire of more recent times, indirect rule simultaneously acknowledged and shaped difference (2). Importantly, he argues, "...it is under indirect rule colonialism that the definition and management of difference was developed as the essence of governance. The difference between the modern democratic state and its colonial version is this: the modern state ensures equal citizenship in political society while acknowledging difference in civil society, but its colonial counterpart institutionalized difference in both the polity and society (2). What this historical understanding of indirect law illuminates for the context of hijab and political identity in the United States is that many similar practices have are still alive today. Notably, whereas empire practices emphatically institutionalize difference in both political society and civil society, the modern democratic state rhetorically (socially) guarantees equal citizenship for its constituents, but actually institutionalizes (politically) the inequality among its citizens necessary for its survival.

<sup>49</sup> Here, Hurgronjec began distinguishing "Europe's 'good' Muslims from its Muslim political adversaries" (39). I insist even beyond the cliché that history repeats itself—as even Mamdani notes in, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*, how this definitive distinction between types of Muslims in the United States was a rhetorical strategy employed by President George W. Bush to fight the post 9/11 "war on terrorism."

Political Action Committee) was formed specifically with the interests of Muslim American women. Accordingly, its specific emphasis on women elucidates not only the ways in which the liberated/dominated binary is mobilized on hijab, but the dangers of culture talks as this binary figure is mobilized to distinguish between what is considered an American Muslim women and Muslim women across the globe. Furthermore, looking at the ways hijab is situated through this political action committee can also elucidate the intergroup tension that emerges as Muslim women lobby for political recognition. Unlike CAIR and MPAC which are nonprofit advocacy groups, AMWPAC is specifically a political action committee. The mission of the group states:

American Muslim women. We are mothers, daughters, sisters and wives. We are lawyers and doctors and teachers and bakers. Our political viewpoint is one that has been largely silent. Some even believe that it is our culture or our religion that forces us to be silent. AMWPAC is created to dispel that myth. AMWPAC operates in order to elect leaders who support our mission (shop, [americanmuslimwomen.com](http://americanmuslimwomen.com)).

Like CAIR and MPAC, the group was formed with a mission in part to dispel stereotypes and constructions perpetuated by the American government and cultural media. Distinctively, though, while the other groups do have donate pages to sponsor the organizations causes, AMWPAC emphasizes their intent to sponsor candidates that align with their political interests. They say, “We are gathered together. We have a voice. But, as we all know, money is the megaphone for a voice. That's where you come in. Your donation says that you support the participation of all Americans in government” (donate, [americanmuslimwomen.com](http://americanmuslimwomen.com)). They explicitly note that their ability to be heard depends on financial backing, which they can then use to promote—though not secure—the protection of “American Muslim women’s rights.” They explain that they are not affiliated with any party and can support any candidate they choose. Accordingly, unlike CAIR and MPAC whose missions suggest that they intend to protect the rights, AMWPAC emphasizes

its own service to the nation as a political action committee—one that is dependent on the financial backing of individual donations. These donations in turn, will be used by the group to support candidates who they believe can create policies in the benefit (or perhaps protection) of Muslim women in the United States.

Robert Lowry notes that political action committees not only sponsor candidates to enforce political agendas, but that they also mobilize individuals who would otherwise not likely participate in electoral politics to make contributions to political campaigns. Such is the idea behind the language on their website that says, “money is the megaphone for a voice.” Yet beyond simply mobilizing individual contributors who would otherwise not usually participate in politics, the narratives of this political action committee can reveal much more than mobilizing campaign donations to push agendas through funding campaigns. At base, they note that in order to have a place they must first validate and work within the capital system in which they attempt to advocate. They are ultimately trapped into serving capital interests of the nation before they can advocate for candidates that can protect their interests. Accordingly, moving beyond the mobilization of people to have a voice, this section will examine the ways in which voice is determined through in group dynamics. Capitalism notably disciplines some while rewards others. Accordingly, here, these tensions of capitalism result in in group disciplining so as to determine a particular type of liberated Muslim woman figure acceptable to national interests that can be the “voice” of Muslim women in the US.

Which types of candidates the PAC will support is not explicitly stated or clear. However, one can infer from looking at the values emphasized on their website—which explicitly includes an emphasis on American patriotism (loyalty and pride to the US) and American identity, though, as Gupta and Ferguson is not entirely clear, and constructs itself based on establishing *differences*

among people. Discursively, AMWPAC establishes their patriotism in being American above all other categories. On the “Donate Page” of the AMWPAC website page it says, “We are **American**. We are **Muslim**. We Are **Women**. American first. Our PAC is the first of its kind. We are trying to do something that no one else has done and we need your help. We are gathered together.” The emphasis on the terms American, Muslim, and Women are the PACs own. The term “American” is stressed twice. The PAC stresses that as representatives of Muslim American women, their priority identity, among the three bolded, is that they are American. On the AMWPAC website home page, the first image that appears is one of the founders, Miriam Seddiq. Large white letters appear on her image, read, “Building our political power.” The page automatically changes to a second image of a woman<sup>50</sup>, this time a woman wearing a hijab. The white letters on her image read, “Capturing our enthusiasm and optimism for America.” The word “America” stands on its own line, and is in a different font than the rest of the text. A third and final image is that of a black woman, with the caption simply “advocating for our communities.” The woman in hijab is strategically placed on a scrolling slide show between the two others. Her picture in specific, though, is linked to American enthusiasm. Here again, the visible Muslim woman (visibly obvious because of her hijab) is obsessively linked to American patriotism. Why is she enthusiastic? In this scenario, emphatic enthusiasm towards being American suggests that she is perhaps happy about what American values have offered her.

The “About Us” page on the site links to the founders of the PAC’s social media, and the “Issues & Advocacy” page tiles news coverage of the PAC by other organizations and news outlets. News coverage featured about the PAC links to articles that detail why the group was formed and its overall advocacy focus. One tile block on the page links to an article on *Slate.com*

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<sup>50</sup> Appendix B

titled, “A New PAC Aims to Prove Muslim Women Are Not Silent.” The headline—Muslim women are not silent—targets misconceptions that Muslim women are dominated by their husbands and fathers into silence. Recall from my discussion on CAIR’s ad campaign that Omar’s ad also targeted this notion from the first line of the advertisement text. Omar’s voice is emphasized through the winning of public speaking awards. In fact, the article, written by Suzanne Monyak, details the role of the PAC as one that aims to speak on behalf of Muslim women to push back against such stereotypes and misconceptions. Seddiq (PAC founder) explains that it was the 2016 Presidential campaign and their endorsement of Hilary Clinton’s ideals that led her to form the PAC. She mentions the specific instance when then Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump suggested that Ghazala Khan wasn’t allowed to speak as she stood alongside her husband on stage at the Democratic National Convention<sup>51</sup>. Seddiq tells the outlet, “She [Ghazala] took a hit for all of us, and that was part of what led me to decide I wanted to help other women speak out” (Seddiq, qtd in Monyak, 2016). Ghazala, wearing a blue hijab, stood silent by her husband, but it was Trump’s remarks that linked and reduced her symbolic stand of support and solidarity to a silence of domination. Yet, the emergence of the pac with the specific mission validates his rhetoric, as Seddiq notes that she needs to aide Muslim women in speaking out. It suggests that it will take on the role to speak on behalf of Muslim women who are otherwise silenced. It’s worth

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<sup>51</sup> On the night of the 2016 Democratic National Convention, Khizir Khan, father of fallen Gold Star soldier Humayun Khan, gave a chilling speech directed towards then Republican Presidential Nominee Donald J. Trump. In his speech, he declared that he and his family were proud Muslim Americans who have dutifully served the country. He questioned Donald Trump’s calls to ban Muslims across the globe from immigrating into the US, and famously waved a pocket-sized constitution on the national stage. His wife, Ghazaleh Khan, stood by his side in hijab. Subsequently, when news anchor George Stephanopoulos of *ABC News* asked President Trump (then, still a candidate) about the speech, he deflected the content of Khizir’s speech towards the presence of his wife. He remarked, “If you look at his wife, she was standing there. She had nothing to say. She probably — maybe she wasn’t allowed to have anything to say. You tell me.” Trump’s statement, as many news outlets noted, insinuated that Ghazaleh was a subservient Muslim woman, and not allowed to speak in public. Trump’s remarks reignited an archaic-American common stereotype about Muslim women: that they are oppressed. See: Haberman, Maggie and Richard Opel, Jr. “Donald Trump Criticizes Muslim Family of Slain U.S. Soldier, Drawing Ire.” 2016 July 30. Web. Accessed 31 August 2019. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/31/us/politics/donald-trump-khizr-khan-wife-ghazala.html>>

mentioning that Khan went onto other interviews where her voice was “heard,” but the PAC’s intent if only validates Trump’s remarks. Whether or not Khan spoke does not mean she was “silent” or not allowed to talk. More importantly, this intent raises broader questions about who gets to speak on behalf of the “silent” Muslim woman. As the Pac formed, the way to offer Muslim woman a voice happened through first through voicing allegiances to American patriotism and values without question.

As in the CAIR and MPAC campaigns and articles, here again, AMWPAC attempts to carve an inclusive space by which Muslim women can be heard in the United States. However, with such depictions, very specific types of Muslim women emerge. Interrogating the historical practices of identity formation, rather than focusing on representation, within groups can demonstrate the ways respectability politics have disciplined and shaped other marginalized groups in the US. To understand the ways the dynamic of creating a narrative of Muslim women determined by other Muslim women, I draw upon the politics of respectability by Frances White on the history of black narratives in the black community. I draw upon White’s work to understand the ways in which respectability politics result in in group discipline, where particular narratives and voices emerged while others are silence. White work on black community narratives, black feminism in specific, because I raise the same questions about whose voices get heard, and who gets to speak on hijab and Muslim women. It also elucidates an understanding of the liberated Muslim women that is obsessively depicted through any presence of hijab. I want to emphasize through, that black women have a distinct and unique racial history in the United States—one that is a result of history and subsequent discrimination that continued (continues) through today. Still the ways that Frances examines the pressures of “respectability” on black women, and the culture this created among themselves is useful to understand a similarly unfolding tension on



representation of Muslim women as they are marginalized. Invisibility in public discourse plagued the black community within the United States. White notes, “a politically active woman was consonant with a respectable black woman” (36). Respectability entailed emulating the behaviors of black club and church women, emphasizing their good manners and value systems. In this way, black women pushed back against the stereotypical depictions surrounding black women’s sexuality, work, and values. Many black feminist writers used the politics of respectability in their discourses as a counter narrative to “racist discourses that used negative stereotypes to portray all black women as innately inferior” (36). While they outwardly pushed back against racism, they inwardly also shaped specific forms of black communities. AMWPAC emphasizes the importance of Muslim women in being politically active and vocal. Through the examination of the voices heard through AMWPAC, and their immediate visual imaginations of hijab, it seems that such a community envisions a devoted patriotic Muslim woman who must ignore American imperial practices as she expresses her allegiance to vague American values.

The drawbacks of creating a respectable Muslim woman who is worthy of being heard in American politics with respect to women is that not only is a particular type of woman heard, but who gets to narrate on her behalf. The hit back for women like Gazalah, who spoke in subsequent interviews, insists that she not be silenced or sidelined--Gazaleh had no part in forming this PAC in the first place. As the local dynamics between others have shown, society is fragmented even at the individual level so as to ensure that people are functioning to serve special economic interests. White explains, “Given this fragmentation, we often struggle over who gets to define the race, who is in the race, and what the meaning of blackness is” (15). White discusses the role of black feminist intellectuals in specific in regard to forming a black feminist movement. She notes, however, that “as representatives, these feminists have been engaged in a contradictory

project that not only obscures conflicts among black women but also destabilizes the meaning of identities such as woman, white, and black” (28). Similarly, AMWPAC functions as its founders imagine their own version of American Muslim women identity. While on the one hand they intend to be a symbolic voice for the otherwise silenced Muslim women, they also reduce Muslim women identity to monolithic prototypes obsessed with American patriotism. This patriotism—and subsequently investing in the “good” Muslim prototypes as outlined by politicians such as George Bush—are created for and only justify war practices abroad.

Muslim-Americans can be thought to be pushing back against stereotypes through presenting the accomplished and patriotic and vocal Muslim American women, but are in actuality pushing a community into complacency of government interests regardless of agenda. Amidst endless representations of the terrorist Muslim women covered in a black burka, Muslim women, as seen through organizations advocating for their civil rights, are increasingly pushing back with their own codes of respectability. This is particularly the case when a woman in hijab is active in public domains. Here, her loyalty to the American value system, and her place in society is constantly emphasized. Qualities like the all-American patriot, the exceptionally educated intellect, an advocate for the liberties of all people, and family ties are forefront values displayed in politically active Muslim women (and/or those portrayed in ad-campaigns). Outwardly organizations advocate for the rights and liberties of Muslim women in hijab, but inwardly build a complacent community, where, as in the example of MPAC and the republican candidate outlined earlier, they are encouraged to express appreciation to Republicans who do not discriminate against them. In many ways, though, perpetuating respectability politics can ironically reinforce the very narrative it pushes back against. White notes, “by censuring African Americans who did not behave in ways that black club and church women considered proper, these

women help authorize racist stereotypes” (36). Similarly, by censuring the negative connotations associated with hijab in the context of American patriotism, it could also isolate many women who do not, and cannot, live up to the ideal Muslim American woman—regardless of whether or not she wears hijab. Furthermore, it validates the Muslim American woman as another identity category by which to emphasize difference.

Beyond respectability politics, where a model “liberated” Muslim woman in the United States is both patriotic and completely compatible (and vocal) with American values, such organizations are further trapped in gendered projects constructed by American neoliberalism that enable US empire to proceed. Sherene Razack examines the relationship between Western society and the marginalization of Muslims in politics. She notes that allegorical figures, including the “imperiled Muslim women” (5) dominate the social landscape domestically, that is, within the United States. This work can elucidate the ways AMWPAC’s positioning of liberated Muslim American woman can illicit the need of saving Muslim women who are not liberated by American values. Empire, she insists, is a gendered project, where the ruling race polices the subordinate one in specific ways (Razack, 17). “Western feminists,” for example, create a discourse that positions themselves as a society of values and ideals, comparing their own perceived freedom in stark contrast to the women overseas who are presumably oppressed and remain premodern (Razack, 17). In attempts to distance themselves from such images, political advocacy groups depict a model Muslim woman, ensuring that they are contrasted with those outside of the United States. Such is the emphasis by AMWPAC, with as the category of *American* Muslim is first and foremost. AMWPAC’s emphasis on being a group self-identified as *American* Muslim women implies an emphatic positioning themselves as Muslims who are liberated through American values in contrast from other Muslims “dominated” in other parts of the world.

### Colonialism: Language and Rule

Considering the different ways hijab is used to mobilize notions of freedom, tolerance, and patriotism in political advocacy groups, a common thread emerges between all three examined: they advocate for themselves within a framework that actually subjugates them. They invest in identity politics, even though, as it becomes clear—such investment is clearly serving larger national interests more than they can advocate for civil rights and liberties. While critiquing cultural formation in analyzing the representation of Muslim women in political advocacy groups is useful to understanding the ways culture is socially constructed to serve national interests, it is limited in that cultural analysis does not reveal rich histories of colonial strategies that have conditioned marginalized groups through today. As I argue that cultural frameworks of political advocacy groups do not reveal the ways in which such representations mobilize imperial discourse—as evidenced through hijab—I turn point to historical reference on cultural formation to elucidate the ways advocacy groups are inevitably subjugated to advocate within a language that oppresses them. How, for people who identify as Muslim in the United States, does this conditioning happen in the nation's interest, and how do such cultural frameworks form without question?

Kaplan discusses how United States' international struggles for domination have historically shaped internal American identities. The time span of the discourse Kaplan examines ranges from roughly 1880 to 1920, which demonstrates the reality that political advocacy groups narrate themselves through discourses that have been established and taken shape for decades—this discourse takes on new rhetoric with new imperial endeavors. Kaplan says, “international struggles for domination abroad profoundly shape representation of American identity at home, and how, in turn, cultural phenomena we think of as domestic or particularly national are forged

in a crucible of foreign nations” (1). She notes that in the context of American imperialism, “domestic” takes a twofold meaning, referring to both the nation and household simultaneously (18). Domestic ideas of “home” cannot be separated from the constantly shifting political, economic, and cultural movements of empire (Kaplan, 19). Kaplan explains the ways in which ideas associated with foreign are used to construct domestic culture within the United States, which are then used to justify imperial expansion elsewhere. Notably, Kaplan argues that the United States perpetuates notions of American exceptionalism as ideals that are starkly different than that of other nations; and it creates an anxiety that in some way those values are being threatened. She notes, “If the fantasy of American imperialism aspires to a borderless world where it finds its own reflection everywhere, then the fruition of these dream shatters the coherence of the national identity, as the boundaries that distinguish it from the outside world promise to collapse” (16). An integral component to justifying American imperialism outside of the nation is to create an anxiety within the nation over its own threatened state. Of course, this anxiety is government manufactured and culturally perpetuated through rhetoric, popular media, political discourse, etc.

This project of threat and national difference has centered on women, as ideas of American feminism have largely been constructed as a threat to American feminist freedoms. The literatures produced in all three advocacy groups illustrate an allegiance to American values in liberated Muslim woman figures order to distance themselves from stereotypical terrorist images—to prove that they are not a threat to the nation. They emphasize their commitment to participate in the greater good of American society as model American citizens, and emphasize their enthusiasm for being uniquely American Muslim. Caught in the midst of national anxiety that paints a drastic and intense us vs. them narrative, Muslim political advocacy groups struggle to mediate an extension of “them” (or essentially, the hijab, as a visible marker of Muslim nations abroad) in the context

of the United States. As advocacy groups attempt to prove that practicing Islam is compatible with American value systems, the Muslim woman in America is positioned as distinctly liberated, though such constructions imply that Muslims that are not American do not enjoy the same protections (that they are dominated). Because national ideas within the United States have largely been shaped by United States imperial agenda, as political action groups advocate for rights and cultural acceptance by the nation at large, the culture that they are advocating to be recognized them has been shaped by the justification of their own oppression. Thus, many discourses and efforts that are seemingly social activism intended to push back against the American media misrepresentations actually inadvertently participate in its narrative formation.

Where cultural formations take shape in the service of imperial practices, mobilizing a language which the marginalized invest is integral to ensuring domination-- such that the colonized's own customs and beliefs seem inadequate to the dominant culture. Historically, language has played an integral role in dominating groups of people to create divisions within them that are being subordinated and forced to identify themselves in order to meet the interests of a national narrative. For instance, scholars of Native American studies have addressed history and the language use of categorization in the context of their own colonized context within the United States. As I detailed in the introduction, Glenn Morris traces the history of semantic strategy that contributed to colonizing the lands and minds of Indian people from as early as the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. This historical reference on language and power can importantly validate the notion that advocacy groups--whose function is intended to advocate for the recognition of marginalized groups in government and to ensure they are entitled to civil liberties—are actually operating within a language created by government and law specifically intended to erase the identities of those colonized. Imperative to colonization was to create a discourse that consisted of the "correct"

universal values that ultimately suppressed and erased the interests of the indigenous population. This language was institutionalized in all public sectors, including the health care and educational systems (120). Part of this entails what Morris has called "colonizing of the mind." According to Taiaiake Alfred, colonization of the mind is "the intellectual dimension in the group of emotional and psychological pathologies associated with internalized oppression...recognizable in the gradual assumption of the values, goals, and perspectives that make up the status quo" (qtd in Morris, 125). People who suffer from colonization of the mind hardly see viability in self or community interests outside of that which is created by white society (Taiaiake qtd in Morris 125). An additional component was to create law that prevented customary definitions of the indigenous people so as to make them a lesser and unworthy for inclusion. This history of language formation and semantic operation on the minds never stopped, but it continued to operate as the nation built itself to ensure its interests on the backs of those it dominated.

Like black women and the formation of black feminism has its own unique history, colonizing the minds of the Indian population also has its own distinct historic circumstances. Nevertheless, whereas with black feminism and Muslim women feminists different in distinct histories, I suggest that the historical strategies of colonizing minds are extended to the Muslim community—as evidenced by discourse on hijab. The principles and strategies may have taken on new form, and people who identify as Muslim in the United States are subjected to such erasures that have been established historically by default. Still, new forms as the United States government must find new ways to continue dominance. As Razack notes, “old colonial technologies enjoy renewed vigor at a time when Islam versus the West is the hegemonic framing of the New World Order” (86). Popular culture, law, and media has consistently referred to as Muslim women as oppressed and has positioned Islamic “culture” as threat to the nation. The ad campaigns and

political missions' statements of Muslim American advocacy group demonstrates the internalized struggle of a groups of people who are being intellectually colonized within the nation, as they are conditioned to invest in the constructs of identity, values, and language that have been constructed to maintain their difference. Furthermore, they accept reductive ideals of freedom, for them specifically, entails a practice—not necessarily the ability to practice in American spaces, but the assertion that the practice has somehow gives them a blurred reduced version of freedom.

### Conclusion

To conclude, my intent in this chapter is to illuminate the ways representation of hijab in political advocacy is mobilizing neoliberal rhetoric to the service of the US government. Essentially, Dickens establishes that in a free-market capital society, market interests permeate workspace dynamics between one individual and the next. Even individual interactions in workspaces serve national interests, and thus as political advocacy groups form—especially as they purport to have a stake and inform local government—such groups ultimately serve national interests. The United States national narrative, through popular media, has used hijab to create as a symbol of freedom for both women in the United States who do not veil, and also the “modern” Muslim women who veils but can find freedoms in American spaces that would not otherwise be available to her. What emerges are reductive monolithic binaries of liberated/dominated Muslim women—liberated in the US pulling at suggestions that Muslim women abroad are still dominated. As the stakes involved in complacency with such identity categories will be continuously be outlined around the discussion of hijab and American imperialism, political advocacy groups advocating for a specific American Muslim woman, one with deep rooted American values, comes with an additional layer of concern. For one, the choice element in campaigns featuring women like Manal obliterates the discussion of other pertinent things. Razack argues that Western



feminists specifically fail to see their own participation in the empirical project, by situating themselves as the more enlightened “than their worse-off sisters in the South” (18). As the United States domestically creates a narrative, political advocacy groups centered on the identity of Muslim women also participate in this imperial project.

The relations that manifest themselves within political organization in the Muslim community no doubt illuminate the deliberate tension created by imperialism and its focus on the identity of Muslim women. As Muslim women in the United States, through political advocacy groups, pledge their allegiances to American values, they also distinguish themselves from media constructs of Muslim women of “oppressed Muslim women” in the Middle east—thereby reinforcing ideals that the social conditions within the United States have granted them protection. Essentially, they present American Muslim women as liberated: educated, patriotic, and enlightened, and specifically distance her from the stereotypical subjugated counterpart overseas who isn’t afforded the same “freedoms.” The fixation on hijab, that which mobilizes reduces the notions of freedoms to individual choices, through ad campaigns, mission statements, and activist work reduces what is presented as a choice to Muslim women. It reduces ideas of freedom, choice, and rights, to culturally relative ideas that are contained within the domestic narrative of the United States. However, that also presumes that American values are modern and ideal, and everything else is not. With only reference and concern to political frameworks, the stakes of colonial subjugation in investing in representational political are masked. Thus, by participating in the discourse identity formation and universal rights, political advocacy groups reinforce themselves as a marginalized category, but more importantly, reinforce the false notions used to justify war and colonialism abroad.

## CHAPTER 2: HIJAB AND THE CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN NOVEL

In the previous chapter, I parsed through the ways that women who identify as Muslim carve their place in American politics and negotiate their identities through political advocacy groups. Through the examination of Muslim political advocacy groups and their situation of hijab within the United States, what emerged was a reductive binary of liberated/dominated Muslim woman, as notions of freedom and choice were mediated solely upon the practice of hijab. The analysis demonstrated the ways in which imperialism subjugates groups people to reinforce notions that they are pushing back against; they are subjugated into participating in identity politics, to ultimately advocate for the state through the reinforcement of neoliberal values on which imperialism depends. However, this only became apparent through looking at the limits of “culture talk,” to reveal the historical mechanisms of colonialism that work to shape the ideologies of marginalized people—ensuring that the only language they have access to, even in advocating for their rights, is that which subjugates and oppresses them. Such phenomenon also extends its mechanisms, though in different forms, to other media outlets, and this chapter will examine the use of hijab in contemporary American fictional novel. This chapter will examine the ways hijab is imagined by authors invested in Muslim identity in American literature, and the ways notions of freedom continues to be negotiated through hijab for Muslim women characters.

As a genre, the contemporary American novel has its own function as not only a cultural producer, but as one with a distinct relationship with imperialism. Edward Said has argued that novels are not only creative productions of an author’s imagination, but they are importantly, shaped by a relationship between culture and empire (xxii). That is, the novel is an imaginative and creative space envisioned by authors, but also a product of such ideologies shaped by social, political, and historical contexts. Today, the novel is an integral site through which Muslim women

seek self-representation against stereotypical prototypes of backwards uneducated and oppressed women that the media often perpetuates. Hijab has become a marketing tool, an easy identifiable symbol, that signifies the emerging genre of “Muslim American” literature about and by women who identify as Muslim<sup>52</sup>. In recent times, especially post 9/11, this marketability has produced a new craze for Muslim women’s writings and publications. More than ever, the dominant narrative focuses on authors who wear hijab and book covers with women in hijab on them<sup>53</sup>. Such titles include *Saint vs. Misfits*, *Does My Head Look Big in This*, and *Ayesha At Last*, to name only a few examples. Such novels feature women in hijab on their covers, alluding to the central protagonist imagined as a Muslim woman who wears hijab. Thus, the American novel is an important site by which we can consider the ways Muslim authors mediate hijab, and can reveal the complex relationships happening between self-representation and free market capital society—dynamics that can only be revealed if we interrogate the limits of cultural analysis that is currently shaping readings of Muslim Immigrant Literature.

Scholarship on the subgenre of “Muslim Immigrant Literature,”<sup>54</sup> generally focuses on the ways authors have created dynamic characters that complicate the reductive binaries of the “oppressed” Muslim women perpetuated by mass media. Their work, however, is shaped by cultural frameworks that are limited to representational practices against culturally constructed norms. Such cultural frameworks inform readings of Muslim immigrant novels as a mode of representation, evaluating authors abilities to imagines characters that can effectively challenge constructs of popular dominant narratives of Muslim women. My own analysis in this chapter will

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<sup>52</sup> Gokariksel, Banu and Ellen McLarney. “Introduction, Muslim Women, Consumer Capitalism, and the Islamic Culture Industry.” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies*. 6.3 (2010): 1-19. Print.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 6

<sup>54</sup> Category as defined by Wail Hassan in: *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab-American and Arab-British*. USA: Oxford University Press. 2011. Print. He defines this as, “a literature that seeks to articulate an alternative episteme derived from Islam but shaped specifically by immigrant perspectives” (182).

show limitation to these models. For example, in Karine Ancellin argues women authors with ancestral connections to Muslim communities have created complex Muslim characters in their novels by “blurring the lines of assimilation and displaying multifaceted selves” (1). In a study of 15 novels written post 9/11 by authors of Muslim ancestry, Ancellin concludes that authors are increasingly presenting Muslim characters that are complex, and flexible in hybridity in bridging two identities along with being Muslim. She argues that such works challenge imperially constructed narratives by presenting new modes of “post post-colonial Muslim identities.” Other scholars argue that authors of Muslim American literature use hijab in specific to challenge reader expectations against the ways women in hijab are constructed in popular media. For example, the article M.M. Raihanah (et al), analyzes how women authors (American and Britain) in literature post 9/11 illustrate the realities Muslims faced post 9/11. They read novels as successfully able to capture the anger many Muslims felt against the attackers of 9/11, and the backlash and hostility many Muslims (especially women in hijab) faced as a result of the attacks. They conclude that writers successfully dismantle the popular one-dimensional myths constructed of Muslim women. Similarly, Lucinda Newns examines “push back” narratives of British Muslim woman authors who write in response to “down-trodden” or typical oppressive type narratives on Muslim women that emerged post 9/11. She notes that such novels (she close reads two “chick lits”) often contest the nature of the oppressed Muslim woman tropes, but they also mobilize other gender codes (297). Here, we see that the major limitations in their arguments is not in identifying the complexity of the characters, but instead in the cultural framework within which they are reading such novels. Without contextualizing novels within the historical/political climates they are produced, scholarship that depends only on cultural frameworks on identity overlook the historical roles novels have played in shaping capital society and narrating social norms to the working class that

ensure the viability of the workers commitment work. Furthermore, investing in a pushback discourse that necessarily is mediated through notions of freedom and liberated work through hijab has further created a liberated Muslim woman figure in and of itself that is acceptable to national interests. My own analysis will demonstrate that, rather than challenging reductive stereotypes of representation, many such novels actually reproduce and reinforce an oppositional binary of liberated/dominated Muslim women through hijab—as the narrative form offers a platform of nuanced representation that service national imperial interests.

Considering the craze of Muslim woman and marketability in Muslim immigrant literature, this chapter will look at the ways hijab is situated in two Muslim American immigrant novels. The first, Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, features hijab in the title and the cover features a young Muslim woman in a loosely wrapped tangerine hijab<sup>55</sup>. The second, Holly Warah's *Where Jasmine Blooms*, features no such reference to hijab in the title nor in cover art<sup>56</sup>. Each of these authors purports investment in the representations of Muslim American women. Kahf is a Syrian American immigrant who has written extensively (poetry and scholarship) on immigration and the American cultural experience. Warah biography includes being traveling the Middle East for over seventeen years, and being married into an Arab family for nearly thirty<sup>57</sup>. I chose these two novels because of their wide circulation as staple reads in the genre of Muslim immigrant novels; I chose their difference in cover to analyze the ways hijab might be presented differently through the works. Instead, through these novels, I demonstrate the ways discourse on hijab produces a monolithic liberated/dominated Muslim women figures that service imperialism—even as they present complex, dynamic, and multifaceted Muslim women characters. In both works, the central

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<sup>55</sup> Appendix C

<sup>56</sup> Ibid

<sup>57</sup> Both biographical information were taken from the covers of each novel.

protagonists are Muslim women who negotiate their own identity with reconciling her choice to wear hijab within American culture. In Kahf's, the protagonist is a complex veiled woman named Khadra, who struggles to balance her American life against the values of her traditional immigrant parents. In Warah's work, each of the three central characters is always situated with her relationship to hijab; in direct connection to its discourse, Warah navigates issues of religion, identity, and belonging through the subplots of each of three central Muslim women characters. Though hijab is not present in on the cover of Warah's work, like Kahf, hijab is still central to the identities of the Muslim woman figures. In both novels, notions of freedom work through hijab to produce the binary of the liberated/dominated Muslim woman figure—but they do so in different way as the central characters struggle to reconcile the practice as compatible with American values. As authors take to novels to self-represent nuanced readings of what hijab in America should look like, or what it is against media depictions, I argue that both Kahf's and Warah's work can illustrate the ways nuanced representations that entail working notions of freedom through hijab inevitably leads to the construction of Muslim women that are compatible with market interests. Importantly, such values rest solely on choice and capital pressures, and the novel as a specific form of cultural production ensures domestic constructions of gender on which the nation constructs itself are both reinforced and reproduced.

In what follows, I first interrogate the novel's unique relationship to imperialism as a mode of cultural production. I then close read the ways the authors imagine hijab in American spaces. Each of the two novels reveals different dimensions on the liberated/dominated binary worked, and importantly extend to include an additional binary—the traditional vs. modern—that work through hijab in different ways. Kahf's heroine attempts to explore imperial histories and uses hijab as resistance to brutal United States historical relations in the Middle East. Here, despite a

surface reading in which Kahf appears to interrogate US historical imperial relations, and subverts mainstream audience expectations on choice and hijab, I show the ways the narrative ultimately collapses on itself by the ending; the heroine must inevitably embrace imperial interests as she evolves from her “traditional” towards a more “modern” self. Accordingly, the liberated Muslim woman figure in hijab is imagined as “modern”—compatible with American values as she embraces capital interests. On the other hand, Warah imagines the new American Muslim women that is modern—and again the dynamic between traditional versus modern emerges. Unlike Kahf’s work, Warah’s modernity is linked with liberated Muslim women who move away from hijab-- hijab is associated with “traditional” values and practiced by older figures that cannot seem to adapt to modern America. Even as these works appear to interrogate United States history and imperial practices, I show the ways that their conclusions lead to a singular endpoint: a place in American society entails an ultimate conceding to American values that ensure neoliberal interests. Kahf’s narrative concedes to capital values of modernity, while Warah’s work implies that love can transcend cultural differences and complex histories. Both readings will reveal different dimensions of gender codes reinforced through binaries mediated through hijab and domestic spaces of the characters—analysis that would otherwise be masked if we remain within frameworks of representational politics. Accordingly, though the central characters are written to push back against cultural constructs, such narratives are actually shaped by histories of colonial and economic conditioning that ensure the continued subjugation of Muslim women.

#### Novel: Narrative Form & Economic Function

One integral limit that emerges in scholarship on Muslim Immigrant literature that argues that representations on hijab are challenging reductive narratives perpetuated by mass media is that they do not consider the relationship between novels and the capital market system in which

it functions. Here, I offer a few points on the integral ways novels function with respect to market capitalism, and, in turn, larger imperial interests. This will then allow me to make informed readings on the narratives of Kahf and Warah with respect to the free market societies from which they emerge. The novel as particular mode of cultural production, a narrative form that has influence over the mass reading public, also plays an integral role in ensuring the viability of capitalist economic systems. In a capital society, it is one place which can present the subjectivity of people in the work force in normalized ways. In a broad sense, Harvey notes that “the socialization of the worker to conditions of capitalist production entails the social control of physical and mental powers on a very broad basis” (Harvey, 123). In other words, in order to condition workers to accept the labor conditions imperative to free market capital societies to function, workers must be conditioned in their social spheres—in every facet of their social existence. This socialization extends to the education systems, mobilizations of cultural and psychological sentiments and notions that are intertwined in dominant ideologies developed and perpetuated by mass media outlets, religious and educational institutions. Often, they are articulated through individual stories of people who work through the system (Harvey 123-124). The novel, in its earlier forms called the bildungsroman, was used to perpetuate a narrative of an individual’s coming of age—from child to mature member of the organized social order (Lowe, 98). The social conditions created by and necessary to sustain capitalism is a complex one that cannot be understood from this analysis alone. Nevertheless, what is important to note is that modes of popular culture that perpetuate cultural ideologies of identity and voice are catalysts by which capitalist modes of regulation depend on. At the core of such production, whether the cultural producers, literary authors of this examination realize it or not, are economic interests that have shaped their quests for individualism and identity.



As print culture emerged as an institution of modernity<sup>58</sup>, Anglo-American novels have been imperative to establishing readers as subjects of the nation (Lowe, 98). Lisa Lowe notes that historically, in the both the U.S. and Europe, the novel was used to construct ideological norms by which society adhered. Lowe's delineation of the novel offers an understanding on both how novels were assumed to function, as well as what writers had to do to achieve canonical success. Such an understanding can elucidate the paradigms within Kahf and Warah are writing—both structurally and in order to achieve success. Lowe notes, “[the novel] constituted a privileged site for the unification of the citizen with the ‘imagined community’ of the nation, while the national literary canon functioned to unify aesthetic culture as a domain in which material differences and localities were resolved and reconciled” (98). Accordingly, the novel largely functioned as a form was one in which even the most complex plots could be unified and reconciled in an ending of universality. The function of the novel as an imagined community that unifies the nation imperatively informs my own reading on how authors shape their narratives in attempts to achieve canonical success. The canon, as created by institutional elites, has serviced the nation by promoting literatures that emphasized national values and sentiments which unify differences among cultures and people. As novels were a privileged site by which authors imagined national values that unified all people, achieving canonical success is difficult for marginalized groups. When they are recognized, it is likely because of their ability to articulate such national values from the very perspective of marginalization—thus reinforcing values on which the nation constructs its own identity and values. As Lowe notes,

The novel formation has a special status among the works selected for a canon, for it elicits readers the identification with the bildung narrative of ethical formation,

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<sup>58</sup> In *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Harvey notes that no fundamental change in the social condition has actually happened between what is generally referred to (by thinkers and cultural producers) as periods of modernity and postmodernity (111).

itself a narrative of the individual's relinquishing of particularity and difference through identification with an idealized 'national' form of subjectivity (98).

Traditionally, novels that served the national agendas of unifying differences in imagined spaces—maintaining differences among people while ensuring domination—are ones that achieved canonical success. The American novel has been a central cultural institution in establishing a cultural authority in the literary and cultural traditions of many various minoritized (“-Americans”) within the United States (Lowe, 100). Accordingly, to achieve recognition, authors are conscious of such restrictions, and take writing within the form conscious of such universal endings. Notably, I will examine the endings of the novels in my analysis. The novels I have chosen for this chapter are largely regarded as staples in the increasingly popular category of Muslim-American literature. That is, while they may not be best sellers per se, they are seemingly the staple “go-to” novels in this sub-genre—they appear on nearly every list on literature on “hijab,” “Muslim women,” etc<sup>59</sup>.

In the United States, as novels play an integral role in articulating focused national values and ideals, they have also played an integral role in shaping a domestic culture that is connected to imperial interests abroad. In chapter one, I discussed the ways United States imperialism depends on creating a domestic culture within the nation that shapes that the public's understanding of “foreign.” Novels in particular have played an important role in forming a domestic culture that justifies United States imperial practices. This has been examined in literatures as early as the 18th and 19th centuries by Edward Said and John Carlos Rowe. Rowe notes that the novel is “one of the chief cultural means of legitimating [U.S.] imperial practices” (14). The role of novels in legitimating imperial practices is not, I suggest, limited to a time period of the Revolution through World War II (which is the time frame of works in his analysis). In fact, with the heightened political interest in Muslim majority countries, capital systems ensure that

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<sup>59</sup> i.e. various lists on sites such as the popular goodreads.com

novels continue to do the imperative work of shaping a culture that emphasizes a domination of American value systems. Accordingly, rather than “writing back” to the stereotypical depictions of popular media by presenting protagonists that strike through assumptions of Muslim women, the narrative plots of Kahf and Warah’s demonstrate that such novels can reinforce them when they are conditioned to mediate hijab through a discourse of freedom/unfreedom as dictated by neoliberal agendas. I am not suggesting that novels cannot “write back” to the dominate discourses and challenge imperial constructs, as Rowe and Said have examined works of other histories and time periods that have<sup>60</sup>. However, as I will show through Kahf and Warah’s works, what appears as “challenging the dominant modes” of representation can actually be reinforcing the same constructs they contest because they are challenged through the same modes that subjugate them. That is, they mobilize neoliberal constructs of freedom/unfreedom that are reduced solely on her right to choose.

Its most important to note that fictional works cannot be examined outside of their historical and cultural context. The evolvement of the novel in its varying historical moments, I suggest, do not function compartmentally from what its function was in times before it. Instead, I attempt to highlight the ways in which if only considered through culture talk, can mask complex dynamics that are ensuring the reproduction of binaries that ensures national difference, and commissions political dynamics. This is not to suggest that the novels *cannot* diverge from traditional functions in society<sup>61</sup>. The intent is to understand the historical implications and dispositions by which the authors in this chapter, and many others, write as they imagine or create

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<sup>60</sup> This is not the scope of this project to evaluate whether or not Kahf and Warah have successfully written back—but rather I am analyzing the ways in which notions of freedom produce a binary of liberated/dominated Muslim figures through hijab. Still, for more on the ways writers have successfully written back, see John Carlos Rowe *Literary Culture and U.S. Imperialism* (2000).

<sup>61</sup> For instance, the literary Boom of Latin American literature of the 1960’s, for example, as Doris Sommer and George Yudice note, was a traditional break from preceding types of literatures in the sense that it desired “autonomy through cultural production,” but still used the legacies of modernity to achieve such (864).

narratives. However, considering the current political climate, analyzing the situations of “Muslim girls” cannot be understood outside of social contexts (Ozlem and Sensoy, 309). Because the authors are seemingly invested in the Muslim-American experience in their own real-lives, the lines of their literatures versus realistic experiences becomes blurred. Readers that pick up such works, either for entertainment purposes or education, then see a modern Muslim-American woman who finds salvation within the confines of the United States because the authors themselves are distancing themselves from a “premodern” Middle East as prescribed by the projects of American imperialism. I suggest that a close examination of how such authors attempt to frame the hijab within a “Western” context, and specifically in American spaces, can reveal a complacency in a larger national narrative intended to push ideas of freedom onto individual choices in order to justify imperialist agendas abroad.

#### Girl in the Tangerine Scarf

The plot of *Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, published in 2006 but set in the 1970’s, is the story of a young Muslim named Khadra who navigates multiple layers of her identity as an Arab Muslim woman in the United States. The central plot of the novel deals with a coming of age plot, detailing Khadra’s evolution and encounters that transform her from an ultra-conservative “black scarf” wearing immigrant to a modern Muslim American (in a “tangerine” scarf). Kahf details Khadra’s internal struggle throughout the novel in the form of her relationship with hijab, and as she progresses towards modernity and embraces American values, Khadra’s relationship with hijab changes- by the end, readers see a happier, peaceful woman in a colored veil that has reconciled all of her previous ideals into a healthy balance of Islam, modernity, and American freedoms. Kahf places hijab in the context of American culture by immersing it within the physical landscape of the United States. Scenes such as this are essential to carving Khadra’s space as a Muslim

immigrant woman in the United States. She juxtaposes the Muslim American experience against the backdrop of all things American. She paints a vivid picture of the mid-Western landscape her family passes through on road trips, noting landmarks that are the symbolic beacons of American “freedoms.” Kahf visualizes Khadra’s family within such landscapes. On a road trip, for example, Khadra and her family stop for the daily five prayers and prostrate under Mt. Rushmore. By the end of the novel, she embraces being “American,” and the novel’s plot from start to finish can be read as one that suggests modernity and market choices can offer Muslim women happiness that they otherwise cannot access if they remain “traditional” (un-modern).

Scholars have looked at characters presented in Kahf’s work as able to subvert mainstream reader’s expectations of Muslim women in the United States by presenting complex women with multiple feminist. However, such scholars remain within cultural frameworks remain limited to representational politics of identity. For example, in “*Hijab Scenes: Muslim Women, Migration, and Hijab in Immigrant Muslim Literature*,” for example, Samaa Abdurraqib notes that although some narratives by Muslim immigrant authors perpetuate stereotypical depictions constructed by popular media, she praises Kahf’s *Emails to Scheherazad* as successfully able to “challenge the traditional trajectory of Muslim immigrant writing” (68) by mediating hijab as an expression of being Muslim American. She concludes that narratives, such as this of Kahf’s, that embraces veiling and being American simultaneously can subvert a readers’ expectation of immigrant literature. My reading of Kahf’s work is not to say whether or not she is successful at depicting proper representations of Muslim American identity in the US. In fact, I am urging scholars to move past identity politics and representations to question the economic and historical factors that are shaping narratives of Muslim women in the first place. My analysis of Kahf’s novel will show the ideological influence neoliberal forces has in subjugating Muslim women—such that even

when Kahf is seemingly questioning imperialism and interrogates history--the only language Kahf can mediate hijab through is that which subjugates her protagonist. In this work, the rhetoric of freedom is prescribed onto hijab as liberating and empowering, while Kahf re-inscribes an additional oppositional binary on the site of hijab: the traditional/modern Muslim immigrant that must reconcile her place in American society through new ways (to her) of wearing hijab. Paying attention to narrative form, rather than presenting a complex character that “writes-back” to popular media representations, I argue that this novel demonstrates the extent to which imperialism has permeated into social orders and cultural productions. Here, this narrative’s end demonstrates the ways capitalist freedoms provide the language for Muslim women's liberation leading towards an inevitable embrace of imperialist forces and a desire for inclusion into the US mainstream.

A central facet to Khadra’s coming of age is imagined by Kahf through a symbolic transformation of her relationship with hijab—one symbolically characterized by an initial “backwards” approach to one that is more progressive and “modern.” Such coming of age invokes the historical function of the novels divulged earlier as a coming of age narratives typically depict young people coming into what is largely considered social order. As the novel progresses, Kahf tracks Khadra’s identity navigation with the color of her veil—and what emerges is a binary of liberated/dominated Muslim woman figure extended through notions of “tradition” and “modern.” Kahf attaches a darker, more conservative, “traditional” version of Khadra to the black veil. In numerous instances, Khadra refers to her “black scarf days” as a time and version of herself that she increasingly distances herself from as the novel progresses. During her “black scarf days,” Khadra is ultra conservative, judging her friends on the way they dress (if, for example, they weren’t in near perfect conservative dress), and any ideological content that contradicted her notions of Islam. Kahf narrates Khadra’s evolving into progress in explicit contrast to the more

“traditional” person she was previously through hijab. Kahf demonstrates this by referencing Khadra’s “modern” self in contrast with who she once was. For example, in one instance, Kahf places Khadra in meetings with her sister in law who holds discussion sessions. She narrates, “Khadra attended a few meetings to please her sister-in-law, but oh, how she would have despised these Muslim Junior Leaguers in her black-scarf days” (256). She would have despised them likely because they stood in for a group of women that were “tres chic and tres holy, they were the face of Islamic women’s work for a new era” (256). Accordingly, during her “traditional,” “black scarf” days, she would have been irritated at women who were into fashion and joined the work force. This is in stark contrast to her more “modern” self at this point in the novel—essentially liberated—towards embracing the capital trends of fashion. Kahf, through stark contrast between the modern Khadra shows that a traditional figure of Khadra cannot be sustained. Khadra struggles through this identity until she reaches a reconciliation of her two selves.

Kahf imagines Khadra during her “black scarf days,” as one opposed to the freedoms offered by America. For instance, during her “black scarf days,” the author writes that Khadra would have never tolerated people who she considered friends to questions her traditional principals of faith that she was once adamantly attached to. For instance, Kahf writes, “She’d have criticized who did otherwise as a ‘cultural traitor,’ a Salman Rushdie, not deserving death of course because she was never that radical—well, maybe in her black scarf days—but deserving reprimand and protest and boycott, certainly” (390)<sup>62</sup>. It becomes clear that an ultra-conservative practicing Muslim woman is one that Kahf imagines to be extreme, “radical,” and not open to the possibility

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<sup>62</sup> Not only is Khadra presented as a character that evolves from premodernity to modernity, but other characters also illuminate a “traditional to modern” evolving too. Just as Khadra symbolically puts on her modern hijab, Eyad also struggles with reconciling the past and the present. Kahf writes, “He was in the swing of an Islamic modernism phase. Earlier, he had gone through a yearning-for-traditional-Islam phase, when he’d felt that there was something missing in his life...” (153). Traditional and modern practices of Islam are continuously placed in opposition to one another.

of a one's freedom of expression. Accordingly, her black scarf days were considered "radical" and in need of evolving towards modernity. That evolving towards radical ideas, though, is situated towards the freedoms offered in American society—freedoms that must inevitably come at the expense of dominating others (as I detailed in the introduction).

Khadra's evolving centers on moving from a more "traditional" closed minded person, towards a more "modern" Muslim American that is open minded and liberal. Around the time she meets her first love interest, Juma, Kahf has taken off her black scarf. In one scene, Kahf writes, "Khadra put on a white scarf with tiny flowers like a village meadow in spring, and a pale blue blouse and soft floral skirt. Her broadcloth nay jilbab and plain black scarves she shoved to the back of her closet" (193). She shoves her black scarves to the back of her closet as she symbolically let's go of her "radical" ways of thinking. As Kahf describes Juma's love interest in Khadra, for instance, she notes that he loves Khadra for the person she was at that point in the novel—not for the "old-fashioned" young woman she was growing up. Kahf writes, "Juma met her [Khadra] at the point when black scarf phase was fading into her neoclassical phase and was impressed, without sharing all her views." Here, Khadra is slowly starting to embrace constructs of modernity and leaving her more traditional views behind her. Kahf writes, "She wore perfect hijab, even a little conservatively for his taste, but that was okay, better that she erred on that side the other way, he thought" (201). Juma's interest in Khadra was in her ability to perfectly balance faith and modernity. Kahf continues, "She fit the profile of the wife Juma always knew he'd have. An observant Muslim, of course but also a modern, educated woman, not old-fashioned and boring" (222). Here, Kahf prescribes the characteristics of Khadra as she evolves away from her "old-fashioned" and "boring self." For one, Khadra is educated, and this nuanced narration—American education here is valued as it is in the CAIR ad campaign in my previous chapter. Second, she is



modern—what exactly such modernity entails becomes apparent by the end of the novel, and will be discussed momentarily. Here, these modern values are invested and reproduce liberated figures that suggest that women who are still in “black” scarves are not liberated—it implies that they are more traditional, and perhaps even still dominated since they have not yet embraced American freedoms.

As Khadra embraces and realizes the values of American “freedoms,” narrated through a backdrop of her evolving hijab—readers begin to see that a modern Muslim woman is a liberated one by accounts of American value systems. In the midst of Khadra’s evolving, Kahf prescribes particular freedoms associated with American ideals of democracy as invaluable and needing to be protected. For example, whereas, as noted that in her “black scarf days,” Khadra would have deemed a Salman Rushdie type of condemnation of Islamic ideas as nearly deserving death, as she evolves, she embraces ideals centered around “freedom.” For instance, when her friend Seemi wants her to attend a public reading of Salman Rushdie’s work, Seemi is upset that Khadra rejects her invitation. Khadra tells her she doesn’t support the way he writes about the Prophet. Seemi says that regardless, Khadra needs to attend because not doing so would imply that she supports religious leaders calling for his execution over blasphemy. In this scene, Kahf explores the reactions between East and West notions of “freedom.” Seemi tells Khadra, “So you support the fatwa on his *life*? You support this fundamentalist *shit*?” to which Khadra responds, “I don’t...I’d go if the protest was just against *that*. And I don’t want his book burned either” (332). At this point, Khadra’s hijab has changed from black, to white, to now removed all together (at times). Khadra explains that she won’t attend the protest for Salman Rushdie because while she disagrees with his blasphemous remarks about the religion of Islam, she believes in his right to express himself. The narrator mediates Khadra’s inner thoughts during this scene: “It was all so confusing. She wasn’t

against freedom of speech” (332). Khadra’s emphasizes a freedom perpetuated by neoliberal values—ones I have outlined in the introduction. Freedom of speech is a foundational value of American government; the idea that the U.S. government vehemently fights to protect people’s ability to express themselves freely and openly is largely. Khadra attributes the freedoms she enjoys as American freedoms and does not mention such freedom when she travels to Syria—except in the context of her freedom to remove her hijab publicly (which I will detail later).

As noted in the introduction to this project, American concepts of freedom has been explored by scholars in the contexts of cultural relativity—that freedom might mean different things to people living in different cultures<sup>63</sup>. Wail Hassan, literary critic of immigrant Muslim Literature also notes, “while freedom has different meanings in different cultural contexts (meaning that may be incompatible with one another, depending, for instance, on whether a given system places a premium on individuality or collectivity), no cultural or religious tradition has ever claimed that it is against freedom, *tout court*” (196). While, Hassan is correct in that no institution has ever been against freedoms, especially in the ways it is emphasized in American media. However, these analyses remain limited because they circumscribe individual choices onto terrains of freedoms, blurring larger stakes with such reductions. That is, as I have outlined in my introduction, freedom is not entirely a matter of cultural relativity—instead it is a neoliberal construct that allows for America to justify its quest to “protect” itself from the threat that other forces are attacking it, or to spread the individual liberties to other countries through imperial conquest.

In other scenes, Kahf demonstrates the tensions within the Muslim community over the respectability politics<sup>64</sup> and symbolic worship in public forums—and such are also mediated in

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<sup>63</sup> Abu-Lughod, for example, explores this in “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?”

<sup>64</sup> Concepts I have discussed in Chapter 1 in reference to Frances White’s concept of the “politics of respectability.”

part on the site of hijab. For instance, Chrif, a character molded as secular and “liberal” friend of Khadra, makes hostile remarks about a group Muslims praying outside at a park. He notably identifies them by their “beards and hijabs” (337). He snarls at Khadra, “These religious Muslims, they always have to embarrass themselves, on some level. Alls I know is, they give us a bad name. Like, let’s make sure the entire world knows we’re religious nuts. Look at them, praying the middle of the park with their rear-ends in the air” (337). Here, Chrif is frustrated by the visibility of people who actually look like the narratives depicted by mass media—the stereotypical Muslim tropes that have existed even before 9/11. At this point, Khadra is in a dichotomy on what she feels: on the one hand she fundamentally sees how the old versions of her disagrees, as she and her family once practiced the same, and on the other, she understands Chrif’s disdain for such public attention. The public worship performance of worship does not fit into Chrif’s idea of how best to be Muslim in the American landscape. For Chrif, it means that Muslims in America must not “look” like the “backwards” figures perpetuated by popular culture. Such scenes have sparked debates on the way religion has been given to Khadra as a mode of feminist agency. Martina Koegler-Abdi draws upon Mamdani who cautions that the validation of assimilating to neoliberal expectations of being “good” Muslims. She draws upon Mamdani in asserting that “the terms of neoliberal US expectations of assimilated multicultural-ness, or in other words being a ‘good,’ not overly religious Muslim, actually rather reinforces orientalist binaries in that they devalue explicitly religious identities as being ‘bad Muslims’” (8). She argues that Khadra’s individual interpretations of faith-based practice subverts expectations and offers her feminist agencies.

However, while her framework maybe useful in interrogating the ways Kahf maybe investing in the production of orientalist binaries, her cultural analysis understands imperialism to be something that restricts and dominates the choice of a group of people to practice culture or

wear hijab. Koegeler-Abidi argues that Kahf offers Khadra multiple feminist agencies, particularly an agency through religion that allows her to transcend cultural differences. She concludes that Kahf's representation of hijab demonstrates an additional layer of religious feminist agency that allows Khadra to transcend cultural expectations. She says, "Muslim feminist agency can operate within multiple normative views of religion, while fighting the double bind and without obliterating multifaceted religious agency women" (10). She argues that religious practice and personal interpretations help Khadra navigate choice and overcome cultural expectations of being an "Arab" woman. However, I do caution that it also reinforces gender descriptions prescribed to be of Muslim majority countries—such as the wife's submission to her husband. Koegeler-Abidi sees feminist agency through religious *choices*, overlooking that this nuanced narrative mobilizes freedom for Muslim women as individual choices, while simultaneously reinforcing gendered notions of domesticity as characteristic to the "othered" parts of the world.

Rather than demonstrating multiple feminist agencies as navigated through choice within cultural frameworks, Kahf's work, considered in the context of empire, is actually reperforming domestic spaces and gender codes on which the nation is built. That is, where she may equip Khadra with religious agency she simultaneously invokes "culture talk" to reinforce gender and domestic spaces as traditionally associated with Arab culture. This construction necessarily happens around the depiction of hijab. For instance, Khadra's first love interest, Juma, has gender expectations that she considers to be "traditional values" that don't fit in the modern American world, even when she insists that Islam does not dictate such gender assignments. Not only does the mediation of hijab in Kahf's work demonstrate new operating sites within which capital production reproduces itself, but it also demonstrates the ways the colonial nations depend on gender for national formation. Here, I refer to manifest domesticity as theorized by Amy Kaplan

to enable a thoughtful interrogation on the ways gender is recoded and reimagined in the domesticity of the novel, and at the same time, “foreign” nations are constructed with respect to empire through such narratives. Kaplan writes, “...where the domestic novel appears most turned inward to the private sphere of female interiority we, often find subjectivity scripted by narratives of nation and empire” (601). Kaplan demonstrates the ways novels of the late 1800s often coded the language of empire within the nation—drawn out in imagined spaces of novels that, at surface, investigate domestic dynamics of the household. Kahf’s work remobilizes such dynamics as she attempts to distinguish between religious agency and Arab culture. As they are remobilized the dynamics between the liberated/dominated Muslim also surface. For instance, a clash between religious observance and cultural expectations creates tension between the two Khadra and Juma, and these are subplots to Khadra’s evolving relationship with hijab. Recall my mention earlier on that Juma loves Khadra because she wears hijab but is still “modern and educated.” Yet, Juma has domestic expectations which are implicitly assumed of “Arab women,” while Khadra insists she has no religious obligation to take on such prescribed roles. In one scene, Juma asks Khadra “What’s for dinner?” to which she responds “I don’t know. Why are you asking me?” Juma responds, “let’s see: who’s the wife in this picture?” Khadra assertively responds, “The Prophet never asked his wives to do anything in the house for him” (241). While, as Koeggeler-Abdi notes that Khadra does use religious agency to subvert audiences expectation, she also, however, reinforces notions that the domestication of women is still very much alive in “traditional” or “dominated” Muslim households. Here, Kahf incites the liberated/dominated binary in a scene of typical of domestication. Khadra refuses to be dominated by her husband’s expectations—liberating herself through religious agency, but also implying that this dynamic still dominates Muslim women in traditional households. Gender dynamics and housework as part of American

production will be further examined in the context of the ways of Holly Warah's work, but here, it is important to note that the deep historical implications of Western civilization and "housework" are obscured through Kahf's reduction of the matter as simply old fashioned gender roles that are not prescribed by religious practice. Whereas Koegler-Abdi might suggest that this instance shows the ways Kahf gives Khadra religious agency to subvert orientalist tropes and stereotypes on Islam, a reading with respect to narrative form and empire can demonstrate that this is a performance that suggests only "modern" Muslims are able to transcend domestic roles that dominated them through liberties offered within the United States.

In fact, of this exact scene, Kahf narrates of Khadra reluctance to further argue with Juma, because he is traditional and old fashioned. She says, "A reg'lar Muslim from the Old Country like Juma wouldn't get it... She resented the Dawah Center for raising her with false expectations about typical religious Muslims" (241). Here, Kahf imagines Juma to be set in his "Arab" ways despite living in the United States—and she shows that religion can somehow be a balance between a clash of cultures. She notes that since Juma is an immigrant from the "Old Country," she suggests that people from across the world where Juma has come all continue to subjugate Muslim women to household chores. Kahf imagines that Juma loves Khadra enough to be "modern," but does not ultimately escape his "traditional" mentality that originates from the Muslim country from which he immigrated from—an implied mentality that Kahf suggests dominates the lived experiences of Muslim women. While Kahf imagines Khadra to have the liberties to contest such gender dynamics in the United States, she mobilizes the "othering" the nation has depended on as it constructs a narrative of protecting the individual rights of women in the United States. Accordingly, she reinforces a cultural "othering" that, for one, is mistakenly attributed as a gender division of housework attributed to Arab culture. Second, that this can only be reconciled through

religion since Khadra lives in the United States—the US, the American value of freedom of *choice*, though gives her the primary agency that allows her to act on religious teachings more accurately.

Other clashes between Khadra and Juma also mobilize old-fashioned cultural differences that are subverted through a reconciliation between faith and American values. For example, when Khadra wants to ride her bicycle to get milk from the grocery store, Juma further is depicted to contest her personal freedom of choice—and again invokes “culture talk” to describe his objection. Kahf writes, “She was an Arab girl, familiar with Arab customs, he hadn’t expected her to be doing that would embarrass him” (227). Here, culture talk pushes the inability to ride bikes as typical of “Arab” customs. Jumaa expresses his disdain that she ride a bicycle as problematic especially because she wears hijab. He says, “its idiotic riding a bicycle in hijab. You look totally stupid and clumsy and clownlike” (228). Here, the impossible expectations set forth by the clash, or perhaps coincide of, culture and religious expectation are highlighted. First, Kahf again notes that culture dynamics of the “old country” puts Muslim women in “dominated” positions relative to her husband. The challenge for Khadra, as Kahf imagines, is how she will reconcile all three spaces: old Arab values, Islamic practice, and modern America—but it seems the way to do so is balanced on her relationship with hijab, and her personal evolving through this practice. As it becomes clear by the end of the novel, the reconciliation comes through an embrace of American culture, a balance of “modern” Islam, and an erasure of her “traditional black scarf” self that she associates with the “old country.”

At the peak of her journey of self-discovery, Khadra takes a trip—a sort of pilgrimage—to her homeland of Syria. At this point, she removes her hijab, and struggles with concepts of freedom and modesty. Here, Khadra does not remove her veil in an act of liberation as in most popular depictions; still Kahf describes the act of veiling and unveiling as one process. She says, “How veiling

and unveiling are part of the same process, the same cycle, how both are necessary; how both light and dark are connected moments in the development of the soul in its darkroom” (309). This very notable scene where Khadra basks in the sun and the wind slips her veil down to shoulders is the start to which Kahf marks a connection of naturality between veiling and unveiling<sup>65</sup>. Kahf attempts to merge the naturalness of veiling and unveiling, but she also ascribes freedoms to one process over the other. That is, Kahf imagines, as do many narratives I have cited in the introduction, a freedom in connection *to* hijab, as opposed to away from hijab. Kahf describes Khadra’s first few days without hijab, “the first few day without her lifelong armor she felt wobbly, like a child on new legs....Having waist and legs encircled now, being compactly outlined by clothing that fit to the line of her body—that defined her body, instead of giving it freedom and space like hijab did” (310). Here, it’s not clear why Khadra had to remove her loose-fitting clothing, even if she was no longer wearing hijab—since loose fitting clothing is not exclusive to women who wear hijab. Anyway, contrary to a national narrative that prescribes oppression to the practice of hijab, Kahf deliberately gives Khadra freedom in and of its practice. Here, cultural analysis might suggest that Khadra, rather than feeling free from unveiling actually feels restricted by it—challenging dominant narratives that hijab is oppression. Yet, again, as I note, discourse prescribed as liberation in or away from hijab are two sides of the same coin. My own analysis of this scene, with historical reference of the desire for colonizers to unveil Muslim women, will show the ways this scene reinforces Western desire to unveil the women. Importantly, it will show the way these desires are operating within the Muslim community, such that Kahf is participating in this desire even while narrating resistance. What emerges then is a complexity of multileveled freedoms: the freedom that hijab gives her physically, while removing hijab gives her an internal

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<sup>65</sup> I use the terms “veiling and unveiling” as verbs that describe physically wearing or removing hijab, respectively.



and peaceful freedom. Yet ultimately, the freedom described—even when presented as freedom to veil and unfreedom of not veil—is only the freedoms of choice to do so.

Importantly, Khadra does not remove her hijab while she is in the United States--she returns Khadra back to Syria where the unveiling takes place. Here, as Kahf visualizes a freedom of choice to unveil, she reperforms a Western feminist desire to unveil the orient Muslim woman. Unveiling women has been a long-standing desire and colonial practice which exerted power and seized control over Muslim bodies (Yegenoglu, 116). Th desire can be traced in early travel writings of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and continues through today. Yegenoglu's historicization of this project of unveiling illuminates the ways in which Kahf reperforms these desires through her narrative. Complicating this desire, though, is now it occurs from the perspective of those (the author) invested in Muslim identity to unveil the Muslim heroine herself. Yegenoglu notes,

The metonymic association between the Orient and its women, or more specifically the representation of woman as tradition and as the essence of the Orient, made it all the more important to lift the veil, for unveiling and thereby modernizing the woman of the Orient signified the transformation of the Orient itself (99).

Accordingly, to achieve modernity, there needed to be a radical break from tradition which could only be achieved through unveiling in its totality. While Khadra ends the novel in a tangerine veil, which I will discuss momentarily, there is a point where she unveils all together in her quest of rediscovery. Here, Kahf's desire to subvert audience expectations comes in the form of the radical break from Khadra's own traditional self, and that which is popularly depicted—and this break from tradition happens through Khadra's unveiling. Particularly interesting about this scene of unveiling the orient women, who is Khadra, is that her unveiling is imaginatively performed by Khadra herself—imagined by Kahf, and immigrant author. This dynamic demonstrates the deep grasp neoliberal ideals has had, such that Muslim immigrant writers have been conditioned to the

naturality of this process where the orient is imagined unveiling herself and accepts it as a natural process.

Kahf describes Khadra's unveiling as safe and natural process. Interestingly, naturalizing women's bodies in unveiling has a long-standing tradition in colonial strategic attempts to unveil women. To legitimize these practices, Western feminist narratives presume a naturality between veiling and unveiling. As Yegenoglu notes, "it is the naturalness and truth of the unveiled body which legitimizes and endorses colonial feminist sentiments and certitude in the necessity of interventionist action against Muslim women's veiling" (115). The unveiled body is positioned as free and natural, but this idea is actually oppressive on Muslim women's bodies. In fact, as scholars such as Frantz Fanon note, veiling is not just the attire which covers the woman's body—it is a symbolic transformation from child into adult. Furthermore, in many Muslim majority countries, unveiling Muslim women is "peeling her skin off" (Yegenoglu, 118). Though imagined as natural, veiling and unveiling is not a singular process.

Through this same trip to Syria, where Khadra notably unveils in self-discovery, Kahf does seemingly attempt to interrogate historical imperial relationships of the US and Muslim majority countries. During her trip to Syria, for instance, Khadra meets her Aunt Razanne, who is informed on the state of her country's affairs, and aware of the effects of imperialism on the Middle East. This awareness is depicted in a scene when Khadra is in Syria eating dinner at her Teta's relative's house. Her aunt Razanne recounts the time the Syrian government tore off the hijabs of all women in the city. Razanne insists that the government was apologetic after the attack. Khadra, confused, asks her aunt "Um, well, whose fault was it then?" Her uncle Mazen replies, "Yours... Your father and mother. You dissidents. Who politicized hijab but you? Who made life hell for us but you?" (282). Kahf notes that the American politicization of hijab in immigrants and subsequent

generations directly effects innocent families living in the “home-lands.” Explaining, Khadra’s aunt responds, “if the government hadn’t been so anxious over what dissidents were doing, it wouldn’t have been forced to crack down on us so hard” (282). In later pages, Kahf explores, through Aunt Razanne, the ways imperial projects operate within community values to cause divisions. For example, in one instance, Khadra and her aunt discuss why so many young women had traveled outside of Syria for their studies. Aunt Razanne recounts to Khadra, “The whole idea of taking schoolgirls to France is wrong. It was part of the Baathist plan to ruin the morals of the land. To get out of our homes, out of our veils, make us vulnerable you see? They succeeded. Aping after the imperialists” (288). In another scene, between Khadra and her roommate Bitsy, Kahf demonstrates the ways in which the history of hijab and what it is associated it can often not be overcome. When Bitsy sees Khadra in her hijab, Kahf imagines a visceral out of body experience in Bitsy because Bitsy cannot see hijab without thinking about the Iranian Islamic revolution she experienced as a child. Upon seeing her reaction, Khadra asks Bitsy if she could call her parents, and Bitsy explains that her parents died in Iran part of the Islamic Revolution. She says, “I was really little, I remember running through the street, terrified, and being surrounded by women dressed like you are dressed right now, and Islamic phrases ringing out all around me. It was the scariest thing of my life” (375). She further explains that her aunt and uncle brought her to America to raise her “away from all of that” (375). Khadra seems to take in this information, this scenario, and Bitsy’s reaction to hijab without any of the resistance earlier versions of Khadra would have certainly protested. Alluding to the 1979 Iranian Revolution—in which Ayatollah Khomeini famously calls the United States the “Great Satan”— history reveals the Regan Administration’s role in using Iran to launch worldwide pro-U.S Islamic lobbying in order to secure Afghanistan policy (in fighting the Cold War) while simultaneously isolating the Shia

minority country (Mamdani, 770). Here, I do not wish to get into a history of Iran-US relations, however, the idea that hijab is a trigger towards a darker life that Bitsy cannot face is problematic -a false idea notion that somehow the United States could be a place “away from all of that” displaces the complex histories of American imperial projects.

Kahf’s historical glosses on American imperial relations is not a unique phenomenon to novels, as a narrative form through which history is often explored. Linda Hutcheon, in “Historiographic Metafiction,” notes, “both historians and novelists constitute their subjects as possible objects of narrative representation...and they do so by the very structures of language they use to present those subjects” (836). History is dependent on narrative conventions, to narrate the past, or a version of the past, and fiction depends on speculations of history; both are narrative forms that play signifying roles in culture (836). Hutcheon says that historiographic metafiction is when novels, or aspects in such novels, both “install and then blur the line between fiction and history” (837). She cautions this type of historical interpretations for readers’ who may misread a fictional interpretation for actual historical events. Such is the case for “postmodern” novels in specific that take on such a narrative form. Through the interaction of history and fiction, such novels raise issues on “the nature of identity and subjectivity, the question of reference and representation, the intertextual nature of the past, and the ideological implications of the past” (841). In “postmodern” fiction, Hutcheon notes, representations of the past have ideological implications; the ideology of postmodernism is, paradoxically, is that it draws upon power that it pushes back against (844). The premise of this ideology on fiction and history is that meaning is empty until its given fact, and that every reference of history in novel writing is a version of history. Ultimately, writing through today is shaped by the author’s own individual understanding or inheritance of historical dispositions.

Conscious of the ways imperialism has operated on the site of hijab, Kahf imagines Khadra's return from Syria with an understanding of hijab as one that can be used against colonial forces. On the flight on her way back from Syria, for example, Khadra pulls a tangerine scarf out of her bag, and lightly drapes it over her head and shoulders. As Kahf describes, Khadra wants the US Customs at the airport to recognize the symbol of her heritage when she lands in Chicago. Kahf writes, "She wanted them to know...that she was coming in under one of the many signs of the heritage, and she wanted her heart to remember, in the dappled ruffle and rustle of veiling and unveiling, *How precious is the heritage! A treasure fire cannot eat*" (313). This symbolic placement of hijab as she returns to America, in essence, can be traced back to projects of nationalism in third world countries attempting to resist imperialism. Scholars such as Chatterjee have noted that part of this project entailed a separation between material and spiritual domains of society. Yegenoglu notes, "the material sphere is construed as the site which the nationalist project needs to rationalize and thereby reform the vestiges of traditional culture, for if it wants to defeat colonialism it must have the knowledge of superior techniques of the West" (124). However, Kahf cannot give Khadra access to superior techniques required to resist colonialism, because she continues to resist within the same paradigms that confine her. Rather than dismissing modernity and other projects of the West, the material sphere finds a way to be compatible with it (Yegenoglu, 124). The only way this happens for Khadra, as Kahf suggests, is through a change in her relationship with hijab. As readers see, while Khadra uses hijab to resist American imperialism connected to the place she is returning from, she ultimately must reconcile her initial relationship with it as she symbolically evolves towards a more modern version of herself.

Khadra's quest for identity depends nearly completely on her relationship with hijab. Furthermore, after each voyage to the Middle East, Khadra returns with a reinvention of herself

that is directly connected to hijab. It is after hajj that Khadra takes off her black veil and begins to evolve towards modernity, and after she returns from Syria does she change to her tangerine veil (and removes it at times all together). Though noted, she explicitly states she re-veils herself on the way back to the United States from Syria as a symbol of protest, heritage, and a personal reminder of her ethnic roots. Kahf demonstrates that despite her own acknowledgement of the effects of politicizing the hijab, Khadra's relationship with hijab is central to her identity struggle<sup>66</sup>. Khadra's journey from premodern to modern specifically through her veil, and as it changes, she embraces neoliberal freedoms that read her as a "liberated" Muslim women figure—one that reconciles her hijab as compatible with American values. The novel ends with an ultimate reconciliation of her faith and investment in market capital—and inner piece accepting her happy American identity that offers her freedom. In the near final scenes, Kahf is taking pictures at a Speedway racecar event, and she is shocked that she's there. She says,

She never would've through she'd be okay going to a place like Speedway. Coming here is like following the white man into his lair. The sport was founded by bootleggers, for goodness' sake. But here I am, she thinks, I am here... She looks around at the white people too—the Americans--no wait, she's American now (438).

Here, Kahf visualizes a final balance of American staples—Speedway, a racecar sport that is a staple of American culture—one Kahf suggests is the epitome of white men's sports, a domain

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<sup>66</sup> After the second half of the novel, and Khadra takes her coming of self-trip to Syria and comes back to the United States, Kahf employs hijab to shape Khadra's reconciliation with her sense of self to emphasize her ability to choose to wear hijab (or not) on her own terms. In some instances, Khadra wears hijab, and in others she does not—whether Khadra's hijab is on or off is always noted. In one instance, when she applies for the position as a photographer at the morgue the assistant asks about her accent. Khadra is surprised because, as Kahf writes, "She wasn't even wearing a scarf that day" (322). Here, what is implied is that typically only women who wear hijab are recognized as Muslim or Arab. On other days, Khadra arbitrarily decides to wear hijab. When Khadra applies for a home loan while house hunting, Kahf writes, "...she made an appointment, put on her neatly pressed hijab, and sat on a chrome chair in the lobby of the bank" (346). Thus, whatever Khadra is doing at any given moment that is important enough for Kahf to visualize, Kahf asks of readers to visualize the presence (or not) of hijab. Readers can only know, visualize, and understand Khadra in the context of hijab. When she meets a new roommate, a Persian girl named Bitsy, Kahf says, "Khadra had made the mistake of meeting Bitsy without her hijab. These days, she made sure to wear it the first time she met anyone" (348). As we have seen from Bitsy's reaction to Khadra in her hijab, the visual marker can be polarizing for others who have otherwise felt "oppression" from the practice.

occupied by their interests. Here, in the final scenes, readers see Khadra as a woman who has navigated away from her black scarf days both physically and symbolically: she loves American freedoms, she protests gender relations, she is open minded, she is in the midst of an American sport. Where she would have once turned away, Kahf places her in a final scene where she is there to photograph the event and notably happy and comfortable to be there. In fact, she narrates that contrary to her old self who would have restricted her physical movements for respect of her modesty and husband, she says she will have no physical inhibitions—one that Kahf suggests were only there from male domination. Kahf writes, “There will be no postponing her task, and no crouching and stopping and restricting her movements for someone else’s hangups. Not for Hakim or anyone...” (440). She emphasizes these physical abilities with her newfound embrace of choices as a Muslim woman and with American freedoms.

Despite the notable exploration of the long-standing effects of imperialism and the complicated relationship between immigration and displacement Kahf explores, I argue that the novel’s end, ultimately collapses the complexities onto itself to produce at most a liberated Muslim woman figure who has inevitably reconciled to capitalist structures. In the end, she reaches a self-realization in which she is comfortable in her freedoms of choices she makes throughout her self-journey—abortion, divorce, removing her hijab, challenging dominant men—and symbolically embodies this journey in the color of her veil. In fact, the novel’s ending is in line with the ways novels themselves have aided in perpetuating imperial agendas. Sherine Razack notes that the plight of countless novels on the Middle East includes “...the story of equality as requiring a journey from pre-modernity and from the non-West to the West, the latter understood as a place of universal values. As a place where a single woman can make a difference and a dollar, the West is marked as inherently civilized because free market capitalism underwrites the freedom to act”

(Razack, 102). Again, I want to emphasize that what is problematic is not in Khadra's physical "freedoms," or in her individual choices, but in what Kahf presents as freedoms and choice to Muslim women (through struggles for Khadra) and how Khadra can only find these freedoms in American value systems. This gradual change in how Khadra bears hijab in the beginning of the work towards the end is a symbolic navigation from a traditional, conservative, even "backwards" Muslim woman to a modern, open-minded, version of herself that is more "free." As the novel offers authors spaces of nuanced narrations, Kahf's narrative demonstrate that imperial discourse provides the language for Muslim women's liberation as she leads Khadra towards an inevitable embrace of imperialist forces.

### Where Jasmine Blooms

Whereas Kahf's novel shows an ultimate reconciliation with Khadra's hijab and modernity is one balances American values and embraces market consumption, in *Where Jasmine Blooms*, Warah links hijab to "traditional" views that she imagines to be out of place in an American modern world. Warah presents three central characters who identify, at least to some extent, with a connection within the Muslim community—and, as it turns out, each female character is characterized in terms of her relationship to hijab. The first is a white American named Margaret, who has been married for twenty years to an Arab Muslim immigrant named Ahmad. In the novel, Margaret has recently decided to stop wearing hijab, much to the disappointment Ahmed's mother and his extended family. The second is Zainab, Ahmed's mother, who is an elderly woman. Warah describes her white hijabs and traditional dress, and juxtaposes her sartorial choices with the very "American" scenes drawn out when Zainab is in America. Zainab is reluctant to the "American" lifestyle and is resistant to assimilation as her sons work, become educated, and get married in the United States. Finally, Alison is also the daughter in law of Zainab, and while she is the descendant



of Syrian immigrants, her upbringing seems to be nearly completely disconnected to her roots overseas. She is a young woman educated in Near Eastern Studies, who attempts to adopt to the “traditional” Arab culture of her husband, but cannot. Each alternating chapter focuses on the plight of one of these female central characters, and all narratives are anchored by the lasting impacts of Zainab and her children’s immigration to the United States from Jordan. In this work, hijab plays a role in each of the narratives, as Warah depicts an individually complex relationship with each of the three women with hijab. In this work, like Kahf’s, the liberated/dominated Muslim woman figure is produced specifically in connection to an additional traditional/modern binary. For Kahf, the liberated Muslim woman figure could wear hijab but was modern in her allegiances to American value systems and capital interests. Here, in Warah’s work, the liberated figure is modern, and notably situates hijab as a traditional practice of the past. Navigating the complexities of the “traditional” versus the “modern” Muslim woman is integral in all three sub-plots—and it also rests largely on the characters’ relationship with hijab and notions of freedom.

A notable difference between *Where Jasmine Blooms* and *Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* is the timing in which each novel takes place, and the respective visualization of hijab in each time frame. Unlike Kahf’s work which is set in the 1980’s, Warah situates her characters in a world post 9/11. Scholarship on post 9-11 immigrant literature in specific highlights the ways the national discussions “us/them” narratives perpetuated in national discussions are subverted in Arab American fiction. For instance, in “Arab American Citizenship in Crisis: Destabilizing Representations of Arabs and Muslims in the US after 9/11” notes that many fiction texts that have emerged since 9/11 have successfully subverted simplistic labeling often imposed on Arab Muslims in the US by popular media. She notes that such literatures often center on complicated themes of identity that are not nearly sorted out by the end of the works. Fadda-Conrey notes that

a shift in representation mobilized “poignantly vocal, assertive, and unapologetic claims to complex types of Arab American identities that articulate cohesive yet anti-essentialist responses to the assimilative pressures of US belonging” (534). Warah’s work is among many written in the context of 9/11 to pushback against monolithic representations of Arab Americans and Muslims in the United States. As Fadda-Conrey notes, such narratives “complicate and challenge reductive and exclusionary conceptualizations of US citizenship” (534). She credits such Arab American post 9-11 fiction for responding to the cultural climate that presents homogenized depictions of Arab Americans, noting Arab American literary writings post 9-11 have created revisionary spaces that have pushed back against stereotypes, blanket labeling, etc. Here, we see that this analysis remains limited because Fadda-Conrey bases her analysis solely on cultural notions on identity. She does not consider the neoliberal contexts within which such works were produced nor the economic relationship to a novel marketed to the mass public. Accordingly, while many such writers undercut the monolithic binaries by showing complex identities that pervade that national discussions surrounding 9/11 in the media, they also problematize a divisive rhetoric that denotes signifies “good” and “bad” Arabs in the United States. My analysis will show Warah’s novel offers a nuanced representation of Muslim women that inadvertently creates a liberated Muslim woman figure that is modern in the sense that she does not wear hijab, and that what Warah envisions as gendered cultural traditions are actually economic conditions produced by neoliberal projects.

Warah imagines a Seattle that has deeply shifted by the events of 9/11. Prior to 9/11, Warah describes that city as a tolerant place outside of Middle East conflict, but after the catastrophic events, she envisions, “the country spun on its axis—a tidal wave of patriotism and security, paranoia, and Islamophobia” (272). Interestingly enough, as Kahf’s work takes place around the 1970’s, Khadra lives and navigates in world with similar Middle Eastern domestic politicization

pre-9/11 as that which consumes the family in Warah's work post 9/11. Pre and post 9/11, the authors offer that the social condition for people who identify as Muslim in the United States is largely the same. This similarity in social condition in both times as imagined by the authors demonstrates the reality that not much has changed in terms of the narrative of Muslim women in the United States. Khadra faces discrimination as a Muslim woman living in Indiana where they are a fringe minority population struggling for acceptance into the mainstream. In contrast, Warah envisions similar hostility but consequential of the tragic attacks of 9/11 which heightened Islamophobic sentiments in the US.

The narrative opens noting Margaret's removal of hijab—she no longer practices hijab--and a definitive distancing herself from the person she was when she wore it. Margaret's past relationship with hijab, Warah notes, is one of disdain. Warah offers two explanations to stand in for why Margaret no longer wears hijab. The first is a standard explanation she imagines Margaret to tell others: "After 9/11, I didn't feel safe wearing hijab. I just felt too visible and exposed." The second reason Warah describes is more personal and deals with the way Margaret began to see herself: "prematurely aged in her navy-blue scarf, pinned under her chin and already looking old" (16). Here is the first instance hijab is associated with old. Later, I will point out the ways it remains practiced by the elderly mother in law who is narrated as a "traditional" woman. In the community where Margaret lives, Warah imagines the reactions of Margaret's white friends to the fact that she no longer wears hijab. They offer Margaret words of encouragement and approval because she has removed her hijab. Warah writes, "Ever since she stopped wearing the headscarf, the women repeatedly complimented her. Jackie had even declared Margaret 'liberated'" (45). Herein, the binary of liberated/dominated first begins to work through hijab. Margaret removes her hijab, and her friends feel that she is more liberated. This approval is offset by Margaret's in-laws, both those

in the United States, and those she visits on family trips to Jordan. Her mother in law, Zainab, for example, prays that Margaret will wear hijab again soon. Upon arrival to Jordan on a family trip, Margaret premeditates the distaste her husband's sisters will have when they see her for the first time without hijab. Warah narrates, "On her last three visits to Jordan she had worn a headscarf—to praises of the family. She was finally one of them! Or so they had thought" (151). Still, while her in laws disapproved, Warah carefully never entitles Ahmed, Margaret's husband with any such disapproval—almost as if to note his "progressive" ideals in contrast to his backwards family. For example, when Warah describes Margaret's relationship with Ahmed, she writes, "As a husband, Ahmed had been good to her...He had never tried to change her into some kind of Arab wife. It was Margaret who had done that. He had understood when she stopped wearing hijab. He had always been supportive" (232). Aside from the blur between Arab culture and Islamic practice that Warah colludes in this instance, her emphasis on Ahmed's approval also implies the connotations involving modernity and emancipation. In both the reactions from her neighbors and Ahmed, Warah imagines both support and progress. Her neighbors call her liberated, and Ahmed is able to move past the tradition of his family to support her. In both reactions, those of the neighbors and of Ahmad himself, Margaret receives support that is specifically situated in her new-found progress and liberation. Her in laws don't catch up or support her because they have not yet "modernized."

Unlike Margaret who has no biological roots in the Muslim community (she was born into white Christian family), Warah writes Alison (the second heroine and married to Ahmed's brother) in the narrative as an American woman with ancestry connected to the Middle East—but with no connection to the Muslim faith or practice. This is in stark contrast to Margaret, who despite having no ancestry lines to the Muslim dominated Middle East, performs other Islamic rituals such as the

daily five prayers. Here, audience expectations are subverted—the character connected to Middle East ancestry is completely disconnected with Islam and Arab culture, while the Christian born is seen to have converted and largely practices. Hijab, for Alison, has no place in her American life. In one scene, where she and Khalid (Zainab’s son) travel to the mosque to officiate their Islamic marriage, Warah describes Alison’s uncomfortable relationship with hijab. Warah describes, “She was startled by her reflection—her head covered in the scarf. She had forgotten she was masquerading as a Muslim woman. A pang of concern rose up: what if someone she knew saw her? What would her American classmates say? The unspoken attitude of her circle was that you studied Islam and Muslim, you didn’t *become* them” (23). In this imagination, Warah imagines Allison’s identity as distinct separate from Muslim women, despite the fact that her grandparents were Muslims and, in this scene specifically, she is marrying an Arab Muslim male. Here, Warah narrates Allison as “masquerading” as a Muslim woman, to emphasize the distance this character feels to Islam even though she has ancestral roots to Muslims—yet the language, I note almost serves to objectify the lives of women in hijab as some spectacle or performance. In another scene, Warah imagines Allison to place her hijab in the metaphoric place it belongs. That is, she writes, “The scarf sat folded neatly on the bookcase, which displayed evidence of her studies: textbooks on Islamic civilization, Arabic literature in translation, and books on Islamic architecture, colonialism, and Middle Eastern film” (18). This imagination of the place for hijab is indicative of an intended separation of the modern women and where hijab, to them, belongs. This separation also mobilizes the “us” versus “them” narrative—hijab belongs on top of her studies, which are parts of the world away from the United States. For both Margaret and Alison hijab is largely

associated with restricting traditional practices, and they are depicted as modern American women<sup>67</sup>.

Turning from the younger daughter in laws, perhaps coinciding with Zainab's elderly age, Warah depicts Zainab as the embodiment of the "old fashioned" hijab. In scene after scene while in the United States, Warah creates a visual in which Zainab is out of place with her "traditional" dress. At Alison's wedding to Khalid, for example, Warah juxtaposes visual descriptions of Zainab and Alison's grandmother. She describes, "Though both were Arab women of a similar age, they were worlds apart: Ahmed's mother in her white headscarf and *thob*, and Alison's grandmother in her prim clothing, handbag and heels, her hair stiff and coiffed" (53). Warah is fixated on every woman's clothing, describing always in detail the character's relationship to hijab. In this scene, Alison's grandmother is a modern American woman: heels, handbag and perfect hair. She stands in front of a woman of similar age, but "others" her as one who is simply still stuck in the land of backwards tradition: in a white headscarf and *thob*<sup>68</sup>. She says they are "worlds apart," reinforcing the othering typical of the "us" vs "them" narratives perpetuated by mass media in the United States.

For two of her three protagonists (Margaret and Alison), Warah explicitly distances them from hijab—one removes hijab all together, and the other so bewildered by the practice, she sees

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<sup>67</sup> Warah illuminates Alison's distaste for tradition in contrast to her husband, Khalid's, ideas of modesty. When discussing their future daughter's high school athletic involvement, for example, and Khalid tells Alison he does not want his daughter to play sports because "she wont be wearing shorts for everyone to see her body," Warah writes, "Had Khalid changed because of Ramadan, or had he always held these traditional views?" (248). For Alison, Khalid's reservations towards his desire to dress his future daughter more conservatively equates with "traditional" ideals that Alison dreads. This and other instances of "tradition" alluding to ideas of backwards can be understood, again, in terms of culture talk. As Mamdani suggests, "culture talks tends to think of individuals (from 'traditional' cultures) in authentic and original terms, as if their identities are shaped entirely by the supposedly unchanging culture into which they are born" (766). As a result, the construction of such political identities is often overlooked. Khalid subsequently remains completely uncompromising, and he and Alison end up divorced because her "modern" values cannot harmoniously exist with his "traditional" ones.

<sup>68</sup> A dress-like outfit that is free flowing.

herself in a performance when she even tries it on. For Alison and Margaret, however, hijab in American spaces is linked to premodernity—she describes her mother in law’s veiling and the dress she wears as seemingly out of place in an envisioned Seattle, America. I read Warah’s commentary on hijab and modernity (that hijab is an outdated practice reserved largely for the elderly), through her narrative, not as a challenge to stereotypes and audience expectations typical of cultural analyses, but through a historical perspective of the Western feminist desire to interpret the veil as a sign of tradition. Yegenoglu notes, “Taken as the most visible market of tradition and religion, the veil provided the benevolent Western woman with she had desired: a clinching example that interlocks “woman” and “tradition/Islam” so that it could be morally condemned in the name of emancipation” (99). Accordingly, hijab provided Western women a venue by which to push the practice as tradition that elicited both condemnation and incited emancipation projects. Recall the ways Margaret’s friends called her “liberated” upon removing hijab. Warah employs a perspective that associates hijab with tradition, and when her characters distance themselves, they do so in the name of modernity.

There is one character who is associated with modernity and wears hijab—but again, since she is modern, Warah imagines that she is out of place in her homeland of Jordan. Like Kahf in many ways, Warah’s work fixates on the “modern hijab”—one that is compatible with American capital consumption. Describing Margaret and Allison’s sister in law Nadia, Warah writes, “She was pretty, Alison would admit, but she was also the most modern. Not only had Nadia managed to learn English...but Nadia was friendly and funny and the least judgmental. She probably couldn’t wait to get on a plane and out of Jordan” (245). As Warah narrates Alison’s thoughts, she notes the essential elements that make Allison modern: she speaks English, she is open-minded, she is non-judgmental towards people’s personal views and practices. This modernity, though, had

no place in Jordan, and she imagines that Nadia cannot wait to be her true modern self in the United States—away from what should be presumed as a “backwards” country (Jordan) that wouldn’t accept or understand her modernity.

Importantly, Nadia’s modernity extends to her dress and her hijab. Throughout, Nadia’s hijab is described as “modern,” and Warah depicts her as a woman with “modern” Islamic fashion, wearing pink veils and jeans under her *thob*. This link between hijab and fashion is present in both Warah and Kahf’s work. In Kahf’s novel, for example, Kahf notably references the fashion of her characters as a symbol of modernity. For example, when she describes Khadra’s sister in law Omayma’s fashion trends and her circle of friends, she says, “Tres chic and tres holy, they were the face of Islamic women’s work for the new era.” (256). Khadra’s mom, too, is a hijab wearing trendsetter among other members of their tight knit Muslim American community. If at the surface, the presentation of these heroine characters is to push back against the stereotypes of Muslim American woman and identity, the implications of creating the “fashionable” Muslim woman are far reaching. Banu Gokarikel and Ellen McLarney note, “contemporary Muslim femininities are increasingly mediated through the market forces of consumer capitalism, impacting Muslim women’s identities, lifestyles, and belonging in complex ways” (2). To position Nadia as a modern Muslim woman, her identity necessarily depends on her fashion forward sense in an otherwise backwards country. Warah follows the trend of reconciling the practice of hijab through an embrace of capital market forces. Gokriksel and Mclarney note that “Muslim identities are constructed through commodities and capital consumption practices” (1-2). These identities are constructed through various modes of narratives in media and popular culture, including novels, lifestyle magazines, newspapers, etc, As Muslim women carve out their position in the American society, they often simultaneously engage with Islamic practice and modalities of capitalism. This



challenge positions the veil, as a place of empowerment and agency, but creating the image of the empowered, self-informed Muslim women simultaneously conforms to that of the ideal consumer (3). The connection to capital market interests automatically invokes the binary of liberated/dominated—liberated because she loves to consume. She must notably leave the place where readers assume women are unlike her and can be assumed to be dominated. Nadia has idealized images of what “modern” women are like in the United States. Nadia insists to her mother that her outfit choices she has preselected for her travel to the U.S. are what modern American woman typically dress like.

In addition to the fashion forward liberated image of “modern Muslim women” Warah creates through fashion, Warah also reaffirms a gendered performance of domestic spaces between the heroines and their spouses—one she places as a custom of Arab/Muslim tradition. Such performances can be necessarily linked to the situation of hijab because it is the characters in hijab—the old traditional mother in law—who emphasizes the importance of domestication as characteristic of a good housewife. On the other hand, it is the modern young woman who contests it. In countless instances throughout the work, Warah carves the dynamic of an Arab/Muslim lead household (as Ahmed and Khalid are both Arab and Muslim) as one in which he is the primary breadwinner, and his wife is the domesticated worker and consumer. The young “modern” heroines of this work push back against these designated roles that seem linked to the ethnicity and religion their spouses follow. Zainab, for example, is consumed with teaching her daughter Nadia how to cook before she gets married. Margaret primarily cleans up dinner after family feasts, serves tea and coffee, while the men sit inside the family room and talk over politics. In one scene, Khalid nudges Alison to help the women clean up after dinner. Warah describes, “As soon as he said it, the reality of the arrangement became clear—the men relaxed while the woman cleaned

up” (245). However, this pitfall cliché of the Arab/Muslim households’ separate gender roles of breadwinner/house-wife has historically rich roots as the driving force to Western modernity (Gokariksel and McLarney, 3). Alison asks Margaret how she is able to tolerate cleaning up while the men have coffee and relax. She says, “How can you stand it...all this work while everyone just leaves” (246). While some modern post-feminist scholarship glorifies the new modern woman as one with choice and agency, with “participation in the structure of economic power,” many scholars are critical of this stance. They note, “it is important to analyze the imperial, military, racist, sexist, and economic ends to which the capitalist imaginary has been put” (Gokariksel and McLarney, 4). Kahf is cautious of this pitfall in terms of domesticity performance and gender roles, noting that Khadra’s parents both do housework and cooking together, and both work at the Da’awah center. However, recall that Khadra also reinscribes these gender roles as a “traditional” Arab custom when she clashes with Juma over who is going to cook dinner.

A cultural reading might consider this scene as a critique on cultural dynamics—Arab culture that separates gender roles in “traditional” ways (men sit, women clean, for example). A cultural reading may suggest that scenes such as this question the “traditional practices” of the labor in conceivably Arab/Muslim households—that men dominate their wives who are subjugated into household chores. However, an economic perspective on the historical ways a refusal to do housework, or on the gendered division of labor, may offer a reading that subverts this scene as a critique of “traditional” cultural/gender roles. In fact, Kathi Weeks explains that gendered labor divisions were an imperative foundation of capital societies, as housework was free accumulation of unrecognized labor. The “social factory” was theorized as a way capital society accounted for people who did not earn wages—families were organized in terms of wages, extending to members that could not earn wages, or too young to earn wages (Weeks, 121). One of the limits of the

movement of “refusal to work” was in the feminist assumption is that this division, or more essentially housework, is a common issue for all women (Weeks, 127). The point is that while Warah critiques these gendered spaces of domestic work as being an Arab/Muslim male domination over housewives, it was actually the basic organization of a capital society as in the United States.

Accordingly, the domestication of women, especially in the lower classes, to ensure their free labor was a necessary component to creating a capitalist society. Free domestic and reproductive labor by women was the driving force to accumulating capital. So, too, came the abuse and subjugation of women by men in order to ensure their services. In fact, Silvia Federici theorizes such practices of subjugating women to the power of men as a necessary means to establish a capitalist society in early Europe<sup>69</sup>. This work is helpful to understanding the ways in which household divisions of labor are actually a characteristic of capital societies originating in Western societies—though Warah pushes this division onto Arab/Islamic “culture.” Federici examines the role of housework in particular as unwaged labor necessary for the development of capitalist economies. Federici asserts that the role of a housewife, especially in terms of housework, is indeed a central force to capitalism. Furthermore, and importantly, against notions that negate housework for feminists, Federici says,

...arguing that women should take the lead in the collectivization of reproductive work and housing is not to naturalize housework as a female vocation. It is refusing to obliterate the collective experiences, knowledge, and struggles that women have accumulated concerning reproductive work, whose history has been an essential part of our resistance to capitalism (148).

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<sup>69</sup> In *Caliban and the Witch*, Federici extends Marx’s initial definition on primitive accumulation to include: (i) the development of a new sexual division of labor subjugating women’s labor and women’s reproductive function to the reproduction of the work-force; (ii) the construction of a new patriarchal order, based upon the exclusion of women from waged work and their subordination to men; (iii) the mechanization of the proletarian body and its transformation, in the case of women, into a machine for the production of new workers (12).

Thus, while it may be fair to resent the gendered spaces of domesticity, notably problematic is, as in Warah's work, to reduce it in contrast to Arab figures taking advantage of their white wives. In later conversations, Alison's mother expresses distaste for the culture. However, this narrative as a difference between culture is reductive, as in reality, far more global complexities connected to capitalism and imperialism are at play.

One notable difference between works produced by non-Muslim authors about Muslim overseas, and the works examined in this chapter, is that the authors of these depicting the Muslim-American woman's experience is that they do make a conscious effort to connect their characters experiences to the historical colonial context abroad. That is, many scholars such as Sensoy and Marshall, that note the relationship between authors producing literature on Middle Eastern life (the colonizer telling the stories of the colonized) is that they ignore historical facts. For example, Sensoy and Marshall note that authors such as Deborah Ellis glance over historical facts in favor of stories that depict "saving Muslim girls" (307). They argue that they hardly "capture the complexities of US involvement and intervention in favour of lessons about educating and saving Muslim girls" (307). In contrast, American authors that identify with the Muslim community, like Kahf and Warah, make more of an effort to identify complex historical and political lines that have determined and shaped their place in American society. However, such versions are reduced to mere glosses, as the heroines of each work attempt to reconcile their places in American life. When Khadra, for example, goes with her parents to a court house to officially become an American citizen and takes the oath to defend and honor the United States, she says, "like she was ever going to help the U.S and its buddy Israel kill more Palestinians and Lebanese!" (142). Kahf depicts Khadra's struggles with becoming a citizen, as she feels like the American core values are just a mask to cover up their quest for occupancy abroad. This however, is early on, as Kahf

simultaneously presents Khadra in her “black scarf days--” an extreme version of the heroine that is nearly replaced (through self-evolution and intense soul searching) by the end of the work as she uses hijab only in light resistance to US imperial practice, but embraces American capital culture.

Glosses over history while glancing over the role American imperialism has played in Middle East relations, ones that that have shaped American culture are also apparent in Warah’s narrative. Such instances in Kahf and Warah’s work contribute to the long-standing tradition of Orientalist discourse that depended upon the validation from women’s discourses. Yegenoglu notes that orientalist discourse of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, particularly from travel writers on women and the veil, depended on women’s “first-hand accounts” of the harem. She notes, “each additional piece of information that comes from Western women is conceived as an integral part of the knowledge of the Orient” while validating the primary truth and totality of the “masculine subjects’ representation” (78). Not only are Warah and Kahf writing from a Western perspective, they are also afforded the insiders perspective as authors invested in and part of Muslim communities in one way or another. In Warah’s work, Alison’s visit to Palestine where she meets Khalid’s sister Yasmine. Yasmine is a poor woman with five children, living in first world conditions burdened by poverty—noting, of course, she wears hijab. For readers, Warah describes the mats she imagines Yasmine uses for seating, the single window of Yasmine’s musty home, and the “old-fashioned” washing machine Yasmine uses before she hangs the clothes to dry. Warah imagines Yasmine to wear hijab and notably draws her into a still old-fashioned world of Palestine. Furthermore, if it can be assumed that the dominant narrative is that which is perpetuated by the media on US foreign relationships, Warah’s contribution validates third world images of the Palestine as a result of occupation. However, she hardly gives accountability to United States role

in the Israeli occupation. Furthermore, as Allison witnesses first-hand the Israeli shooting in Palestine and accounts her horror to her husband upon return, she is able to turn her attention away from news on the occupied territories and focus on her life in America. In fact, Warah visualizes the idea that the people living under occupation as a *choice*; in the heat of the scene, the soldier yells to Alison “you don’t have to live here.” When she returns to the United States, Warah describes, “Her mind returned to the soldier, calmly lowering his gun. *You don’t have to live here.* She couldn’t imagine raising a baby in that refugee camp. Nor could she imagine Khalid growing up there. When she tried to conjure up a picture of it, all that came to mind as Yasmine’s clingy mass of children” (243). Here, Warah explicitly narrates the difference between the imperiled “other” Muslim women overseas—the poor, overworked women who can’t seem to stop bearing children—and the privileges and luxuries of education and middleclass life of Muslim women in the US.

Though Warah does seemingly narrate the scene in Palestine as an impoverished world resulting from colonial occupation of Israel, she envisions Yasmine’s hope that the US, or its citizens, can help her condition. The scene with Allison and Yasmine does more than mobilize the *choices* American women have not only to geographical locations (America) that guarantee them safety and modern conditions, but it also envisions a dynamic between the two women, where Allison, the liberated American woman figure, helps Yasmine, the impoverished Palestinian. Upon ending her visit at Yasmine’s, Allison gives Yasmine money—narrating a liberated/oppressed dynamic between “American” and “Arab” women. In fact, Yasmine expresses resentment to Allison that she had not received “help” (in the form of money) from her brother in a while. This savior dynamic has been interrogated by scholars such as Leila Abu-Lughod who notes that the veil is often a site upon which narratives of oppression that needs rescue by American

freedoms are narrated. She notes Western feminists needs to move past looking at the veil and posing the situation of Muslim women in the Middle East as somehow oppressed and in need of saving. She cites, for instance, that contrary to popular notions, the Taliban did not invent the burqa; it was local covering, symbolizing “portable seclusion” that enabled Pashtun women to move into public spaces while still remaining protected and dignified from strange men (785). She notes that for women of this part of the world, even through today, hijab signifies a “a moral way of life in which families are paramount in the organization of communities and the home is associated with the sanctity of women” (785). The contrast between women, Allison, and American woman who does not wear hijab offers Yasmine, a poor Palestinian woman in hijab, signifies that one woman is in a superior position to the other. Abu-Lughod’s notes that women in different parts of the world come from complex political histories that must be accounted for when making overreaching calls about women that need saving. The contrast between Yasmine and Allison, though, are clearly a result of imperial conditions and occupation that does not place any burden on American imperialism—and even suggests that American women can help the condition of women in the Middle East. Abu-Lughod’s perspective is important as she also examines the limits of “cultural relativism” in using a Western lens to understand the circumstances of Muslim women in the Middle East, I push her idea further to identify what Sensoy and Marshall call “missionary girl power”—a strategy in which first world women are constructed as saviors of their third world counterparts (296). Authors of such narratives, usually white feminists, depict Muslim women as poverty struck, sad, and longing for the freedoms embodied by a Western women figure (297). I suggest that woman who identify as Muslim and/or are invested in the Muslim community may offer readers severely monolithic ideas about “Muslim women” in the United States. On one note, it might afford them a more accepted place in American society, one in which they will face

slightly less discrimination and hate speech. However, it also validates to such non-Muslim readers and students that true *freedom* (reduced to choice) is available in American spaces, while the texts emphasize that Muslim woman abroad are still backwards and need saving. Ozlem and Sensoy note, “By positioning ‘Third World Girls’ as most in need, those in the ‘West’ pass up a rich opportunity to engage in complex questions about oppression, patriarchy, war, families, displacement, and the role of values (imperialism or faith-based) in these questions” (309). When Muslim authors depict the modern American Muslim woman, they pass up the same opportunities, plus perpetuate a reductive monolithic idea that entails an imaginary freedom for Muslims in American spaces, which justifies their “oppressed” counterparts abroad.

Warah ends her novel with a suggestion that love can somehow transcend cultural differences and borders, obscuring the complicated histories across cultures. Given the novel's relationship to imperialism, this narrative mobilizes national constructs of cultural values that prescribe unity among difference—though the foundation of a capital society depends on creating differences among people. At the end of Warah's work, she imagines a scene of collectivity, where family and togetherness transcend all the complexities of the clash of lives between cultures and across borders. The center of Margaret's plight focuses on the conflict with her husband to move, and in the end, she agrees to move with Ahmad overseas for a better job opportunity. As the shipment of her family's things leaves from Seattle to the Arabian Gulf, Margaret drives to meet Alison, who has divorced Khalid. At this point, Alison is continuing her graduate studies in Near Eastern studies, and Margaret has come to terms with moving, despite her resistance. Zainab, the old fashioned out of place mother in law, remains old fashioned, but becomes less resistant towards her white daughter in laws—even encouraging a reconciliation between Khalid and Alison when



their conflict first arises. Zainab vows to appreciate her family and God's blessings regardless of where she was (she is depicted to have a longing to return to Palestine).

At this point, the skeptic in me urges to question what an alternative of what nuances of Muslim women in American literature might look like if they didn't focus on hijab. So, what then, when there is an alternative literature by which to examine a Muslim woman outside of her relationship to hijab. One example lies in Bushra Rehman's depiction of her protagonist in the short novel *Corona*. In this work, Rehman's heroine, Razia grows up in a Muslim community of Desis in Queens, New York. Nowhere in the work is there any mention of hijab. However, there seems to be a caveat with this work, as it becomes clear early on that the heroine is excommunicated from the Muslim community she was brought up in. She says, "My family had made me chose: the family or Eric. I thought I was choosing freedom" (36). Rehman visualizes a young woman who was excommunicated from her family for dating outside of marriage, and for refusing to accept an arranged marriage. While this refusal of the arranged marriage seems like a ground-breaking stereotypical breakthrough, the story quickly unfolds however, into the narrator, Razia, moving from home to home, in extremely poor conditions, and without any sexual boundaries. In fact, the presentation of a moral deviations by all standards is a recognized phenomenon that often occurs when marginalized groups attempt to break free from stereotypes. As Yegenoglu notes, "The ability of the Orient to modernize itself is assumed to be possible only by its radical break from tradition. The oppressive unfree condition of Oriental woman is...morally condemned" (Yegenoglu, 99). In fact, when Rehman visualizes the kind of people that Razia surrounded herself with, she says, "Even though the desis I hung out with were queer, progressive, and into drugs and polyamory, it still like my neighborhood where everyone was watching" (125). Accordingly, drugs are equated with progress, and Razia herself chronicles her promiscuity

throughout the work. Rehman frees Razia into choices that entail indulgences in the excess staples of vices: drugs, alcohol, and promiscuity. This leads her down paths of homelessness, drug addiction, and abusive relationships. Still, in an attempt to break from the stereotypical Muslim woman, the antidote becomes one drenched in excess decadence, and poor life choices—choices even she notes are poor: “Maybe I had made some bad choices in my life” (113). My point is not to suggest that this is a “failed” alternative to a nuance of Muslim women that does not focus on the protagonist’s relationship to hijab. However, what I am saying is that negotiating freedoms—on way or another—on the bodies of Muslim women ultimately shows that there is no right answer. Put simply, negotiating freedoms on women’s bodies as choices will ultimately subjugate Muslim women to the same forces they are pushing back against.

### Conclusion

I do wish to suggest that it is not possible to question dominant discourse of imperialism through cultural productions such as the novel. In fact, my alternative reading of *Corona* should only suggest the difficulty in imagining an alternative that has not already been conditioned by neoliberal rhetoric that serve larger economic interests. What I am saying, though, is that the discourse of freedom/unfreedom that is taking shape on the site of hijab, is ensuring a domestic colonization of Muslim women. In this narrative form, one that imperatively shapes domestic American culture by offering nuanced readings of national values that reconcile human differences, what is being perpetuated is a reinforcement of false notions of choice that reinforce gender codes on which the nation has constructed itself. That is, they implicate that the condition of Muslim women in the United States entails freedom that her counterparts overseas do not have access too—mobilizing rhetoric US government depends on to justify its imperial interests in Muslim majority countries.

In brief, this analysis of Kahf's and Warah's novels demonstrates that the forms of the novel remain true to their function in service to imperialism. Through a form which emerges as a narrative that constructs social order, and canonized when content reinforces national values, authors invested in the Muslim American experience write within a paradigm that inevitably leads to an embrace of capital forces. It is important to acknowledge the dynamic, multifaceted characters such Muslim writers are creating in their literary works as they carve a space and voice for themselves against the stereotypes of American media. However, it is important to note that given the complicated historical and political implications that rests on hijab and the usage of women in nationalism, they also demonstrate the limits when trying to fully absolve themselves from national imperialist projects that have used hijab as a tool to rewrite concepts of modernity and freedom. Many such works, focusing on protagonists with some connection to immigrant communities are forced to reconcile their spaces in some narratives of progress. While they challenge complicated histories of American imperialism and its lasting effects, they also reduce such complex histories in endings of reconciliation and belonging. Most of this happens in the discussions of hijab, juxtaposing visuals of American Muslim woman and her backwards counterparts. Both works mobilize not only mobilize the liberated/dominated Muslim woman figure through notions neoliberal freedoms through hijab, they mobilize an additional binary in their nuanced narratives on hijab imagined in American spaces—an oppositional traditional vs. backwards Muslim woman that must necessarily move towards modernity in order to be happy. Yet, as it becomes clear, imperialism rides on false narratives of progress and freedom, one in which liberal democracy can mask its flaws with while simultaneously continuing political imperialism abroad.

### CHAPTER 3: HIJAB AND NONFICTION MEMIORS

In Chapter 2, I demonstrated the ways authors invested in the identity of Muslim women in the US nuanced narratives envisioning what it might look like to be a Muslim American in the United States--and how hijab can be reconciled to be compatible with American values. By attempting to “write-back” against popular media, I show the way such narratives mobilize neoliberal freedoms negotiated on hijab. While fiction has a particular relationship with imperialism—one that includes normalizing social orders to the working class--in this chapter, I will examine the ways women who identify as Muslim situate their place within the United States in relationship to hijab in their own memoirs. Similar to the marketing strategies of novels, the visibility of Muslim women on the covers of memoirs has become more apparent than ever. Here, women who identify as Muslim (or “ex-Muslim”) account their “true” stories of the freedoms the United States has offered to Muslim women to accomplish their dreams, as well as those who account the “horrors” of the faith and how they were able to be freed from its practices. Titles include *The Wrong End of the Table: A Mostly Comic Memoir of a Muslim Arab American Woman Just Trying to Fit In*, *Born With Wings: The Spiritual Journey of a Modern Muslim Woman*, *Caged In America*, *Unashamed: Musings of A Fat Black Muslim*, *Hiding in the Light: Why I Risked Everything to Leave Islam and Follow Jesus*, to name a few. As women who identify as Muslims in United States narrate their experiences in the American cultural experience, their identities center largely on hijab. In such narratives, the question of hijab continues to work on both sides of opposition--on one side as sign of liberation and the other as sign of oppression. Yet, different from political advocacy groups and novels, memoirs offer a unique perspective in shaping cultural ideologies because the narration of lived experiences as Muslims renders as “truth” and

“testimony” to mass reading publics. In this chapter specifically, the role of memoir and its history in American cultural production as a form testimony will be examined.

Existing scholarship on memoirs written by Muslim women concerns itself with perspectives of voice, and which accounts of Muslim women are being recognized. However, these perspectives are limited because they do not move beyond the politics of representation—that is, who gets to tell the story of Muslim American women, and which voices get heard. For instance, Susan Smith notes that memoirs achieving popular acclaim are not doing enough to dispel stereotypes, and only include a small representation of Muslim women<sup>70</sup>. She notes that while there are many stories being told, there needs to be more diversity in the rich experiences being told. Her concern is about the voices being heard—the representations within the genre rather than the genre and its impact on cultural formation itself. Nada Elia also examines the relationship between Islamophobia and “privileging” Arab American women in the United States; she notes that in the midst of the United States’ aggressive drive to “liberate the Middle East,” Arab/Muslim women authors in the United States who denounce Islam are privilege in popular acclaim far more than those who denounce even the occupational injustices from which they have immigrated from<sup>71</sup>. Here we see how through these works, the analysis of Muslim American memoirs is limited because it remains within cultural frameworks that circumscribe discussions on how Muslim women are represented. However, I argue that if we look at the ways memoirs of the “native informant”—that is, accounts from the third world--have functioned as testimony in relation to imperial constructs, and domestically—accounts from marginalized groups able to achieve the American dream--to validate American values system, a different analysis on such Muslim

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<sup>70</sup> See: Smith, Susan. “Defeating Stereotypes: Memoirs increasingly providing diverse perspectives, representations of Muslim women.” *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*. 24.17. (2007): Print.

<sup>71</sup> See: Elia, Nada. “Islamophobia and the ‘Privileging’ of Arab American Women.” *NWSA Journal*. 18.3 (2006): 155-161. Print.

American memoirs emerges. In fact, examining the ways women who identify as Muslim situate hijab in their memoirs through notions of freedom, what emerges is the binary of liberated/dominated Muslim woman figure in which notions of capitalist freedoms provide the language for Muslim women's liberation--leading towards an inevitable embrace of imperialist forces and a desire for inclusion into the US mainstream. My analysis in this chapter moves beyond cultural frameworks on representational practices to look at two memoirs considering narrative form; I point towards historic and economic frameworks can reveal the ways in which hijab is being mobilized to both service imperial projects (internationally) and ensure capital consumption (domestically).

I look at two memoirs polarized in perspectives of hijab and Muslim women. The first is Hirsi Ali's *Infidel*, which features a picture of Hirsi Ali on the front cover<sup>72</sup> looking straightforward, advertised as the account of an "ex-Muslim" woman who dodged the horrors of an arranged marriage. She notably does not wear hijab. While Hirsi Ali's political career was largely grounded in Denmark, I employ this work to explore hijab and memoir in the US because she ultimately seeks protection in the United States and remains vocal the freedom the Western parts of the world can offer to Muslim women. The second memoir I look at is Ibtihaj Muhammad's *Proud*. She is similarly featured on the front cover of her work<sup>73</sup>, but with a nearly opposite aesthetic: she wears her Olympic uniform and a hijab. From the cover, side by side with *Proud*, *Infidel* insists that through rejection of a practice, her work is "ultimately a celebration of triumph over adversity... [her story] tells how a bright little girl evolves out of dutiful obedience to become an outspoken, pioneering freedom fighter."<sup>74</sup> *Proud*, on the other hand, suggests that Muhammad's

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<sup>72</sup> Appendix D

<sup>73</sup> Ibid

<sup>74</sup> Back cover of *Infidel*

journey also somehow centered around the practice: that she overcame stereotypes centered around hijab as “the first Muslim American woman in hijab to compete for the United States in the Olympic Games.”<sup>75</sup> The opposition of narratives, both serving as testimony involving the same practice, one with ex-communication and one with pride respectively, are, I continue to argue, two sides of the same coin: each version reduces ideals of freedom and liberation in American spaces solely through freedoms of choice worked through hijab. Here, the liberated/dominated Muslim woman figure emerges in distinct ways, respectively. In the first, the practice of hijab is posited as a domination of Muslim women who must be immediately freed from its oppression through Western saviors. In that latter, the liberated Muslim woman figure is free in her choice to wear hijab and subsequently free to consume in the US capital market.

While both memoirs mobilize notions of freedom and choice through their discussions of hijab, they appeal to imperial agendas in different ways. While Muhammad’s narrative positions hijab in complete opposition to Hirsi Ali, a close reading will demonstrate that a narrative nearly opposite in nature does not altogether solve the problems that works such as Hirsi Ali’s creates. The two works situate hijab in polar opposition to one another, but they have one thing in common: either through attachment or detachment of hijab, each of these women work through a sense of identity and self-liberation either with or away from the practice. Hirsi Ali’s memoir functions as native testimony—a first-hand account of the horrors of Eastern life under Muslim majority rule. Muhammad’s memoir offers a testimony of the American dream, a success story where she fought against social factors—race, religion, and gender—to accomplish her dreams. The differing perspective allows me to illuminate the two different ways these works function with respect to United States imperialism and its project. Hirsi Ali employs new forms of historical colonial

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<sup>75</sup> Back cover of *Proud*

strategy that reinforces an “us” versus “them,” while simultaneously re-invoking the historic ways hijab was targeted by British colonial strategies as a social project that must be reformed. Muhammad’s concern with the politics of representation traps her into situating the layers of her identity through a narrative of normalization—that Muslims are “just like everybody else”—which ultimately means that they consume as part of the American economy. Thus, in this chapter, I will first outline the function of memoirs as it appeals to readers in a capital society with respect to each narrative. I will then employ historical readings references to demonstrate the Hirsi Ali’s work, contrary to popular acclaim that she is a voice for Muslim women’s empowerment, is actually a reenactment of the social aspects of colonial strategies that took place nearly a century ago. I will then turn my attention to Muhammad’s memoir to show that, contrary to scholars who claim that such memoirs offer true accounts against popular media depictions, the representational politics that Muhammad is consumed with actually drives capital interests.

#### Memoirs and Testimony of the Exiled

Hirsi Ali’s *Infidel* is split into two parts: Part I is titled “My Childhood” and overviews the abhorrent conditions in which she migrates through various countries in her upbringing, some third world (Somali, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, and Kenya), while Part II is titled “My Freedom,” which entails her flee to Western parts of the globe towards what/where she considers to be free. The title of the second part implies a blanket notion in which all the major events that happened in her life—leaving Kenya and moving to West—are connected with the struggle to get to “freedom” that she finally found and was secured in Western spaces (Denmark, Britain, the US). Audiences are to assume that everything that happens in the second part of the work, all after she leaves the third world conditions she experienced, ultimately changed her life for the better with her newfound freedoms. Part of that narrative includes moving away from Islamic practice, and, predictably,



labeling hijab as an oppressive practice that Muslim women should abandon in order to achieve freedom. In this section, I move beyond cultural frameworks towards historical readings that can reveal the ways in which colonial influences shape Hirsi Ali's attitudes towards hijab and Western "civilization" in much the same ways that colonial forces shaped attitudes of colonized Egyptians over a century ago. Furthermore, the binary of the liberated/dominated Muslim woman figure as an integral component on which imperialism depends also takes similar historical root.

An important thing to note is that Hirsi Ali does not account for her experience alone, and instead makes overreaching assertions, as I will demonstrate throughout my analysis, that Muslim women follow suit and follow her towards their liberation. While many scholars may argue that such representations reignite orientalist tropes that have maintained difference between cultures, I argue that the stakes move even past the production of orientalist representations. For instance, Coeli Fitzpatrick notes that memoirs operate as producers of meaning in American culture. She notes that memoirs specifically promoting concepts as defined by "New Orientalism" are perpetuated through memoirs of native/semi-native testimony promote the problematic assumptions that Orientalist discourses as defined by Edward Said once did. Such narratives contribute to normalizing narratives and assumptions of the Eastern world in American popular culture and justify foreign policy abroad (243)<sup>76</sup>. The function of native testimony is also at the center of Sunaina Maira's critical examination of testimonial discourses. Maira notes, extending Mahmoud Mamdani's theory on "Good Muslim, Bad Muslim," that "Good" Muslims privileged in the United States are those that provide "humanitarian justification for United States domestic intervention abroad—essentially, it is that which drives the American War on Terror (634)<sup>77</sup>.

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<sup>76</sup> See: Fitzpatrick, Coeli. "New Orientalism in Popular Fiction and Memoir: An Illustration of Type." *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*. 4.3. (2009): 243-245. Print.

<sup>77</sup> See: Sunaina, Maira. "'Good' and 'Bad' Muslim Citizens: Feminists, Terrorists, and U.S. Orientalism" *Feminist Studies*. 35.3 (2009): 631. Print.

However, these analyses are limited because beyond simply shaping culture through reinventing tropes, or reinforcing ideas of “good” and “bad” Muslims, Hirsi’s memoir will allow me to demonstrate that the testimony of the native informant is integral to imperial projects as they ensure their continued justification. My analysis will reveal an understanding of the ways these representative techniques and mobilized Orientalized tropes, as examined through hijab, are not only representational but actually historical colonial strategical practice that are reinventing themselves in new ways—thus contributing to new forms of domestic colonialism within the United States, and fueling imperial discourse that justifies the need to “save” uncivilized women oversea.

In this section, I align myself with the perspectives of Moustafa Bayoumi who examines the function of native testimonies relationship to historical and sociopolitical practices and imperialism. In “The God that Failed: The Neo-Orientalism of Today’s Muslim Commentators,” Bayoumi contextualizes Hirsi Ali’s popularity in reiterating orientalism to Western audiences—one that situates Islam as a victimizer of the civilized Western world (Bayoumi, 90). Importantly, he notes that Hirsi Ali’s work, among other native testimonies that validate tropes on the Eastern world, function in much similar ways to the narratives of Cold War and ex-communists of that era. He looks at the ways testimonies during these historical times have functioned to justify US imperial practices. For instance, he says, “Communism, like organized religion...flees from freedom and defeats the individual. The existence of this old narrative endows contemporary tales of ‘Islam’ with the ‘truthfulness’ on which they rest, because ‘our’ violence, in this mythology, promotes liberty, while ‘their’ violence is forever atavistic” (Bayoumi, 92). Here, he notes that imperial violence is justified in promoting freedom and liberty, and by insisting that communism was a threat to freedom. I read Hirsi Ali’s work for hijab which can shed further light on the ways

hijab has been positioned as a colonial project that could help civilize the social conditions in Muslim majority countries.

As the term “testimony” with respect to Hirsi Ali’s work has already been used multiple times, it is useful to understand the role of immigrant narratives in offering such “truth-based” accounts to Western audiences. In his introduction to his work *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab-British Literature*, Wail Hassan lays a useful groundwork to understanding the position of “minority” narratives of immigrants. While his work focuses mainly on Arab and Arab-Muslim immigrant authors (of memoirs included), such authors immigrated in exilic conditions to America and Britain, and he examines these works in the context of both Orientalism and colonialism, emphasizing more on the fact they immigrated from ‘Eastern’ (relative to the US and Britain) parts of the world and many of which were Muslims. Accordingly, this groundwork is useful to understanding the function of memoirs as a genre, as well as contextualizing Hirsi Ali’s condition as an immigrant author in terms of audience perception of minority authors. Mainly, he begins by examining Deleuze and Guattari’s theory on minor literature. Hassan notes that immigrant writing is essentially minor literature as evidenced by three characteristics: 1. The language usage of a minor language within the major language the author writes in, 2. Because of the minor status of the immigrant author, everything for them is connected to politics, and 3. The narrative takes on the voice of a collective (Hassan, 5). The second and third characteristics are particularly of value when analyzing the work of Hirsi Ali. With the second, she is deeply grounded in the ‘successes’ of the Western world in stark contrast to the ‘barbaric’ Eastern<sup>78</sup> world from which she immigrates from. In the third characteristic, as I will show, despite

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<sup>78</sup> I use these terms as generally described by Wail Hassan, the West referring to: “not only a sense of cultural or civilizational identity, but more fundamentally, an ideology of exceptionalism: the idea of the West as an autonomous (and above all superior) tradition that is radically distinct from other civilizations” (9-10).

the fact that Hirsi Ali lived a life of refugee for most of her childhood, greatly shaped by colonial rules, she uses her single experience to paint a single picture of experiences in Eastern life—she makes overreaching calls for reform for the experiences of all Muslims across the globe, especially with regard to women. Importantly, he also examines the role of immigrant authors of translational status, who write in English even if it was not migrant’s native language. He notes, “their position represents a merger of the two classic stances of the native informant and the foreign expert” (29). What authors write becomes a truth testimony for audiences, based on a lived tried and true experience of a native, and have even adopted a new language by which they communicate these truths through.

Accordingly, Hirsi Ali’s credibly lies in the two-fold position that she is an immigrant who escaped a tumultuous life as a Muslim woman. Hirsi Ali opens her memoir aware of her as status as a minority author writing for Western audiences and is also aware that the “testimony” she offers—the first-hand experience—will resonate as uncontested truth for the general public. She establishes herself as a credible voice in the offer of testimony in the prologue of her work *Infidel*, but one that, even on the surface, not incredibly credible. She says, “This is the story of my life. It is a subjective record of my own personal memories, as close to accurate as I can make them; my relationship with the rest of my family has been so fractured that I cannot now refresh these recollections by asking them for help” (xxii). She admits that a source that could have aided her recollection of events is entirely missing. Still, she continues, “It is the story of what I have experienced, what I’ve seen, and why I think the way I do” (xii). A prominent voice against Islam, she implies that she will offer the horrors she experienced first-hand under Muslim majority countries—accounts she is likely aware that Western audiences will want to hear. Yegenoglu notes that Western audiences desire to hear the native informants accounts of what life entails for Muslim

women in Eastern societies (Yegenoglu, 121). Furthermore, imperial projects look for native testimony that aligns with their depictions in order to validate their narratives for Western audiences (Yegenoglu, 122). Yegenoglu argues, in what she calls a battle between nationalism and imperialism, that orientalist<sup>79</sup> discourse often reproduces itself via the orient, or native testimony, through nationalist projects (122). The last line of Hirsi Ali's introduction reads, "This book is dedicated to my family, and also to the millions and millions of Muslim women who have had to submit" (xxii). Here, at its opening, Hirsi Ali purports to dedicate this book to, in broad strokes, Muslim women who are assumedly subjected to the oppressive conditions narrated by the popular media. Earlier, she notes that she wants to be the voice that stands up against injustice. She says, "...somethings must be said, and there are times when silence becomes accomplice to injustice" (xxii). Accordingly, taken in connection with one another in Hirsi Ali's introduction, she assumes the position of a narrator who is set to inform the Western world of the abhorrent world of the Middle East in which she grew up and escaped. She purports to speak on behalf of "millions and millions" of Muslim women—suggesting a rather prominent domination of Muslim women that she suggests her voice can somehow save from injustice. Accordingly, moving beyond cultural frameworks of representation, this testimony is the center of imperial justification—and the content of her work, as I will analyze, follows suit.

With her position established as a native informant, an expert advocating for reform from a life and society she survived through, she begins to detail her experience with hijab. At times, Hirsi Ali notes that hijab made her feel empowered, while at others she visualizes woman unveiling in conversations with God. Hijab is addressed and discussed at different moments throughout her

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<sup>79</sup> Here, Yegenoglu uses the terms "Orientalism" and "Orient" as established by the popular theory Orientalism by Edward Said, and she references his theory explaining that "the Orientalization of the Orient can be read in the modernization attempts undertaken by the indigenous elites which aim to "develop" and "civilize" the native population" (122).

work, and progress from one of attachment and liberation towards one that associates it with oppression (domination). She notes early on in Part I (on her childhood) that her mother wore hijab, and that her mother's hijab protected her. In this context, she notes the value hijab had for her mother. She writes, "My mother had no protector in Aden—no father, no brother...She began wearing a veil, like the Arab women who robed when they left their houses...The veil protected her from those leering men, and from the feeling of vileness it gave her to be looked at that way. Her veil was an emblem of her belief" (11). Though Hirsi Ali blurs the lines between people who practice hijab—noting that she veiled like "Arabs" (feeding the misconception that all Arabs are Muslims)—she ultimately suggests that the veil served a specific protective function for her mother. It offered her a shield. More importantly than a shield, she begins to invoke the liberated/dominated Muslim women figure specifically in relationship to men. Because she Hirsi Ali's mother had no brother or father figure to "protect her" from "leering men" the hijab was a shield. She posits a woman figure as dominated by the objectification of men in the society that she lived—earliest instances in which she depicts a world of women dominated by male figures.

As Hirsi Ali moves through her childhood, notions of freedom work through hijab more explicitly—both through the practice and away from it. After traveling from Saudi Arabia to Ethiopia, she notes that she didn't have to practice hijab in the latter, and that made her feel free. She says, "We never had to wear headscarves or long robes...It felt like being free" (57). Here, not wearing the hijab made her feel free. Notions of freedom begin to work through hijab—in this case, liberation away from it. However, as she progresses through her childhood, though, she adopts hijab and is devoted--feeling unique and empowered by it. She describes how she felt when she first began to wear hijab, "It had a thrill to it, a sensuous feeling. It made me feel powerful: underneath this screen lay a previously unsuspected, but potentially lethal, femininity. I was

unique: very few people walked around like those that in those days in Nairobi. Weirdly, it made me feel like an individual” (85). Hirsi Ali describes that wearing hijab transformed her into an empowered figure of femininity. She feels unique. She feels powerful. She takes extra measure and has a black robe custom tailored over her regular attire as an additional layer of modest clothing—and this further adds to her love of the practice and to her sense of self as she wears it. In fact, she describes wearing her black robe, “When I spread out my hands, I felt like I could fly” (85). Here, continues to describe her connection to the practice in vivid terms that almost baffle the reader. At school, she describes that she would remove the robe that made her feel like she could fly. Yet, at the end of a school day, when she would re-wear her robe, it would immediately transform her again. She describes, “...I modestly unfolded it and put it on—and suddenly I was interesting, mysterious, and powerful. I could see it just by looking at my classmates” (85). Here, she describes herself again in terms of power, but she pushes this further towards an element of mystery. However, she describes herself as a mystery in the midst of a Muslim majority country where the practice of hijab was prominent. She describes that the only difference between her hijab and those of her friends was the additional element of the modest fitting robe—a robe that made her nevertheless feel like she could fly. Such contradictions baffle the reader since one she moves away from the third world countries as a refugee towards “freedom,” she can no longer see these feelings as viable for any Muslim woman. As I have mentioned, Hassan notes that often the native informant takes on the language of the colonizer. Accordingly, in the context of contradictions, her description of hijab as “lethal femininity,” “mystery,” and “power” are hegemonic constructs typical of orientalist narratives identified by scholars<sup>80</sup>. Here, an “othered” herself in the position of informant adopts the same language that Orientalized her.

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<sup>80</sup> See Said, *Orientalism* (1978).

Interestingly, even early on in her childhood, Hirsi Ali contradicts herself on multiple occasions—contradictions I don't believe she intends to make, but ones that necessarily emerge perhaps because she is subjugated into assuming the position of the native informant deeply influenced by colonial truths engrained in her. In Saudi Arabia, she was forced to wear hijab. When she moves to Ethiopia she no longer has to, as mentioned, and says she felt "free." Then, she wears hijab and never feels more empowered—and actually never describes herself in such vivid language as she does in the previously mentioned scene of empowerment that hijab gives her. Her own accounts of her relationship with hijab with what she narrates of Islam is contradictory. She says in the previous passage, for example, hijab makes her feel like an individual, and yet ten pages later she asserts that Islam doesn't value individuality for Muslim women. She says, "In Islam becoming an individual is not a necessary development; many people, especially women, never develop a clear individual will" (94). Similarly, while she contends in her introduction that this work is for the women "forced to submit," she always wore hijab by choice. In fact, her sister did not wear hijab and referred to it as a "tent" (89). Notions of freedom necessarily work through hijab in such contradictory and conflicted ways, but notably, as I will show, she settles on the narrative of domination (wearing hijab) the more she is educated by the British colonial systems. In fact, her attitude towards hijab begins to evolve as she becomes more and more educated through the British colonial school systems occupying Ethiopia at the time.

As Hirsi Ali continues through her narrative, and subsequently through her upbringing, her relationship with hijab begins to change. I will detail this change momentarily, but one important aspect to consider is that her beliefs are largely shaped by Western colonial forces largely present in her childhood. When Hirsi Ali begins to invoke notions of freedom, she bases those notions largely on notions engrained in her through colonial rule. Ali's childhood, as she recollects in her



memoir, entailed refugee from country to country, extreme conditions of poverty, displacement and abuse. The circumstances she faces are undoubtedly abhorrent, however, she seldom considers the circumstances she had faced as a result of the colonial forces that had occupied the territories she had traveled to. Yet, as Hirsi Ali navigates back through memories of her childhood, she is aware of the colonial rule that was dominating the various countries she lived in—especially during her time in Kenya. More importantly, through these teachings, she also demonstrates what her understanding and sense of freedom and “choice” entail. In one instance, for example, she recalls the ways Kenyan society had instilled in all people a hatred of the “Western” world. She rejects these ideas. She says,

As much as I wanted to be a devout Muslim, I always found it uncomfortable to be opposed to the West. For me, Britain and America were the countries in my books where there was decency and individual choice. The West to me meant all those ideas. In addition to pop music and cinema and the completely silly pen-pal relationships we’d had at Muslim Girls’ Secondary School with girls from Finland and Canada who thought we lived in trees in the jungle (109).

Here, Hirsi Ali notes that Britain and America were places of decency and individual choices—the same notions of freedoms (freedom of choice) that has been notably mobilized on the site of hijab throughout this work. This emphasis of Hirsi Ali’s own ideas of freedom quite literally demonstrates the presence of neoliberal discourse discussed in the introduction—the freedoms of choices that only occur on at the expense of the freedom to oppress (here, Kenya is resisting colonial rule). Irony lies in the fact that it was Western imperialism that educated her enough to reject the resistance of imperialism—by enticing her through capitalistic mediums (popular culture) on which imperialism depends on.

As the memoir progresses from the parts of her “Childhood” towards accounts under part “Freedom,” however, her relationship with hijab changes. She moves from someone who once admittedly felt it gave her power and femininity to a practice which she suddenly regarded as

oppressive. What had once given her power and liberation began to suddenly be seen as a source of oppression. In one instance, she recalls a conversation she had with an Ethiopian friend a refugee center while in Holland. She notes that she grew up thinking that Ethiopian women were far too free with their sexuality. Her friend tells her that she should take off her hijab, and at which point Hirsi Ali narrates that she realized she grew up in a belief system that was sexually frustrated and filled with lies. Hirsi Ali says, "...I decided to stage an experiment. I would walk out of the door without a headscarf. I was in my long green skirt and a long tunic, and I had my scarf in a bag with me in case of trouble, but I would not cover my hair. I planned to see what would happen" (195). She does not detail what "trouble" she could hypothetically face, but she positions the spare hijab as a shield that would somehow protect her. She continues to detail that, contrary to what she had previously thought, chaos did not ensue, nor did men stare at her with inappropriate gaze. She recalls, "Absolutely nothing happened. The gardeners kept trimming the hedges. Nobody went into a fit...Nobody looked at me. If anything, I attracted less attention than when I was covering my head" (195). Here, who was once "liberated" by hijab now describes the liberations she felt when she removed it. She kept a hijab in hand, suggesting the idea it would somehow protect her from a hypothetical assault of nearby men should they see her without her hijab. Importantly, this scenario implies the ways hijab functioned for her while still in Muslim majority countries—that hijab served to protect her from such subjectification. Her expectations of what would happen if she unveiled did not match up to what actually happened when she did. Later, when she wears a swimsuit, she laments over her internal argument. She says, "I kept coming back to it, arguing with myself, trying to justify what I was doing...I was supposed to cover myself because I was so beguiling that I would lead men astray; even the allure of perfume of high heels under a black *hidjab* could supposedly cause an intolerable chaos of desire. But this was clearly not true:

everything was entirely the same” (196). Here, she sorts through what she considers irrational reasoning as to why many Muslim women wear hijab<sup>81</sup> as testimony, as a first-hand account on the reasons she wore hijab--though she doesn't consider that this may not be their reasoning for it all, and that every woman's experience with hijab is different (including her own). More importantly, she positions those reasons in direct response to the reaction of men, mobilizing the discourse of being dominated by the sexualization of Muslim men (or men in general), while removing her hijab presumably liberated her from those objectifications. Accordingly, through her own reasoning, she begins to distance herself from hijab as she progresses towards “freedom.”

Throughout the second part of her memoir—in her account of being “free” --beginning with her own relationship with hijab, she sets out on a mission to “free” Muslim women particularly in Holland from their conditions. She details how she aimed to get this done particularly through joining Holland Parliament. She sets three agenda items in her bid to run for office: 1: “I wanted Holland to wake up and stop tolerating the oppression of Muslim women in its midst,” 2: “I wanted to spark a debate among Muslims about reforming aspects of Islam so that people could begin to question, and criticize, their own believes,” and 3: “I wanted Muslim women to become more aware of just how bad, ad how unacceptable, their suffering was. I wanted to help develop the vocabulary of resistance” (295). These agenda items would be no easy struggle. She says, “I knew that freeing Muslim women from their mental cage would take time, too” (295). Rhetoric in these lines alone rings of a lesser inferiority of masses of people—dominated figures that could be freed by Western law and politics. As this close reading will unfold, and as it turns out, the factors that have conditioned Muslim women she refers to who must be freed, who must acquire a vocabulary of resistance, are those that Hirsi Ali believes gave her freedom.

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<sup>81</sup> Ironically, under the part “Freedom,” where she unveils, she mentions that Haweya's guilt from her own abortion lead to her sister wear hijab.

Hirsi Ali explicitly notes that Muslim women need to be freed from oppressive forces, including hijab and the subjugation of Muslim women. As noted in introduction, scholars concerned with the concepts of “freedom” have tried to define the term as it pertains to feminist readings of Islamic practices largely regarded as otherwise mutually exclusive. However, such analysis are limited because rather than defining freedom as a relative term, I question the emergence of the notion as a neoliberal construct that enables American culture to take shape with distinction against other nations. For instance, Khader examines Hirsi Ali’s ideas regarding the reformation of Islam through a concept she defines as “Enlightenment Freedom.” Khader defines “enlightenment freedom” as a “freedom according to which the acceptance of traditional dictates constitutes an impediment to self-realization” (732). Khader notes that she uses the term traditional to denote essentially an acceptance of religious practice (731). She notes that Western feminists need to “stop seeing it [Enlightenment Freedom], and the worldview that houses it, as the only value or world that can ground feminism” (Khader, 751). Her ultimate goal is to reconcile the opposing views of traditionalism and feminism as she wrestles with the notions that suggest feminism, liberation, and tradition cannot coexist. While it is not the scope of this project to delve into epistemological discussions on feminism, it is important to note the stakes in asserting, as Hirsi Ali suggests, the abandonment of practices based on Western ideals is more than just a matter of defining freedom. Freedom as such is a social project that takes root in colonial practices—ones that can better be understood with at least some glossary historical reference.

Thus, at the center of social transformation, Hirsi Ali’s places hijab as an integral factor that Muslim women should reshape their understanding of. The implications are far larger than simply the abandonment of a religious practice as they quite literally reinforce European/American hegemony and imperialism abroad. These overreaching calls for the abolition of hijab for social

transformation are not new considering discourse surrounding hijab at various historical moments. In fact, a brief historicizing of when hijab became the center of social transformation can reveal critical colonial projects that have depended on hijab in order to accomplish specific agendas. Hence, in what follows, I will delineate a bit of history to offer some reference on Western historical colonial strategies and social projects that took place on the site of hijab during the late 1800s in Muslim majority countries. Locating the moment in which hijab became the focal point of colonial projects can illuminate the ways hijab functioned as imperative to colonial projects—the site of which colonizers were able to ensure the subjugated embraced their interests. It can also shed light on the ways such liberated/dominated figures of Muslim women operated to enable the colonizer to visualize the extent of control over all members of society. In *Women, Gender, and Islam*, Leila Ahmed examines the point in which discourse on hijab within the Eastern world shifted from a highly revered religious practice (practiced by Christians, Muslims and Jews alike) towards a barbaric tradition that women needed to abolish. Ahmed pinpoints a major historical moment in 1899, in Qasim Amin's *Tahrir AlMara'a* (or *The Women's Liberation*) published and circulated widely in Egypt, which centered primarily on the abolition of hijab altogether. His premise was that in order to achieve full reform for the rights of women in all facets of society, women needed to unveil completely to mark this social transformation (Ahmed, 144-145). His work can perhaps be considered the first which centers the social condition and plight of Middle Eastern societies heavily on women and hijab (Ahmed, 145). His work generated debate across Egypt and beyond far and wide, and also elucidates historical instances in which the colonized invest in their own subjugation. A closer look at the context this work was published in elucidates the extent to which Western colonization had clawed into every facet of Egyptian life. This

included direct influence on men in Muslim territories being colonized, as the upper classes in these regions were gaining direct benefit from the British rule.

Importantly, and foremost, Amin's work was published and began circulating in the midst of colonial occupation of British forces in Egypt (which had already begun in 1882). His aggressive call for the ban of hijab in Egypt, as a native deeply entranced by colonial rule, can be similarly traced with Hirsi Ali's own change towards hijab as becomes more and more educated in British colonial schools. British interest in Egypt lied in their production of raw material for British factories. Reform laws were focused primarily on increasing agricultural efficiency for the production of such raw materials. Such reformations greatly benefited the middle and upper classes, which nearly having either no affect or worsening the conditions of the lower classes (Ahmed, 146). Ahmed notes women's issues became the center of Western narratives on Islam near later 19<sup>th</sup> century as Europeans increasingly began colonizing Muslim territories (Ahmed, 150). The reason seems to be the "result of a fusion between a number of strands of through all developing within the Western world" in the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (150). The narrative saw endless hope in domination of the colonized territories, masked by inferiority of all 'other' cultures and societies in relation to Europe. In fact, even as the Victorian male establishment resented notions of feminism and the ideas that slowly emerged pertaining to the oppression of women within their own domestic spaces, they captured the rhetoric of feminism and redirected its service in their colonial conquests abroad with regard to the "other" (Ahmed, 151). Ahmed notes, "The idea that Other men, men in colonized societies or societies beyond the borders of the civilized West, oppressed women was to be used, in rhetoric of colonialism, to render morally justifiable its project of undermining or eradicating cultures of civilized peoples" (151). It is in this historical instance in which Muslim men were largely depicted as oppressive, and this was evidenced for

Western societies through the idea that they forced their women to wear hijab. This is how culture, feminism, and colonial rhetoric became inextricable from discourses on domination. Fear of seeming uncivil and backwards began to pressure Egyptian men of the upper classes who were benefitting from colonialism—they followed suit and began calling for women in Egypt to remove their hijabs<sup>82</sup>.

Why hijab<sup>83</sup> in specific became the center of Egyptian progress in the midst of British colonialism is an issue that Ahmed examines. She notes, “Veiling—to *Western* eyes, the most visible marker of the differentness and inferiority of Islamic society—became the symbol now of both the oppression of women...and the backwardness of Islam, and it became the open target of colonial attack and the spearhead of the assault on Muslim societies” (152). Because hijab is a visible marker and easily identifiable practice, it was recognizable target that allowed for the discourse of oppression which justified colonial practice to ensure. In fact, I infer from Ahmed’s historical analysis the ways in which the liberated/dominated Muslim figure has rhetorical traces to colonial practice even over a century ago. Then though, the binary was far less complicated: the liberated Muslim woman did not wear hijab, while the dominated woman still did. Even then, such a binary was integral for both serving colonial purposes and ensuring the cooperation of the

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<sup>82</sup> Other countries followed suit in efforts to appear more refined as defined by Western standards. In Turkey, for example, Atatürk introduced laws of reform, and called for a ban on hijab all together—noting specifically how the practice reflected on Turkish men, making them appear uncivil (*Women and Gender*, 164). In the 1920’s, similar notions circulated in Iran under Reza Shah, going as far as issuing a proclamation banning the veil. This, however, was not as well received as it was in other areas of the region, as many of the upper class did not oblige and some even resisted leaving their houses from fear of prosecution for donning hijab in public spaces<sup>82</sup> (Ahmed, 165). Importantly, Ahmed notes that such positions on hijab have one thing in common: “they are men of classes assimilating to European ways and smarting under the humiliation of being described as uncivilized because ‘their’ women are veiled, and they are determined to eradicate the practice’ (Ahmed, 165).

<sup>83</sup> Interestingly enough, however, up until the colonial period, the veil was donned by women from Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions alike (*A Quiet Revolution*, 36). As waves unveiling began to spread at the turn of the century, Muslim women seemed to unveil at a slower rate, and the practice became known to Europeans as an Islamic practice (*A Quiet Revolution*, 37). Yet, as British colonialism privileged middle and upper classes, it was mainly women of those classes who began to unveil—and it had little to do with religion and more to do with consumer capitalism of high fashion (*Women and Gender*, 180).

remainder of society. In another work of historical examination, *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence from the Middle East To America*, Ahmed discusses the influence of the British general consulate station in Egypt during this occupation—Lord Cromer<sup>84</sup>. During the first 24 years of the occupation (starting in 1883), Cromer established what would be later referred to as the Veiled Protectorate. Cromer had a specific focus and agenda when it came to women in Egypt. While he reiterated the common, now overplayed narratives that Islam oppresses women, he also focused on the practice of veiling as a key factor impeding imperial expansion and European civilization in Eastern parts of the world (*A Quiet Revolution*, 29). Women, he noted, were key to social transformations in what he thought was an otherwise barbaric society (*A Quiet Revolution*, 30).

Ironically, while much of Cromer's rhetoric focused on the ways Islam degrades women, and how Christianity elevates the status of women in the context of hijab in public spaces, he was not by any standards a champion of women's rights. In fact, as Ahmed notes, he served as the President of the Society Opposed to Women's Suffrage (*A Quiet Revolution*, 31). He publicly preached that women would risk being "unsexed" going into voting booths, and that women need to remain "womanly" and men need to be "manly" in their respective roles (Ahmed, 31). However, when it came to the status of Muslim women abroad, he targeted the veil as an identity marker and

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<sup>84</sup> Important to note are the racist practices Cromer encouraged: for example, he refused on the free public education system that had already started in Egypt before the occupation, and often hired novice British overqualified experienced Egyptians for government posts (Ahmed, 29). In fact, even when he returned from Egypt, he published a book of inferiority of Eastern brown skinned men to the superiority of fair-skinned Easterners (Ahmed, 30). This ideology is particularly important when considering, for example, the context of Hirshi's admiration of her teacher early on in the work. She describes her, "...Sister Aziza cloaked herself in full hidjab. Thick black cloth fell from the top of her head to the tips of her gloves and the very limit of her toes. It was spectacular. Her pale, heart-shaped face stood out against a sea of black. Sister Aziza was young and beautiful—light skinned and fine nosed—and she had a smile in her eyes" (Ali, 80). As she describes her taking and comfort in her religion instructor, she emphasizes her skin-tone twice—almost as if anomalous that a light skinned woman would dawn hijab. It also illustrates Hirsi Ali's own ideas of beauty as shaped by colonial influences, drawing upon the fair skinned contrasts typical of orientalist narratives of early 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century.



practice that could catalyze a change in ideology across Egyptian society and beyond. Women in Egyptian society, Cromer notes, had the greatest influence over the characters of their husbands and sons, and thus the veil became an obstacle that prevented men from what Cromer believed was critical and elevated thought characteristic of European civilization (Ahmed, 31). Part of that project, as Ahmed analyzes, was to condition Egyptian men to adapt this ideology with regard to the status of women. Herein lies the connection between Cromer's work and Amin's essay which lands hijab at the center of imperial of European imperial project that would continue for decades, and take new shapes as its considered in today's context. Whereas Cromer's Veiled Protectorate can be considered the target beginning to a colonial project to unveil women (remove their hijab), Amin's work anchors a point in time when the quest to "civilize" the "Muhammadean"<sup>85</sup> countries relied heavily on the participation of men to accomplish these projects. Overlooking such histories by remaining in cultural frameworks leave out important rich connections of identifying the ways in which colonialism began to take shape through hijab as a social project, and the way that it continues through today in new forms.

Decades later, Hirsi Ali practices a similar call for social transformation as did Cromer and peddles the same focus--that it happens on the backs of Muslim women. Through her recollections of how she advocated for the empowerment of Muslim women—in sections of part II titled "Freedom"—she initiates programs through her service in parliament. Here, we see a Western figure in the likes of Cromer peddling imperial agendas within Denmark. Simultaneously, we also see the consent in the likes of Amin who, from fear of looking uncivil, participates in the project of calling for the removal of hijab to pander to colonizing forces British elites benefited from. For example, during her run for Parliament, not only is it part of her agenda (detailed previously) to

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<sup>85</sup> As Cromer referred to them, or more specifically countries in the East that were predominately Muslim.

reform Islam, but in order to get Muslims to “think about their beliefs” she proposes a Museum exhibit. The exhibit entailed a lineup of wax mannequins of women with verses of the Quran written across their chest. She describes the exhibit both in her introduction and then again in her narrative. Importantly, the exhibit visualizes the dominated Muslim woman figure for Western audiences—reinforcing nearly every narrative that has been described about Muslim woman (many of which I have detailed in my own introduction). In the introduction, she describes “There is a woman flogged for committing adultery; another who is given in marriage to a man she loathes; another who is beaten by her husband on a regular basis; and another who is shunned by her father when he learns her brother raped her” (xxi). Here, Hirsi Ali puts forth a display of symbolic figures she says herself “stand for hundreds of thousands of Muslim women” (xxi), painting broad strokes on the lived experiences of Muslim women to singular experiences of domination. Importantly, these notions do work through hijab, as when she references this exhibit again within her narrative, she says that each figure wears a transparent hijab. She emphasizes, “There would be a women flogged for adultery, a woman beaten repeatedly, a woman imprisoned inside her house. One of them would be wearing a transparent *hidjab*, and each would have words written across her flesh” (307). Her display entails a mannequin in hijab, one beaten brutally (“oppressed”), one imprisoned inside her house (“unfree”), and one with Quranic verses on her chest (“backwards”). Again, a conversation meant to get Muslims to “think about these beliefs actually do to human beings” (308) centered on women, and more specifically, hijab. In other words, she implies that these beliefs (depending on the truth of her own testimony) dominate Muslim women in abhorrent ways. Through this exhibit, and through reemphasizing the controversial initiative in this “testimony,” her exhibit mobilizes perceptions of Islam with neoliberal ideas that claim they need saving.

Narrating in retrospect of the work she did in Parliament while in Holland, she nearly urges the U.S. government to intervene to “save” all of these figures.

Hirsi Ali extends her public rhetoric on hijab to later essays and works to “free” Muslim women from oppression. In a later work, *The Caged Virgin, An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam*, she dedicates a collection of essays to call for Muslim women to stop wearing hijab. While the focus of this chapter is on Hirsi Ali’s memoir, it is worth examining in context as she offers herself as a credible source, a similar firsthand testimony, to “liberate” women from the “oppressive” practice—in such works, rather than considering the long standing effects of colonialism and violence on Muslim women, she believes that practice of hijab in and of itself can somehow emancipate the condition of women in third world countries. Note, the problematic title in and of itself: an emancipation proclamation that rings similar in rhetoric of the historic American legislation passed to emancipate slaves in the United States (the Emancipation Proclamation). With obvious and starkly differing histories, it is at least abhorrent to title a series of essay in allusion to a complex history of slavery, racism, and exploitation. Yet, as its been established that Ali can be considered as part and parcel to the native informant within the imperialist project, it is also appropriate then to understand her in the context of the liberal feminist desire to unveil her counterparts abroad. I discussed this desire in chapter 2 with respect to unveiling Khadra in Kahf’s work, and with a particular emphasis that as an immigrant author, Kahf takes on this role that has been largely a Western feminist desire. Here again, in the form of testimony, Hirsi reignites feminist desire to unveil all Muslim women across the globe. Whereas Kahf’s unveiling was to collapse the unnaturalness of women’s bodies, Hirsi Ali’s unveiling comes with the desire to improve their lives and make them more-free—freedoms as determined through the language of colonizers. Yegenoglu notes that the desire to unveil women is rooted in an epistemology

characterized and conditioned by the fact that is the “precondition of her liberation” (111). As hijab became the center of the European desire to advance predominately Muslim majority societies in the Eastern world, so too became a narrative of progress and modernity. Here, liberal feminists participated in the project of remaking women. For example, Ruth Frances Woodsmall<sup>86</sup> writes about how although there is little desire to unveil throughout the Eastern world (at the time), there is a strong urge for freedom that would be symbolized by unveiling and “growth in freedom in collective unveiling” (qtd in Yegenoglu, 100). Woodsmall continues to note that achievement and advancement are indicated by recognizing traditional practice (in her case, the purdah) as national problem. Accordingly, a pivotal marker of advancement and progress is when the native herself conveys “the necessity of abandoning traditional customs which is regarded as the indisputable way to foster social ‘progress’” (Yegenoglu, 100). The recognition has a twofold importance: 1. It reassures the colonizers that the change will be achieved (in this case, unveiling) and 2. It makes the native an agent of her own subjugation of “Western norms of progress” (Yegenoglu, 101). Thus, Hirsi Ali’s condemnation of a practice she considers “traditional” validates colonial dominance abroad and, more importantly, makes her an agent of her own subjugation.

These glances at history reveal the colonial practices from which Hirsi Ali has been influenced by at different moments in her text. She attributes these instances of hijab as oppressive government practices which colonial rule saved her from, but leaves out the sociopolitical context from which such relationships have risen. Furthermore, it also reveals the widespread influence the British colonial forces had, and how hijab was later reused to resist the colonizers. For example, while she visited her father’s family in Mogadishu (in 1990), she comments on how heavily covered women were there. To that end, her cousin Ainanshie laments, “Before the Brotherhood

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<sup>86</sup> Yegenoglu notes that this appears in her work *Women in the Changing Islamic System*, which I found was published in 1883.

came, you could see everyone's arms and legs. We never used to notice. But now that women are covering so much, all I think about is those round calves and silky arms and the hair, smelling of coconut" (135). He attributes the intense covering of women (describing their long black robes) to the movement the brotherhood. Later, Hirsi Ali explains, "...Ainanshie's pals from downtown would laugh at the Brotherhood's gibberish and sneer that it was all Arab cultural dominance, but a few weeks later some of them, too, would be wearing robes and spouting Arabic" (135). The Muslim Brotherhood's own establishment in the Middle East can be generally reviewed as a grassroots movement to overthrow British colonial forces, and a resistance to all aspects of social facets the colonizers had seeped. The organization was first founded by al-Bannu in 1928, and comprised mainly of working class men, later gaining support from even the middle classes (*A Quiet Revolution*, 50). The organization was originally built to take a strong and complete stand against the British Occupation in Egypt that the government failed to do (Ahmed, 50). Politically, its first and foremost goal was to rid Egypt and all Islamic countries of imperial rule (Ahmed, 52). They rejected nationalistic ideas as defined by geographic borders, and "committed to the idea of a larger Islamic umma, or community" (Ahmed, 52). It gradually set up a series of schools, hospitals, and other social services that functioned independent of the government, while preaching "a message of hope and renewal through a return to Islamic values" (Ahmed, 50). Part of the return to Islamic values included a return to Islam's core practices, emphasizing that hijab is a part of the religion's foundational practices (Ahmed, 49)<sup>87</sup>. The Brotherhood's project spread across many parts of the continent, and used hijab as a fundamental marker that signified the end

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<sup>87</sup> According to Ahmed, in 1952, another political faction comprised of military officers, called the Free Officers, staged a coup and overthrew King Farouk (the then leader of Egypt) and took power. They, too, had pledged to overthrow the British occupational forces. During this time, though they had expected to share in the governmental control after the coup, internal fighting and differences emerged, and Egypt's new president (Gamal Abdel Nasser) was the victim of an assassination attempt during a final victory speech (celebrating the end of the British occupation).

of British colonial rule. One way or another, at various historical moments, hijab was used as a visible marker to control the masses of people in resistance or to maintain control in the region—and either visibly or invisibly influenced by Western imperial forces. However, this lack of reference, to insist that now with the Brotherhood, “women are covering so much” entailing an oppressive force operating on people without reference to Western colonial involvement in such projects.

This overreaching holistic acceptance reflects Hirsi Ali’s own lack of recognition of the detrimental effects colonialism has had on Third World countries. She focuses heavily on the condition of women in the Third World countries she was raised in and wants to ensure that those practices are not repeated in United States in British societies. For example, she expresses panic and disdain that many Somali refugees continue to reject Western ideals and abuse women. She also refers to specific instances where Somalian refugees expressed disdain that she had removed her hijab and was riding a bicycle. For her, the key to improving their condition is through adopting American values. As Yegenoglu notes, “what’s at stake in the unequivocal acceptance of Western feminist’s achievements as democratic, advanced, emancipated, in short as the norm, is the positing of a universal subject status for themselves...” (101). In other words, by accepting Western feminist tropes of an Enlightenment Freedom is also to accept and validate that Western *norms* are universal norms across the globe. Hirsi Ali calls for the abandonment of Islamic practices as a key to liberating Muslim women altogether. I also suggest that, at the other end of the spectrum, even when freedom is argued with the acceptance of religious practice, the same issue remains: that larger concepts of freedom are being reduced and understood mainly in relation to a religious practice.

An examination at how hijab was used colonial histories demonstrates that Hirsi Ali's calls for reformation in Islam, and to negotiate new forms of practice, are actually part of a larger history that serves colonial ends. More importantly, they reinforce male hegemony and their service to fulfilling particular political ends. As Ahmed notes, "The idea...that improving the status of women entails abandoning the native customs was the product of a particular historical moment and was constructed by an androcentric colonial establishment committed to male dominance in the service of particular political ends" (*Women and Gender*, 165). The overall tone of Hirsi Ali's work is that through "Western" society, she was able to improve her own condition, attain freedom. She claims to extend those improvements to all Muslim women and advocate for freedom for women by condemning the "backwards" ways of Islamic societies that threaten the Western world. In the epilogue, she emphasizes, "Whatever you're feelings on the subject, the United States is the leader of the free world. By taking my ideas to the United States, I don't feel in any way that I am selling out" (346). She also commends the value system of the United States, and "Western" ideals in general noting, "I moved from the world of faith to the world of reason—from the world of excision and forced marriage to the world of sexual emancipation. Having made that journey, I know that one of those worlds is simply better than the other. Not because of its flashy gadgets, but fundamentally, because of its values" (348). Hirsi Ali perhaps has gained such a widely recognized platform because she services imperial ends masked behind agendas the claim to "improve" the conditions of third world women. What they actually do, however, is exploit the conditions of such countries for material gain. Such discourses said to "improve" the plight of women who identify as Muslim within the United States continue through today. Accordingly, Hirsi Ali's initial call and later reinforcement of the abandonment of practices under the banner

behind freedom and liberation dangerously take root in early colonial histories. Such histories have taken on different shapes and forms through today, but feed into the same end result.

Representation Matters: Capital Consumption and Choice in *Proud*

While Hirsi Ali's memoir offers an example on how hijab is used to negotiate freedom from the vantage point of an immigrant, Ibtihaj Muhammad's work offers one from a black Muslim woman within the United States—mediating concepts of race, gender, and religion as she reconciles her identity as an American Olympian. Here, the relationship between Muhammad's situation as a black woman who wears hijab elucidates a complicated intersectionality between the convergence of these identity markers. In this work, hijab is emphasized as a choice—one that she takes great pride in its practice. Notably, hijab was in fact a *choice* for Hirsi Ali, one that at some point made her feel powerful, she later condemns its practice in an effort to “emancipate” women. As I will show, Muhammad emphasizes freedoms of choice to practice hijab proudly in the United States, and that despite challenges and discrimination, she was able to overcome them with hard work and dedication to achieve her dreams. In turn, she says that her popularity as an Olympian in hijab urged her to use her platform to dispel stereotypes of Muslim woman popular media depictions. As I will show, as Muhammad attempts to pushback against misrepresentations, what emerges is a liberated Muslim woman figure emphasized through the freedoms of choice to practice and normalized through her participation in the capital consumption.

In Muhammad's own words, her narrative aims inspire others that if one works hard, even the most marginalized can overcome obstacles to achieve their dreams. From early on in her work, Muhammad emphasizes that the fact that her narrative will be about breaking through the barriers of marginalization of race, gender, and religion to become a successful Olympian athlete. In the prologue, she says, “...the way I identify myself leaves some people perplexed: Black but Muslim.



Muslim but American. Hijabi but an athlete” (xii)<sup>88</sup>. As she navigates these categorical identifiers that have created obstacles for her along her journey—that entail discrimination, prejudice, and social set-backs--on an already rigorous journey to the Olympic games, Muhammad’s story is sold as one of triumph and hope. She also discusses her own intent in writing her memoir. She says, “I wrote this book because I wanted to chronicle my quest to challenge society’s limited perceptions of what a Muslim woman, a Black woman, or an athlete can be” (xii). As she pushes back against the limitations expected of a Muslim woman in hijab by society at large, the focal point of her story and journey centers largely around her hijab. Yet, what also emerges from her journey, is that Muhammad’s idea of changing perceptions of black Muslim women in the United States—or Muslim women in general—is to insist that they are free to choose, and that they do in fact freely choose American consumption “just like everybody else.”

Most scholarship on Muslim American memoirs concerns with, as detailed in the introduction to this chapter and that which centered on Hirsi Ali’s work, the ways immigrant Muslim memoirs function as testimony. Still, as Muhammad’s narrative is concerned with cultural representations of Muslims in American spaces—she is especially conscious of the representation of Muslim women in hijab—scholarship on representational narratives of Muslim women in the US is relevant. Most such scholarship is limited because it remains within cultural analysis where the stakes of misrepresentation hardly reach beyond stereotypes. For instance, where scholars like Susan Smith call for better and more inclusive representation, Muhammad would fit such need. Alexandra Magearu calls for a phenomenological approach to understanding the misrepresentation of Arab and Muslim women in the mainstream media as gendered racialization. She draws upon

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<sup>88</sup> But for societal categories, none of the categories that she identifies as contradictory are at surface really mutually exclusive. For instance, according to Islamic History, the first person to recite the call to prayer<sup>88</sup> was a black freed slave, and there are hardly provisions that, religiously, should prohibit a woman who wears hijab from playing sports. The exclusions, however, perhaps come in the middle categorical self-identifier: Muslim but American.

narratives in different cultural productive forms in order to “interrupt racialized habits of seeing” and to argue that phenomenology can “give visibility to the lived dimensions of racialization” (135). This framework centers on dimension of the lived experiences and visibility of race and gender to understand representational practices and marginalization of Muslim women. However, this framework is limited because it does not consider the economic conditions that produce constructs of race and gender at core. Furthermore, Muhammad’s memoir will allow me to demonstrate that, while race and gender have both been constructed to marginalize Muslim women, even when they attempting to combat representation, notions of capitalist freedoms provide the language for Muslim women’s liberation leading towards an inevitable embrace of imperialist forces and a desire for inclusion into the US mainstream. Representation for Muhammad, that is, means proving that Muslims consume capital culture, and because this is narrated through the form of “truth,” taken as testimony, this renders as uncontested with audiences—serving as truth for the public, and ultimately peddling capital interests through endorsements of consumption. My analysis makes clear that this representational inclusion accompanied with choice and freedoms is to be better understood through economic frameworks. Such frameworks will reveal, for instance, the ways corporations exploit marginalized groups behind social justice projects.

Integral to understanding Muhammad’s narrative is, like Hirsi Ali’s, its form as testimony. Returning briefly to Wail Hassan’s work on immigrant literature, he notes that the limit to Deleuz and Gattari’s theory is that it does not distinguish minority literature from those who immigrated into the United States from those who are non-immigrants. He extends the theory to account for minorities who are nonimmigrants. Ibtihaj Muhammad is, by her own account, a minority in the United States—and she offers testimony as a native informant, a first-hand experienced black

woman in the United States—who was able to overcome significant barriers to accomplish her goals. While her work can generally be considered minority literature in the characteristic of offering testimony, this narrative works different as she is not a third world immigrant detailing life to Western audiences. Instead, this narrative works within the United States as a tale of accomplishment that validates the “American Dream”—telling audiences that if they work hard, they too can accomplish their goals. Muhammad begins *Proud* with an author’s note and then a prologue to what her book is. She distinguishes her book from an autobiography, and notes that the stories she tells in the work are from her memory as she recalls the events to have happened. In her own words, she notes, “If I had to describe exactly what this book is, I’d say it is the true story of my life” (ix). Notably, though, she does say that “in some cases, names and identifying details have been changed, and some characters are composites of people who have passed through my life” (ix). While she simultaneously notes that some characters and details have been changed to some extent, readers are to assume that this is in fact a true account of her journey.

Part of Muhammad’s objective to better represent Muslims in the United States to emphasize “choice,” against the idea that she is otherwise forced to practice or oppressed. “Choice” is emphasized a number of times throughout the memoir both to demonstrate the freedom for Muslim women who practice as well to push back against stereotypes that negate Muslim women are forced to wear hijab. For example, she says:

My journey as a Muslim woman on Team USA flipped the Muslim narrative onto its head and became a source of pride for Muslims of all backgrounds. I bucked every single stereotype of the media depictions of Muslims. I was an American. I wore hijab by *choice*<sup>89</sup>, and I proudly represented my country on and off the fencing strip, both in victory and defeat. My journey was bigger than me. I was a vision that publicly counterbalanced the negativity surrounding Muslim identity in the United States (202).

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<sup>89</sup> Emphasis, my own.

Accordingly, for Muhammad, her victory or defeat as an Olympian was not only about her outstanding win, but that it was a source of pride because her categorical distinctions of identity as a Muslim woman. She says that her defeat was important especially because she is a Muslim woman participating in a sport hundreds of thousands of people across the globe were watching. This platform enabled her to “buck”—that is combat—every typical representation perpetuated by mass media through, as she notes, the embodiment of her own self. Specifically, central to her representation is the emphasis on her *choice* to wear hijab—against the narratives that Muslim women are forced into the practice by their husbands and fathers.

Muhammad emphasizes her choice to wear hijab in a number of instances and continues to emphasize choice even in instances when choice can't be applied. For example, when Mattel approaches her to create a Barbie doll modeled after her, she is elated. She explains, “Considering how much I loved my Barbies, the thought of little girls, both Muslim and non-Muslim, playing with a Barbie who *chooses*<sup>90</sup> to wear hijab made me so happy” (266). Here, conscious of the stereotype about Muslim woman, Muhammad consciously emphasizes choice even to inanimate object. Barbie cannot choose to wear hijab; but Muhammad mentions the Barbie's choice in wearing hijab as she partners with this large corporation to create a Barbie based on her identity. Its emphasis, however, mobilizes notions of freedom that are circumscribed for Muslim women to whether or not they have the right to practice hijab in the United States. Importantly, signals, as scholars such as Haddad also question<sup>91</sup>, the question arises on what denotes choice for women

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<sup>90</sup> Emphasis, my own.

<sup>91</sup> When Haddad asks, “Liberation from what?” noting how liberty from a Western perspective has meant different things and at different historical moments. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, for example, the Puritans thought that Muslim women needed relief from overindulgence in sex, while in the 21<sup>st</sup> century feminists see that she needs liberation for more sexual freedom (260).

who identify as Muslim in the US. In the context of being both American and endorsing a Barbie, choice is mobilized as the freedom she has as an American citizen and capital consumer.

As she emphasizes freedom of choice, she is also very conscious of representations of all of the markers that make her identity: religion, race, and gender. Throughout her story, Muhammad laments on the lack of representation she sees in visible spaces as a black Muslim in the United States, and she focuses on the three identity markers—at times together and others separately—as important for her to address in cultural discourses. For example, as she recalls the headlines in her hometown and beyond that commonly centered around her being “the first American Muslim to Wear Hijab While Competing at Olympics” (176), she begins to realize what her visibility might mean to the dominant national narrative. She is torn in the ways that media is spinning her story as a “first” phenomenon. Yet, while the media seemingly spun her story not only to focus on identity categories beyond her ability to play a sport, Muhammad expresses an ambivalence towards which category warranted the attention she was receiving. She says,

I knew I was unique for being the first potential Olympic athlete to represent the United States wearing a hijab, but I didn't know if it warranted the level of attention it brought me. I was also the first woman of color on the women's saber team, but no one ever wrote about that. On the other hand, I was extremely proud to represent Muslim women in sport and show us in a different light than how we had traditionally been portrayed in the media (176).

Here, Muhammad is conscious of her achievement particularly mobilizing notions of gender, race, and religion simultaneously. She notes that she is the first to earn the accomplishment of (potential at this point) Olympic athlete for the particular markers that culture has labeled as minority—and capital forces ensure to be marginalized. However, Muhammad does not recognize these identity markers as social constructs, and instead accepts them as truth, narrating them in “truth” form accepted by consumer culture.

Still, with representation at the forefront of Muhammad's mission with a public platform, she soon seizes an opportunity to tell an invigorating story—one the public does not hear often. In narrating her accomplishments as a black Muslim woman who was able to compete in the Olympics, she also mobilizes and attributes American value systems as allowing her to achieve these goals. She continues, "The acknowledgement of 'firsts,' especially in sports, was important to show not only how far we've come as a people of color, as women, and as a religious minority, but also how far we still have to go in order to make our world more inclusive. Making the Olympic team would have been an amazing triumph for that reason alone" (176). Here, Muhammad mobilizes the concept of inclusivity and notes that there has been progress as an American society with shared universal values to include people of all backgrounds—and that more progress needs to be made. Recall my discussion in chapter 1 on the drawbacks of overreaching the progress of complex American histories in attempts to be recognized in the American cultural experience—here, Muhammad alludes to the idea of multiculturalism. Participating in the discourse of universal sentiment and values, she pushes for recognition through American principals of multiculturalism—an America that celebrates diversity and difference. Yet, as Gupta Ferguson note, "'Multiculturalism' is both a feeble recognition of the fact that cultures have lost their moorings in definite places and an attempt to subsume this plurality of cultures within the framework of national identity" (35). The shared values that such Muslim American women align conveniently with the shared values of the narrative of the American Dream. In any case notes that her contributions to the narrative, narrated through the form of truth, is impactful and necessary to moving towards more inclusion. At this point in the narrative she doesn't yet qualify for the Olympics, but notes that this platform and visibility it would offer her motivated her to work harder to ensure she could compete. She concludes the section by saying, "It wasn't until after I failed to

qualify that I really started to consider what making an Olympic team would mean, not just for me as an athlete but for the communities whom I represented, particularly the Muslim community here in the United States” (177). At this point, she realizes she must persist with a narrative that centers on the plight of Muslim women in American spaces.

As gender, race, and religion complicate Muhammad’s place in American society, she is determined to write back against narratives through a singular narrative: that Muslims are ordinary people living regular lives. As Muhammad uses the freedom of choice to push back against misrepresentation of Muslim women in popular media—to prove that she is not, contrary to the common narrative, oppressed or forced to wear hijab—she is also focused on using her platform to dispel stereotypes about Muslims in America. To counter write (or counter depict) these narratives, for example, she says, “...our nation desperately needed to see that Muslims were just as American as anyone else. We could be athletes. We could be female athletes. We could be African Americans. We lived in suburbia, went to work every day, and care for our families. Just. Like. Everyone. Else. I wanted the country—the world—to see that normalcy in me and everyone I represented” (235). She is adamant to prove that Muslims are not premodern, uncivil, terrorists disconnected from reality. She wants to show that Muslims come in different colors (they can be African Americans) and have different occupations (they can be athletes, or they can have different professions). While these ideas are very logical and real, what normalizing the Muslim American experience to mainstream public for Muhammad—to show that they are “Just. Like. Everyone. Else,” as I will show—entails a visible participation in American capital consumption.

Accordingly, the liberated Muslim figure that Muhammad continuously emphasizes is on that has freedom of choice, and her in mainstream recognition is through American consumption. Muhammad’s way to combat representational practices is to curate their place in the mainstream

American consumer industry. As she consciously discusses what that representation looks like in the lived experience in micro spaces—that the narrative of Muslims is a bigoted, false misrepresentation of Muslim—she talks about the initiatives she takes to push back against such misconceptions. For Muhammad, just as much as a false representation of Muslims was problematic, so too was the absence of Muslim Americans in public spaces altogether an issue. While she notes that anti-Muslim sentiment was gaining large traction, and hate crimes were at an all-time high, companies and brands still seemed interested in her take on such social issues. She explains,

During a time when anti-Muslim sentiment was at its peak, a lot of companies sought to help elevate the conversation on the importance of diversity and inclusion by endorsing athletes who different in thought, culture, and/or lifestyle. I partnered with a range of companies from Visa, to Nike, to United Airlines. Here I was an outspoken Muslim athlete, representing a relatively obscure sport, and these major companies were coming to me. I was also fortunate enough to find a management team who interests were aligned with my own in using my platform to fight for justice and bigotry....While fencing was still my priority, using my opportunity as an Olympian to unify and to lead was the greatest call-to-action of my life (237).

Here, Muhammad importantly says that corporations approached her in order to push back against the rhetoric of Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign. She suggests that corporations took on social responsibility to help push back against bigotry and to promote inclusivity. As she notes, she considers the offers afforded to her as ways to use her platform to address misconceptions of Muslim women and increase the visibility of Muslims in public spaces. No doubt well intended, and with the pressures of media and bigotry by and large, it is difficult for women who identify as Muslim who are in public spaces to be anything other than their physical absence/presence of hijab.

Muhammad's work with these corporations might be regarded as a seized opportunity to use large and far reaching public platforms to dispel the heightened hostility post 9/11 and



subsequently during 2016 presidential campaign against Muslims in the US. However, moving beyond representational practices, I underscore the ways economic understandings will actually elucidate how mechanisms of capitalism trap resistance into profit for large brand corporations. Notably, while it is not the scope of this project to divulge a comprehensive understanding on the economics behind corporative practices, I can offer examples—which merely only scratch the surface—that can demonstrate the ways corporations are actually trapping Muslim women in an important way: the liberated Muslim woman figure is accepted into mainstream through the marketability of her hijab in mainstream culture. For instance, these corporations she mentions did not approach Muhammad to dispel stereotypes of for inclusivity—but rather to turn such difference into marketability and increased profit. As an Olympian, Muhammad already had a digestible story to sell that would align with mass audiences that consume. Corporations intentionally turn difference into a marketable product, one, that in cases such as this, “influences the value and legibility of Muslim products and practices” (Gokariskel and McLarney, 6). Muhammad is not wrong to note, that “sport has played a dynamic role in cultural discourse” (237); however, corporations mask how they have managed to shape that narrative through consumption and consumer logic in order to gain profit. In doing so, they fashion large campaigns under the guise of inclusivity and freedom in American spaces. Obvious draw backs include, as Gokariskel and McLarny note, that “Muslim identities unpalatable to the sensibilities of the market are excluded, often leading to further marginalization at the intersection of class, race, and ethnicity” (6). Accordingly, as in other instances, the packaging of other Muslim women (i.e. Manal Omar) inevitably leads to the exclusions of others.

Along with turning difference into marketability, corporations often mobilize the very difference of marginalized groups for sales. As a Muslim woman, many of the partnerships

Muhammad embarked on—notably Barbie and Nike—mobilized the very difference she was pushing back against. That is, both mobilized her hijab as profitable tools—focusing on gender and religious difference in order to profit. Whereas Muhammad is advocating to show that Muslims are “just like everybody else,” the platforms she uses simultaneously mobilize the constructs she pushes back against. For example, Reina Lewis examines the framing of Muslim identities that is increasingly materialized and developed by groups previously marginalized by larger consumer practices and normative cultures. Corporations are concerned with understanding consumer logic in order to reach the largest consumer base. Part of that logic depends on creating rights based social movements is to create a narrative of “choice” and agency (i.e. reproductive rights, religious freedoms), and thus the consumption of products associated with those campaigns becomes an enactment of diverse modes of citizenship and belonging (Lewis, 63). Choice, as noted previously, is one reason Muhammad is most excited to partner up with Barbie—and she extends she memorably notes that she is excited to have offer a Barbie to young girls that has a choice to wear hijab. In the epilogue of her work, again, she also remembers her joy when meeting with the infamous doll company Mattel for a partnership to create an Ibihaj Muhammad Barbie doll. In specific, she notes that the Barbie would be the first Barbie to wear a hijab. She recalls what she told the Mattel executives, ““Not only does it give millions of little girls a doll that looks like them, it means you see us and we matter”” (266). Mattel demonstrates another instance of a corporation’s strategy to understand social dynamics in order to increase profitability. Barbie notably has a long history of over sexualizing women’s bodies and setting unrealistic expectations for the average human being to achieve. Addressing push back and criticism, the brand has popularly boasted creating barbies in a range of sizes and “colors.” Still, people who identify as Muslims, in seeking to assert their visibility and participate in mainstream spaces as Muslims, then invest in models of

identity through consumption (Lewis, 63). Like Mattel, other corporations also approached Muhammad by mobilizing choice—or more essentially the choice to consume. Nike often plasters the images of popular figures—in this case Muhammad herself—in large campaign advertisement promoting the brand and social justice missions. Nike included Muhammad as part of a larger “Just Do It” campaign to promote social justice—with slogans like “Be the Hero You Never Had” on her picture—emphasizing the list of firsts that she herself discusses in beginning of her memoir, enforcing the idea that her accomplishments were anomalous because of her identity markers. Beyond a campaign, Nike also capitalized on the hijab as “choice” campaign, as they also employed Muhammad as the face of the brand’s first ever athletic hijab. The Nike Pro Hijab was boasted by the company its first ever hijab and anticipated global sales as it launched both online in more than 20 countries<sup>92</sup>. The product was a black hijab that featured the brand’s signature check mark logo high up on the side of the models’ head. The check mark logo is noticeably visible and in white—contrasting with the black hijab. This hijab clearly needed to stand out as one that is branded Nike.

As Muhammad partners with large corporations to promote the inclusivity and visibility of Muslim women in the US, there is more at stake even beyond the commodification of difference. Here, the liberated Muslim woman figure that becomes plastered on corporate campaigns masks both racist and unethical labor practices on which large corporations depend on in order to maximize profit. In addition to peddling issues of gender and religion for sales, a closer look at Nike’s labor practices—beyond even understanding the marketability of difference employed by large corporations—can reveal that corporations also depend on racializing laborers to maximizing profit. As Muhammad discusses her race as a black woman, Nike has historically used black

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<sup>92</sup> See article from Nike: <https://news.nike.com/news/nike-pro-hijab>

athletes to promote diversity and inclusivity while they, ironically, simultaneously depend on racist practices to ensure divisions within groups that will maximize consumption within the US and production outside. Carol Stabile closely examines corporations that engage in marketing discourses of social responsibility, using Nike as a case study. She notes that Nike presents itself a “global citizen”—largely depending on a discourse of social responsibility to produce and manage their social image (Stabile, 186). Domestically, Nike has historically used African American bodies to promote a narrative of inclusivity and antiracism as an offset to media bias that focuses on intercity violence and criminalizing black youth. Such advertisements are often situated within a context of media coverage which demonizes intercity populations heavily populated with black youth, but in programs and contexts that are largely consumed by white audiences that are majority consumers (Stabile, 194). Furthermore, Nike uses black spokespersons framed within poles of “negative” and “positive” role models—a strategy of logic Stabile refers to as inferential racism. Such racism, historically, relies on a logic that implies that sports can be an appropriate physical outlet for blacks, who are “naturally” more physically aggressive and prone to danger than white who can play for leisure (Stabile, 194). Accordingly, such advertisements not only reinforce inferential racist attitudes in mass consumers, but their campaigns of heroism and the attainable American dream also obscurely hide production practices abroad as well. Stabile says, “Nike, like corporations in general, will use any image to sell its products, providing that such images can be stitched into a seamless narrative that poses few contradictions for its consumers—a narrative designed to guarantee the very invisibilities outlined above” (Stabile, 199). The invisibilities Stabile examines and refers to are the labor conditions Nike and other corporations use to ensure free and cheap labor. For example, Nike outsources labor to “friendly” governments such Indonesia, where they, among unsafe working conditions, can guarantee cheap

labor for a cost even below minimum wage (Stabile, 198). Thus, she notes that Nike depends on the contradictions of neatly organized advertising campaigns with spokespersons for inclusivity and inspiration (visible), masking the exploitations and labor conditions of others abroad for cheap labor (invisible).

I only examples of the ways proving Muslims are “just like everybody else” means that they inevitably need to reconcile with corporate interests that are simultaneously exploiting them for consumption and production. In doing so, she constructs a liberated figure specifically through emphasis on reduced notions of freedoms of choice, but that also must be recognized into the mainstream through corporate consumption. Muhammad’s intent is to partner with big corporations that would give her a public platform to dispel negative narratives about Islam and women. However, the platforms afforded to her are ones that drive the consumer capitalist economy in the United States and abroad. Furthermore, these practices are increasingly becoming harder and harder to recognize, such that Muhammad and the likes are investing in the subjugation of themselves and the laborers that the corporations depend on. Nike, for example, is often criticized for the labor politics it employs in factories overseas—commonly referred to as “sweat shops” for their unfavorable and abusive conditions for workers. Intan Suwandi notes that global corporations, such as Nike, Apple, H&M are known as global commodity chains—grounded by exploiting people for labor as they outsource production to southern parts of the globe in order to drastically increase profit margins on production (4). They note that this phenomenon of outsourcing labor is not new, with deep rooted histories that can be traced. However, the scale and sophistication on how this outsourcing occurs in the wake of moving factors such as immigration, a shifting global economy, media etc has left even political-economic analysts confused (2). Global commodity chains, they note, enable imperialism to permeate the structures of worldwide

production on a commodity basis: the most labor intensive components in a global commodity chain take place in the global south, where “the reserve army of labor is larger, unit labor costs are lower, and rates of exploitation are thus correspondingly higher” (Suwandi, 19). This process that produces an amassing a central wealth for corporations is increasingly becoming disguised and invisible (Suwandi, 19). Part of that invisibility entails masking those practices with large social justice campaigns and projects under the guise of social responsibility. Social justice projects, partnerships, and endorsements of the likes that Muhammad describes only being to chip at the ways such large corporation mask their unethical labor practices. Thus, the same platforms that are the embodiment of capital consumer culture manipulate economic consumer markets with ideals of inclusivity and diversity in an effort to increase sales and dig into a wider range of consumers.

### Conclusion

In brief, examining the different ways hijab is negotiated by Muslim women offering testimony of their lived experiences can reveal the ways imperialism operates on various sites, and can force even its own subjects to participate in its discourse. Furthermore, in lieu of a new wave of narratives considered to pushback against such stereotypical and cliché tropes, in hopes of establishing counter-hegemonic narratives, the stakes broaden and must be accounted for. That is, on the one hand, this chapter considers the testimony of native informant who immigrated to the Western world, and reinforces the narrative of saving. On the other, it considers a type of pushback of a black American young woman who identifies as Muslim, striving to achieve her dreams. Both situate their experiences in relation with hijab in stark opposite ways: the first mobilizes the dominated Muslim woman figure who needs to be saved by American imperial projects, the other is liberated Muslim woman figure whose freedom entails choice and normalization through

consumption. The experiences of such women who offer “testimony,” are consequences of a domestic capitalism and imperial forces abroad. Behind the guise of freedom and opportunity, identity politics have reduced their struggles to their relationship with hijab and freedom of choice. Hirsi Ali and Muhammad navigate their relationship with hijab differently, but both engage the practice relative to the idea of freedom. Essentially, as a result of capitalist forces and mechanisms of imperialism, the American national narrative has used hijab as both a tool to divide women who identify as Muslim and as an identity marker by which concepts of “freedom” are reduced and solely negotiated upon.

## CHAPTER 4: HIJAB AND POLITICAL ICONOGRAPHY

On November 17, 2015, Saba Ahmed ignited a global media frenzy after she appeared on a Fox News segment using an American flag as her hijab<sup>93</sup>. The segment, *The Kelly File*, featured renown anchor Megyn Kelly interviewing Ahmed along with President Trump spokesperson Katrina Pearson. The interview topic was the recent call by the then Republican party presidential nominee Donald J Trump to shut down mosques in the United States. Ahmed, a founder of the Republican Muslim Coalition, defended her right to practice religion in America, telling Megyn, “It’s absolutely horrifying to hear that our constitutional rights of free exercise of religion are going to be challenged”<sup>94</sup>. What was most striking about the interview, was the visual of American flag, wrapped around a Muslim woman as she defended her constitutional rights. Countless media outlets across the globe<sup>95</sup> began to cover not the segment for its content, but almost entirely the visual of Ahmed wearing an American flag. Many outlets hailed Ahmed’s choice in hijab as bold and courageous. Some headlines, for example, read, “Total Badass Goes On Fox News In Patriotic Hijab,”<sup>96</sup> “This Woman Wore an American Flag Hijab on Fox News. That’s a Revolutionary Act,”<sup>97</sup> and “A Little Chat With Saba Ahmed, Hero Who Owned Fox News With Her American

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<sup>93</sup> See Appendix E for a still shot of Saba Ahmed from the interview.

<sup>94</sup> Taken from dialogue of the interview: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=1&v=8LAI00UbNSg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=8LAI00UbNSg)

<sup>95</sup> Coverage extended to outlets in Australia, for example: Tovey, Josephine. “Meet Saba Ahmed, the Muslim Woman Who Wore An American Flag Hijab on Fox News.” *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 20 November 2015. Web. Accessed 10 July 2019 <<https://www.smh.com.au/world/meet-saba-ahmed-the-muslim-woman-who-wore-a-us-flag-hijab-on-fox-20151120-gl3glu.html>>. See also: Mangla, Ismat Sarah. “Who Is Saba Ahmed? Muslim Republican Wearing American Flag Hijab Spars With Trump Spokesperson On Fox News.” *International Business Times*. 18 November 2015. Web. Accessed 10 July 2019. <<https://www.ibtimes.com/who-saba-ahmed-muslim-republican-wearing-american-flag-hijab-spars-trump-spokesperson-2190163>>. Coverage reached other countless other international outlets including CNN, Yahoo News, and others.

<sup>96</sup> Amatulli, Jenna. “Total Badass Goes on Fox News in Patriotic Hijab.” *The Huffington Post*. 18 November 2015. Web. Accessed 10 July 2019 <[https://www.huffpost.com/entry/saba-ahmed-fox-news-hijab\\_n\\_564ca031e4b06037734bdf2](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/saba-ahmed-fox-news-hijab_n_564ca031e4b06037734bdf2)>

<sup>97</sup> Cauterucci, Christina. “This Woman Wore an American Flag Hijab on Fox News. That’s a Revolutionary Act.” *Slate.com*. 18 November 2015. Web. Accessed 10 July 2019 <<https://slate.com/human-interest/2015/11/why-wearing-an-american-flag-hijab-is-a-revolutionary-act.html>>



Flag Hijab”<sup>98</sup>—generally hailing the move as one that embodies the freedoms and constitutional protections afforded to Muslim woman in American spaces, and their returned devout patriotism to all things American. Ahmed herself noted in various subsequent interviews—for example, to *Slate* and *The Huffington Post*--that her intent was to visibly demonstrate American Muslim patriotism. She says, “My whole point was that I just wanted to share that we are patriotic American Muslims” (Cauterucci, 2015). For Ahmed, what better way to espouse American patriotism than to visibly show it to spectators? Still shots of her during the Fox News interview circulated far and widely, and its iconography took new forms in incredible ways.

The following year, after the 2016 election of President Donald Trump, visuals alluding to Saba Ahmed’s bold move resurfaced in “viral” ways. President Donald Trump’s 2017 inauguration sparked a series of protests across the United States in response to bigoted remarks he had made during the campaign trail about different groups of people identified and labeled as minority (such a women, blacks, and Muslims). During the protests, again, a visual similar to the image began to resurface on the posters of hundreds of the thousands of people. The image was of a woman who, like Saba Ahmed, wore a hijab made of the American flag. The image was illustrated, and the caption on the bottom of the posters read “We the People Are Greater Than Fear”<sup>99</sup>. The posters were part of a larger campaign called the “We the People” project by artist Shepard Fairey. Fairey, a white male, is also the artist behind the infamous “Hope” poster of the 2012 Presidential Campaign of Barack Obama. Fairey’s art was commissioned in direct response to President Trump’s immigration policy instated in January of 2017 (which I will later detail) and bigoted remarks he made throughout his campaign. As the icon surfaced on posters during protests,

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<sup>98</sup> Tolentino, Jia. “A Little Chat With Saba Ahmed, Hero Who Owned Fox News With Her American Flag Hijab.” *Jezebel*. 20 November 2019. Web. Accessed 10 July, 2019.

<sup>99</sup> See Appendix F of a photograph of the original image aside the poster version that circulated in protests.

numerous women who identify as Muslim began to dawn the American flag as their hijabs as a symbol of patriotism and freedom<sup>100</sup> during protests as well. The widespread reception of Fairey's subsequent poster and the phenomenon of dawning an American flag hijab can demonstrate a visual consequence on the limits of culture talk—a consequence in which the colonized embodies the emblem and embraces the symbol of the colonizer.

In this chapter, I will examine this bewildering visual of dawning an American flag as a hijab in the context of the political protest from which it rose. Dawning the American flag as a hijab has not been particularly covered in scholarship, though critical acclaim throughout news outlets largely hailed the trend as being revolutionary<sup>101</sup>--as evidenced by both widespread acclaim noted when Ahmed first dawned the phenomenon and subsequent coverage on the protests themselves<sup>102</sup>. My interest here is not only in Fairey's image itself, but the widespread adaptation of the concept by Muslim women (who dawned US flags as hijabs in mass protests). Here, along with critical acclaim that largely hailed the act revolutionary, I move beyond scholarship that has examined the public presence of Muslim women post 9/11<sup>103</sup>. Such analysis remains limited to cultural frameworks that discuss the representations of Muslim women against stereotypical depictions in news media post 9/11. For instance Zahedi (2011)<sup>104</sup>, and Rasmussen (2013)<sup>105</sup> have all noted that the events of 9/11 mobilized the “visibility” of Muslim women in various modes of

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<sup>100</sup> See Appendix G & H for examples/images of protestors dawning American flags for hijabs.

<sup>101</sup> I did find one blogger with an entry titled, “Please Keep Your American Flags Off My Hijab” (2017): <http://www.joojooazad.com/2017/01/keep-your-american-flags-off-my-hijab.html>

<sup>102</sup> See for instance, “Women are Making hijabs Out of the American Flag, and It Beautiful” (*India Today*, 2017), Christina Catuterucci's “A Q and A With the Muslim Woman Whose Face Became a Symbol of Trump Resistance” (*Slate*, 2017)

<sup>103</sup> This phenomenon is relatively new, and while I did not locate scholarship on the phenomenon, some scholars do concern themselves with the “visibility” of Muslim in American media post 9/11.

<sup>104</sup> Zahedi interviews Muslim women in the United States and their visible presence in media coverage and advocacy groups, to conclude that 9/11 mobilized their visibility (in popular media, visually and discursively) from previously marginalized spaces to mainstream ones.

<sup>105</sup> For instance, Rasmussen divulges a critical study meant to enhance understanding of the practice, and to expand on issues raised by scholarship regarding political pressures on Muslim women and representation of hijab in media.

popular media (including news media, tv, etc)—to which they argued Muslim women have successfully and actively pushed back against popular narratives of “oppression” depicted by news media. While they establish that news media has created monolithic narratives about Muslim women in hijab, they draw upon interviews and studies to note that there has been “progress” in creating understanding of hijab that undercuts assumptions of “oppression” and “patriarchy.” Such models are limited, as this scholarship on the representational politics of Muslim women highlights Muslim woman who can undercut such media depictions. However, as we seen in chapter one, this often leads to the production of the “good” Muslim woman—the liberated--figures that may be deemed acceptable to mainstream audiences. Other scholars criticize news coverage on Muslim women in the US on hijab (post 9/11) for emphasizing cultural values such as “assimilation” while simultaneously presenting mainly women who are vocal about their *choice* not to wear hijab in the US. For instance, Byng examines news coverage and images post 9/11 in popular media outlets (specifically the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*) regarding hijab, noting that despite representing American values such as “assimilation” and “integration” as voluntary, coverage on hijab in America largely centered on Muslim women’s choice to *not* veil as part of the larger public space. Yet even scholarship that problematizes media coverage, as in this instance, of Muslim women as covering or projecting one bias over another (to or from hijab), remain within representational politics that underscores the idea that certain “types” of Muslim women need to be visible over others. Here, cultural analysis remains circumscribed to discussions of how Muslim women are represented—in this case, as an imbalance for people who do *chose* to wear hijab. My own analyses of the image pushes beyond representational of the media, and points towards interrogating the sociopolitical and historic realities that are masked when discussions on Muslim women pertain to visibility and choice.

This visual phenomenon demonstrates the extremes of where “culture talk” can take those being colonized: their own forms of resistance are to embody all that has colonized them. Fairey’s poster and the phenomenon at large of dawning an American flag hijab visually mobilizes the liberated/dominated binary of the Muslim woman figure: it places a symbol (the flag) that implicates that the United States protects her individual “liberties,” when in actuality, that same flag works to ensure her domination. Here, the binary of liberated/dominated Muslim women figure works through the hijab flag as it invokes visuals that symbolize American freedom superimposed on the religious practice of Muslim women; while the image form and context can demonstrate how its perpetuation simultaneously ensures her oppression. I argue that Fairey’s image, and the phenomena at large, is not revolutionary, it doesn’t encapsulate resistance, or the progressive presence of Muslim women in mainstream spaces post 9/11. Instead, I argue that image itself and the subsequent investment and adaption of the phenomenon by Muslim women embodies a symbolic visualization of the liberated Muslim woman figure that is central to the survival of neoliberalism. As I will show, the American flag invokes sentiments of national freedoms, and dawning this as hijab then invokes liberated Muslim women freed by American freedoms. Furthermore, this particular phenomenon illustrates a colonial violence—an intellectual one—that continues to take place on Muslim women’s bodies in new forms within the United States.

Invoking a framework that moves beyond cultural analysis on media representations of Muslim women towards histories of the US with regard to Muslim immigration and the US flag in American colonial contexts will elucidate the ways the United States continues much of the same colonial practices as it has before—and that by draping the flag as a hijab, Muslim women are inadvertently consenting to their own oppression. Thus, this visibility of Muslim women is one

that entails a form of colonial violence on the bodies of Muslim women, normalized behind fallacies of neoliberal tolerance, freedom, and equality while simultaneously securing imperial interests abroad. The visual of donning an American flag hijab encapsulates an embodiment of the liberated/oppressed Muslim binary that emerges when notions of freedom are mediated through hijab—it suggests that the otherwise “uncivil,” “backwards” and “oppressed” Muslim women can be “freed” when she transforms into American values (symbolized by the flag that is superimposed on the Muslim women’s head).

The widespread “viral” acclaim of the poster by Fairey invokes inquiry into how hijab was visualized as resistance through national sentiments of patriotism, citizenship, and belonging, within a nation of deep and complex colonial histories. As Fairey’s poster and the larger phenomenon of the American flag hijab received widespread media coverage as a symbol of resistance and carried multiple meanings and valences for protestors throughout<sup>106</sup>. However, from a visual standpoint, such complexities (reasons and meanings to individuals carrying them) at base are masked in still shots of the coverages<sup>107</sup>. What emerges is not the reasons Muslim women were donning the flag, but rather the fact that the American flag was their hijabs. With the influx of mass media and technology, especially post 9/11, images are disseminated across various media outlets and social media platforms within seconds. Rigoni explains that the current millennium is characterized by three phenomena: human mobility, a surge in communicative abilities, and the mass migration of minority cultures (834). Accordingly, she notes that media in particular plays a pivotal role in shaping identities because of its presence as a primary means of disseminating information, especially with regard to narratives that traditionally “other” minority cultures (835).

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<sup>106</sup> See Nadja Sayed’s “Muslim Women Respond to Shepard Fairey’s American Flag Hijab” (Artslant.com, 2017)

<sup>107</sup> Appendix I

The image presents hijab in the context of being American, and representationally employs the American flag to function as a woman's hijab—and, because of its form, disseminates messages over platforms—social media, news outlets, and others--in seconds. Accordingly, moving from the eyes of hundreds of thousands of spectators instantly, visuals and their surrounding context play integral roles in shaping American ideology.

While chapters 2 and 3 show how language operates to mobilize concepts of freedom through hijab, in different ways, they depend on rhetorical components based on the author's access to language itself. This chapter will examine the medium of political, the visual itself (and the visualization dawning an American flag as a hijab), and the context from which it arises. Examining this visual in particular offers an opportunity to explore the ways in which a visual created for resistance, one adopted in protest to combat the stereotypes and misrepresentation of Muslim women in the media, actually reinforces the larger constructs it resists. In order to examine the function of the image and the meanings attached to it in its social and cultural context, I first establish a framework of image theory and its direct function in capital market systems. I then turn towards the way the poster as political art services the nation through mobilizing the imperial discourse of liberated/dominated Muslim woman figure—one that invokes sentiments of liberation that simultaneously subjugates her in a single visual--through a close analysis of the image itself as well as context. I then employ historical contexts to understand the history of the American flag and how its meaning has been repurposed at various historical moments to mask larger war-based projects both within the United States own formation, and beyond. I demonstrate that in the same ways, the visual of the flag as hijab is merging colonial tropes with personal practices—invoking a national pride of liberty while ignoring a colonial history of domination. Only through a historical analysis will it then become clear why the image is not one of inclusivity, but actually one that

demonstrates an intellectual violence onto marginalized people being colonized within American spaces—and oppressed into consenting to this colonization.

#### Artistic Production as Products of Economy.

Before I begin my analysis of the liberated Muslim woman figure the phenomenon invoked, and the historical context which it masks, I find it befitting to first analyze the form of the image as an operative in a capital society. Fairey's poster was largely circulated throughout protests against President Donald Trump's bigoted remarks about Muslim and his subsequent immigration policy; the poster was seen held up by countless protestors—many of them Muslim women who mimicked the image and donned the hijab themselves. Beyond critical acclaim or cultural analysis that the image is revolutionary because it invokes Muslims rights to practice freedom of religion while simultaneously solidifying the belonging of Muslims in America, I first point towards a frameworks that can elucidate the relationship of political art as a form and its function in capital market societies. This will enable me to demonstrate, before I can even analyze the particularities of the image, that Fairey's poster in its form services that nation's interest, even when it appears to be a symbol of protest. Fairey's image was commissioned by Amplifier, a self-described design lab whose mission is to change the national narrative<sup>108</sup>. They note that they draw upon an extensive portfolio of artists, commission them with new art, and disseminate those products in “unparalleled numbers through creative space hacks, reaching new audiences and driving real change” (amplifier, 2019). The organization commissioned Fairey's poster as part of the larger series titled “We The People.” The series features three posters<sup>109</sup>: the American flag hijab woman, Latina woman, and a black woman. All three are designed in color hues similar to

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<sup>108</sup> <https://amplifier.org>

<sup>109</sup> Appendix J

the infamous Hope poster Fairey had previously produced; they are animated and colored with shades of the American flag. While I will analyze the particularities of the poster throughout this chapter, my intent now is to establish the function of this image as political art. This is evidenced by both Amplifiers mission, critical reception by various art based organizations<sup>110</sup>, and the most apparent features on the poster itself only the poster of the woman in hijab is additionally colored with an American flag on her head—none of the other posters from the series contain the American flag as a supplement to the color scheme that already invokes the nation’s symbolic colors. The caption and particularities will be analyzed momentarily, but I bring up the presence of the American flag—both in color scheme and a reemphasis on the Muslim woman’s head, to offer context from which the image emerges. Accordingly, in form and intent, I situate this poster as a form of political art. As I will show here, political art has particular functions in service to national interests.

Recall from my introduction that neoliberalism is a project intended to permeate every facet of an individual’s social existence. In a labor driven society, all that is produced is all tied to the labor from the society within which it is produced. In “Camera Obscura,” Marx and Engles offer a framework which can inform a reading of the image in terms of expression and its connection to productivity and labor. They note that artists must work within economic contexts within which they are producing; and what they produce is directly connected histories of labor interests (even if the connection is subconscious in the producer), and manifest themselves, through different modes of expression—such as art. They state that the production of ideas and conceptions is the direct result of man’s material activity and is expressed through the “language of real life” (49). Accordingly, all that is produced by people in various forms—be it art, religion,

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<sup>110</sup> For instance, see Pamela Reynolds “Artists Take Action as Collectors Take Note” (WBUR, 2018).



politics, etc-- is the direct result of their material consciousness—men, they continue, are “conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces” and of all forces that related to such labor conditions (49). In fact, they suggest that even the thought process of humans results as connected to their material real life processes. They emphasize,

The phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises. Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking (49).

All facets of a person’s consciousness are directly connected to the material world, conscious of the production necessary to create such materials. They suggest that ideologies such a politics, morality, and religion cannot exist independently because their own histories and ideologies are a result of material processes produced by people. Marx and Engles determine that material expressions of thought—be it art, politics, etc—are also a product of the material processes involved in the lived experiences of people. Thus, the production of an image in which the American flag wraps the body of a woman in the name of “freedom” can reveal much more than an optimistic representation of values and belonging—it is a byproduct of the economic conditions and interests from which it was produced. The economic conditions are that which ensure the accumulation of labor. Accordingly, Marx and Engles inform a basis by which to begin an understanding of the image: that even expressive art is at least seminally connected to the labor world which the producer services.

As Marx and Friedrich connect the relationship between artistic expression in a capital society—one that depends on labor to accumulate wealth, and subsequent consumption of good-- considering the function and form of political art particularly, in light Fairey’s image as political

art can also enable an understanding of how the form operates in service to a capital society—or, more essentially, the United States. In “Political Art and the Paradigm of Innovation,” Adrian Piper distinguishes between what she calls explicit political art and implicit political art, and their place in a free market capitalist society. Her conceptions of explicit political art and implicit political art help to elucidate the fact that if we move past cultural analysis that hail the image as “revolutionary” towards an understanding on how art form operates in capital society—the poster is not actually able to invoke any form of revolution. In fact, its acclaim demonstrates its implicit service to the nation. As Piper’s analysis will demonstrate, Fairey’s image could not, based on the criteria I will lay out here, be considered explicit political art—or one that could actually disrupt the free market in “revolutionary” ways. Piper notes that explicit political art is work that “frustrates market exchange and consumption,” such that it inverts the common idea that freedom of expression and free market capitalism are somehow necessarily connected (125). She says, “Cutting-edge art thereby exposes the ideological deception by which unrestrained capitalism claims the mantle of freedom for purposes of self-legitimation” (125). According to Piper, rather than dismantling and questioning the foundations of “freedom” in the United States, Fairey’s poster wraps the symbol of American freedom on the head of a woman Muslim woman—emphasizing the importance of such freedoms that theoretically secure her right to practice religion. Furthermore, explicitly political art explicitly questions the American values system of “freedom” that it depends on in order to justify its capital and imperial practices. In a capitalist society, freedom of expression is typically encouraged through the exercise of free-market consumption: essentially, freedom of expression, freedom of self, in modern democracies are an enslavement to external objects advertised to the masses (124). Ironically, however, free-market capitalism actually restricts the freedom to express in art forms or works that undermines the

transactions of the markets such works are intended to be consumed through (Piper, 125). Consequently, explicit political art is typically at the margins of society—it does not have institutionalized legitimacy backing or financial support, and does not attract the mass audiences at the center of contemporary art (Piper, 125). Fairey’s image would have very likely not made it to the center of mainstream had it actually questioned the relationship between freedom and capital consumption. Instead, the image, as I will delineate in later sections, mobilized nationalist values of freedom directly onto hijab.

As it becomes clear that Fairey’s poster, while hailed as revolutionary and used in protests against anti-Muslim rhetoric, did not challenge the conditions or subjugation of Muslim women in any substantial way, I turn to analyze the ways the poster functioned as implicit political art in direct service to reinforcing free market values of the nation. Whereas explicit political art explicitly questions the mantles by which free market capitalism functions, implicit political art is much more subtle—and can actually be seen to reinforce much of the same principles it questions. Piper continues, “...implicitly political art reinforces and exploits the conditions required by unrestrained free-market capitalism...[it] endorses the status quo by taking advantage of it, presupposing it, and declining to interrogate it” (127). In a society functioning through unrestrained free market capitalism, mainly implicit political art enjoys privilege of acclaim, canonization, and wide mass circulation in the mass market (126). As explicitly political art undermines and questions the bases of free-market capitalism, it is marginalized because it threatens the regulation of speech on which capitalism operates on; implicitly political art reinforces and depends on its foundations and is thus rewarded (Piper, 130). Hence, the ability of Fairey’s image to go viral in and of itself signals that it was allowed to go viral since it did not work to disrupt free market values—the flag actually reinforced American values that are

necessary for both corporate interests in the US as well as rhetoric necessary to continue imperial practice. Piper explains, artists of implicitly political art are aware of the cost of full self-expression in a free market capitalist society—and limit themselves as an adequate tradeoff for professional success and institutionalized legitimacy (126). Fairey was commissioned for this artwork by [amplifier.org](http://amplifier.org)<sup>111</sup>. Amplifier sponsored Fairey’s work through their “We the People” initiative, explained as “a nonpartisan campaign dedicated to igniting a national dialogue about American identity and values” ([amplifier.org](http://amplifier.org), 2019). The organization describes itself as an advocacy group, and may work in similar inadvertent ways as outlined in chapter one. Furthermore, implicit political art produces work with commodities that are easily recognizable and digestible to the mass consuming public (Piper, 132). In its form, the poster was able to be widely circulated, and was fashioned in similar style to his also popularly circulated and also widely acclaimed “Hope” poster for the 2008 Presidential campaign of Barack Obama. He drew upon momentum, fame, and nostalgic sentiment that he had garnered previously, and employed the same hues—color schemes/shades of red, white (or off-white) blue, and animation--to invoke the same consciousness in his 2017 series. Accordingly, even if Fairey’s intent was to protest the election of Donald Trump, as news outlets suggested<sup>112</sup>, his position as a previously acclaimed artist had given him a platform of legitimacy. Fairey himself is described as an “American born” street artist, born in 1970 in South Carolina<sup>113</sup>--his father was a doctor, and mother a real estate agent. He attended college and earned a degree in art. His life was shaped by the privileges afforded to him as a white young man in Middle Class America. Furthermore, he did not create anything unfamiliar to the consuming

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<sup>111</sup> <https://amplifier.org/campaigns/we-the-people/>

<sup>112</sup> Abrams, Amah-Rose. “Shepard Fairey releases ‘We the People’ Series to Protest Trump.” *News.Artnet.com* 2017 January 20. Accessed 3 August 2019. <<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/shepard-fairey-releases-we-the-people-series-824468>>

<sup>113</sup> <http://www.artnet.com/artists/shepard-fairey/>

mass public which picked up his work: using the familiar color hues of a widely successful preceding presidential campaign poster, he essentially merged the familiarity of the American flag onto a figure—a Muslim woman—that has perplexed colonizers for centuries.

More importantly, the function of implicit and explicit political art, then, can also elucidate not only how political art services the nation but also how the binary of liberated/dominated first emerges through the form itself. That is, US government and corporate interests actually depend on images such as Fairey's—who on the surface appear to protest, but actually reinforce American values systems that mask economic interests and practices. She explains that a free market capitalist society, everything that is produced is done so for personal profit (Piper, 127). At surface, its government consistently advocates for the voiceless in society, punishes criminal behavior, and regulates policies and procedures to ensure fair economic transactions (Piper, 128). At surface, Fairey's image appears to advocate for the right of Muslim women to practice religion, the form as a means of political resistance and freedom of expression should, by all cultural accounts, invoke the idea that she has the right to practice religious freedom under US law and values systems. However, a society driven by profit motives—unregulated free market capitalism—will always be dysfunctional and unhealthy because it will only honor contracts, for example, when it is beneficial to do so—and it will violate them if it is more costly beneficial (Piper, 128). As Piper explains, "...in an unregulated free-market capitalist society, government performs none of these functions consistently because it is, in reality, a subordinate instrument of capital accumulation that acts only when and where it serves corporate interests to allow this" (Piper, 128-129). In a free market society, all forms of expression are regulated to ensure service to corporate interests (through lobbying, bribing, etc) to ensure maximum profitability; these regulations extend to political speech, corporate speech, and other forms of expression where people tell people the

public what they want to hear, even if it contradicts what they actually believe or act upon (Piper, 131). While at surface the narrative form appears to invoke the ideas that Muslim women can freely express and resist—inevitable regulation of the form that services the state simultaneously ensures. As Fairey’s image gained widespread critical acclaim, it did hardly more than reinvoked American ideals as rights for all United States—reinforcing values that simultaneously operate to subjugate others. Its widespread acceptance asserted a familiarity that ignored the realities of free market capitalism and demonstrated the subjugation of people who are being conditioned to believe that all people can somehow come together under neoliberal “freedoms” to express and resist.

#### American Flag Hijab and American Freedom

At this point, with a theoretical framework on art in a capital society, and the function of political art—one that actually serves US government and corporate interests—I turn to an analysis of Fairey’s poster itself and discuss the larger phenomenon of using an American flag as a hijab from a visual perspective. Here, as the dynamic of liberal/dominated woman is invoked through the form—as at surface a poster of free speech and resistance (liberation) that is actually regulated by marketed by capital interests (domination)—the binary is even more explicit when analyzing the image itself. Fairey’s poster, or the image carrier—features an animation of a woman in hijab with only her head visible. The only article of clothing featured is her hijab, composed of the American flag: half of the hijab on her head is red and white stripes, the other half blue featuring white stars. The unidentified woman is wearing red lipstick that matches the red stripes of the flag. Her animated skin tone is of blue hues, and the rest of the poster is white. Just as the colors of patriotism are red, white, and blue, so too is the entirety of the poster—even her skin tone is an animated blue hue. The American flag hijab drapes down over her shoulders, such that no other

article of clothing—i.e. her shirt—is visible, though the length of the flag suggests that the image centers on her body from her chest up. The color scheme and the central focus of the flag over the woman’s head suggest an occupation of a practice, that the flag—a symbol of American tropes—has overtaken the practice of hijab. Kemmelmeir and Winter note that most Americans associate the American flag with freedom, especially because liberty and freedom constitute the heart of American national identity (861). They say, “With individual freedom being one of the most cherished values in American society, it can be expected that the flag evokes a great sense of commitment to the flag and the nation state it represents” (861). Accordingly, as the flag of the image invokes sentiments of freedom and commitment to national values, sentiments of the “liberated” Muslim women protected under such national values is mobilized. The image suggests that on her head, she wears the flag of “freedom,” and thus this image becomes an embodiment, an icon, of a “free”—liberated—Muslim woman. Yet, as the image of the flag hijab circulates far and widely across the United States, it also perpetuates a liberation of Muslim women particularly in the United States. Because the practice of hijab is absorbed into an American flag, this liberation is reserved exclusively for Muslim women in the United States—suggesting that other Muslim women across the globe are not afforded the same national freedoms.

The woman in the poster is wearing a bold red lipstick that matches the stripes on her hijab. She appears both emboldened with a sharp look in her eyes, and confident with the flag on her head. The expression When merged together visually, the iconography of a Muslim woman donning an American flag as the material of hijab creates a visual of a new modern Muslim woman—red lipstick and all—who is unabashedly “American.” The red lipstick also invokes her commitment to modernity—the iconic Marilyn Monroe, a staple of American popular culture, was infamous for her shade of red lipstick. Accordingly, it suggests that that hijab in American spaces

entails the truest commitment to American national values and modernity. The flap wraps her head and the entirety of what shows from her body to suggest that she embodies American values in the ways that hijab may embody Islamic values for Muslim women.

While the flag hijab visually invokes sentiments of American values, the originators of the image—Ahmed, Fairey, Adhmai, and Munira—explicitly discuss their intent to mobilize notions of freedom through the poster and concept of the flag hijab at large. Fairey’s image is a recreation of a photograph taken nearly ten years prior by a Muslim American male photographer named Rodwan Adhami<sup>114</sup>. Fairey’s subsequent poster emerged in a series of three visuals featuring women from marginalized groups and is reported to have been a direct recreation of Adhami’s work. Adhami’s work, taken nearly ten years prior, did not receive the popular acclaim—likely because of the privilege Fairey enjoys as a white artist over one who is not white, and identifies as Muslim. His interpretation, however, took on new meanings from Adhami’s statement—which was intended to be a bold message of belonging. Fairey’s work was commissioned by the Amplifier Foundation, an art-based activist “design lab” motivated towards social change through grassroots movements<sup>115</sup>. The posters not only began to circulate during protests and across internet spaces, but Amplifier also ran the image as advertisements in *The New York Times* and the *Washington Posts* the day of President Trump’s inauguration<sup>116</sup>. Notably, none of the other women from marginalized groups featured in the other two posters of the collection dawned

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<sup>114</sup> An article in *The Guardian*, “Munira Ahmed: The Woman Who Became the Face of Trump Resistance,” explains that Fairey’s work is based off a photograph taken by Ridwan Adhami, a New York based photographer, over a decade ago near ground zero. Adhami’s initial message with the photograph, he explains, was “...to make a strong statement. So we made it down at Ground Zero to heighten the sense of: ‘We’re here, we’re Muslim, we are New Yorkers and we belong here’” (qtd in Helmore, 2017).

<sup>115</sup> <https://amplifier.org>

<sup>116</sup> As reported by: AFP. “US newspapers carry woman-in-headscarf protest ads.” *Yahoo News*. 20 January 2017. Web. Accessed 10 July 2019 <<https://www.yahoo.com/news/us-newspapers-carry-woman-headscarf-protest-ads-171349485.html>>



American flags on them—though they were animated with the same color schemes. The fact that only the poster featuring the Muslim woman emphasizes a necessity of her emphatic loyalty to American values that work to protect her freedom to practice religion. The woman featured in Fairey’s poster, Munira Ahmed, does not actually regularly practice hijab in her life but she does identify as Muslim—and took on the role of modeling an icon of an American Muslim woman figure. Still, she tells *The Guardian*,

It’s [being the face of the posters] an honor because of what the picture represents...It’s not anti-anything. It’s about inclusion. It’s about saying, ‘I am American just as you are...It’s unfortunate that there are still people who feel America is about excluding people of different origin. That to me is not what the core values of America are about. A lot of the progress of this nation takes places because of immigrants so the idea [floated by Trump on the campaign trail] of a ban on Muslims or a Muslim registry is absurd. What makes this country great is pluralism. Our diversity is the envy of the world (Ahmed qtd in *The Guardian*, 2017).

To Munira Ahmed, the image of dawning the American flag as a hijab embodies American ideals of diversity and pluralism. She also notes that the visual rings of inclusion—the idea that all people should be accounted for in the American cultural experience. To her, dawning the hijab as an American flag means to reinforce the notion that America is about inclusion, and that national progress happens because of immigration. Importantly, she raises the idea of pluralism—that all people should practice their religion freely in the United States.

Ahmed and Fairey both assign a singular meaning with regard to hijab in the United States—one as a Muslim woman and one as a white male artist, respectively. When asked about the meaning of the image, Fairey himself says, “The image of American flag hijab is very powerful...because it reminds people that freedom of religion is a founding principle of the United States and that there is a history of welcoming people to the United States who have faced religious persecution in their homelands” (*The Guardian*, 2017). For Fairey, the image means that people

have religious *freedom* in the United States; the visual of the American flag draping on the woman's head should invoke the ideal that the United States must protect this woman's freedom of religion.

I did not find any source that indicated whether or not Saba Ahmed had seen Adhami's photograph (since Fairey's collection had not yet been created), and if she was inspired by it when she appeared on Fox News donning the American flag as her hijab. Still, her own interpretation took on new meanings. As I note earlier, Ahmed explained in interviews to both *Slate* and *The Huffington Post* that her intent was to visibly demonstrate American Muslim patriotism (Cauterucci, 2015). In fact, she notes that she had initial plans to wear a purple hijab and to drape an American flag, that she found hanging in the corner of her dressing room, over her shoulders. She made a last-minute decision to, instead, use the American flag as her hijab all together. What difference would it have made had the flag been draped on her shoulders versus her head? The difference lies in considering the ways hijab has been presented throughout the media—as a mysterious, oppressive, and backwards practice—and what using the flag as her hijab would signify to spectators. Her intent was to show that—contrary to right wing rhetoric that says Islam is a threat to American democracy, and that cannot perform religious practices while simultaneously being American—they are not mutually exclusive (that one can be Muslim and American at the time same time).

In interviews, both Saba Ahmed, Ahmed, and Fairey assign a common ideal with visual of the American flag as hijab: that as United States citizens, America protects their *freedom*—emphasizing notions of liberation not only rendered through the visual, but through the context of the originators themselves. In all contexts, freedom, again, is mobilized on the site of hijab—either visually through a poster or in the actually of mimicking the phenomenon. Ahmed, in response to

Donald Trump's calls to shut down mosques in America, insists that Muslims should have the freedom to practice religion as well. In an effort to dispel mass perpetuated narratives that posit practicing Islam and being American as mutually exclusive—especially on networks like Fox News—Ahmed acts within the language imperialism has given her access to: that she embodies American patriotism as evidenced by morphing what is otherwise considered an oppressive practice with the symbolic visuals of American freedoms. As I will detail later, the similarity in attached meanings to the poster (or phenomena at large) alludes to the very important reality that even when people who identify as Muslim (Adhami, Ahmed, and Ahmed) participate in creating their narrative, their visibility occurs within mediums and language afforded to them by ideologies that have been shaped by cultural narratives. Fairey, as an artist with at least a certain degree of middle-class white privilege, gave the image a new life, and his success as a previously hailed artist enabled him to remobilize ideas of tolerance and freedom. Accordingly, I have detailed over the last few chapters, notions of freedom and religious tolerance have been historically used to manage difference within the United States, while still maintaining white racial dominance. As I will detail later, culture talk of inclusivity, diversity, pluralism without a historical and economic understanding of how domestic colonialism operates can result in creating an image for one purpose (i.e. inclusivity, emphasize a freedom of religion), and then it is used for another (to reinforce national values that the US can liberate dominated Muslim women abroad).

In further analyzing the ways the American flag hijab not only invokes a liberated/dominated binary of free Muslim women in the US (free to practice religion), it also catapults sentiments of nationalism in specific in association with the flag mediate on Muslim women's bodies. Accordingly, as I have argued that that the image serves national interests in form, and have demonstrated the binary of liberation/domination in visual, considering what the

American flag actually means to the masses, and how the nation (government) assigns symbolic values to national icons can inform the dangers of such a poster. National iconography is an integral component to maintaining the loyalty of a nation's citizens. Webster characterizes flags as the nation's "symbolic containers," and defines a nation's iconography to include any and all symbols of belief—such include the systems currency stamped with the iconic American historic figures, national anthems, important buildings etc (Webster, 2). Such iconography is repeated daily in the lives of citizens, largely intended to cement fundamental values of the system and prevent the masses from disunion against it (Webster, 3). I have made the claim thus far multiple times that the flag invokes sentiments of patriotism and nationalism. This claim is not unfounded. In fact, Kimmelmeier and Winter distinguish between patriotism and nationalism, noting that patriotism is an unwavering love for the United States. Nationalism, in specific, "is related to an ideology of superiority of the ingroup over outgroups and implies the exclusion and even domination over others" (863). Nationalism is associated with militarism, superior attitudes, social dominance hierarchical orders, etc. In a study on the exposure to the American flag, Kimmelmeier and Winter conclude that nationalist values increased in participants exposed to the American flag (871). As the image of the flag on top of a Muslim woman's head is disseminated to the masses, an immediate drawback was the invoking of nationalist values and sentiments—especially in the midst of protest against a policy that discriminated against Muslim immigrations.

As everyday citizens demonstrate their deep loyalty to values they perceive as American, values intrinsically connected to the flag, the widespread presence of such iconography also suggests a particular type of nationalism that is being elicited. The concept of "banal nationalism" as addressed by various scholars (i.e. Carrion 2006, Webster 2011) is the idea of nationalism that is indicated and present in the lives of everyday citizens (Webster, 4). This type of nationalism is

essential for the reproduction of Western nations—it enables consent of reproducing the state through a reservoir of emotion in its citizens that can be rapidly invoked in its (Webster 4). For instance, students declare the pledge of allegiance to the flag daily in many public schools across the nation—reciting the values “liberty and justice for all” daily, even if this is not what has existed in the actuality of American imperial relations. Banal nationalism, for instance, was invoked after the tragic events of 9/11, with the increasing presence of the American flag across the country throughout neighborhoods in the United States. Such devout allegiance of American citizens to national ideals allowed for President George W. Bush to justify his invasion of Iraq in 2003, though Saddam Hussein had nothing to do with the terrorist attacks, nor was there any actual evidence that he had weapons of mass destruction (Webster, 4). This same banal nationalism was invoked in complicated ways as thousands of people protested among many things, the anti-immigration policies and bigoted remarks about the presence of Islam in the United States. The flag was waved valiantly to remind people of American “values,” Fairey’s posters were widespread, and Muslim women donned the flags as hijabs in protest. However, the protests with a flag that simultaneously signifies ideas of American nationalism invokes the same principles that were being contested.

#### “Are Greater than Fear”: Maintaining National Hegemony

The presence of the American flag hijab throughout the reactionary political protests that took place elude to new forms of dangerous banal nationalism taking place on the bodies of Muslim women, and this nationalism is used to secure consent and hegemony over people and countries of the world. Yet, there is one additional component unique to the viral poster that also needs discussion. That is the caption under the animated Muslim woman figure: “We the People Are Greater Than Fear.” This caption is important because, as I will show, reinforced the imperialist construct that entails that Middle East world is somehow threatening the nation’s values. When

the caption is contextualized with the political context of the US government policy from which it emerged, its service to ensuring the domination of Muslim women in practice is underscored. Here, I analyze the caption “Greater than Fear” in the sociopolitical context to show that the image suggests that donning an American flag hijab embodies the liberated Muslim woman figure in the US that people do not need to fear. Whereas cultural analysis may suggest that the widespread dissemination of the poster and the subsequent visibility of Muslim women donning flag hijab solidified their place in American society with this “revolutionary” sign of protest, context and caption can offer a different understanding on the ways it maintained hegemony—and ultimately further invoked an acquiescent liberated Muslim woman figure that is only protected through American freedoms. “We the People” rings of the constitution, which states that that all citizens of the United States are entitled to the protections by the United States constitution. The reason the caption is important is because Fairey’s poster was produced and circulated in response<sup>117</sup> to President Donald Trump’s infamous “Muslim Ban<sup>118</sup>”. The caption sits as a sub-caption to the larger caption “We The People,” it lies directly underneath “We the People” in the same color blue font—all letters are capitalized. Though all three posters of the series contain the same central caption “We the People” under the figures of the women, only the poster with the Muslim woman figure reads “Are Greater Than Fear” under its own. The other two posters in the series read “Defend Dignity” (the Latina figure) and “Protect Each Other” (the black woman figure). Taken together, only Muslim women are linked to notions of fear.

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<sup>117</sup> See Amplifier “We the People Shepard Fairey “Greater than Fear.” Accessed 21 November 2019: <<https://amplifier.org/portfolio-posts/people-shepard-fairey/>>

<sup>118</sup> As called by organizations such American Civil Liberties Union and many other liberal news outlets and organizations. The Trump administration vehemently denied that this executive order was a ban on “Muslims,” though all seven countries on the ban list have Muslim majority populations.

According to Amplifier, the title of the image and caption itself signifies Muslims should not be feared. In fact, in the organization's description of the image, it says, "As the Trump administration's Muslim Ban continues to wage a war on Islamic faith, the artwork's message will keep ringing loud and clear. There is no room for fear, only freedom" (2017). I read this intent—"no room for fear, only freedom"—in combination with the visual as one that suggests that people can overcome their fear of Muslims because Muslim women embrace American freedoms. The organization itself does not define what notions of freedom there is in the midst of the "Muslim ban," but this ambiguity is a stake in and of itself. Amplifier suggests, as I will detail the rhetoric of the ban momentarily, that people should not fear Muslim immigrants coming into the United States and that American freedoms should be protected. The image then suggests that such freedoms are protected because Muslim women embrace and embody American values as evidenced by the hijabs on their heads. It suggests that American values are as true to them as their religious practice. Accordingly, to overcome fear, Muslim women can invest in the freedom loving liberated women, but as I detailed in my introduction, freedoms in a capital society necessarily come at the expense of dominating someone else. With this unclear description of what freedom entails, and a visual that places the flag as a replacement with what people may "fear" (hijab, Muslims, etc), what is suggested is that Muslims who embrace American freedoms are not to be feared, but other Muslims not in that visual are not accounted for.

The "Muslim Ban" restricted immigration from seven Muslim Majority countries labeled as a threat to United States of America. Formally known as "Executive Order 13769: Executive Order Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States," the order called for a restriction on travel into the United States from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and

Yemen<sup>119</sup>. Interestingly, while there is not enough room in this project to trace the individual histories of United States meddling in each of the countries targeted, one can easily trace obvious links between the United States and these countries in the last two decades alone<sup>120</sup>. In any case, the justification of the order reads:

In order to protect Americans, the United States must ensure that those admitted to this country do not bear hostile attitudes toward it and its founding principles. The United States cannot, and should not, admit those who do not support the Constitution, or those who would place violent ideologies over American law. In addition, the United States should not admit those who engage in acts of bigotry or hatred (including “honor” killings, other forms of violence against women, or the persecution of those who practice religions different from their own) or those who would oppress Americans of any race, gender, or sexual orientation (Trump, 2017).

The order hardly defines what such hostile attitudes entail. Still, such vague hostility is threatening the United States. While I acknowledge the large resistance to the ban from people all across the nation, the government is what largely shapes the national narrative to pursue its policies. Recall my discussion in the introduction on ways in which the United States has historically created a “domestic” culture that is threatened by “foreign” forces that wish to dismantle American democracy and freedom. Masked as protecting the American people, the policy says that, in order to protect its citizens from such a threat, it should not admit anyone into the country with such mindsets. No mind-set vetting was in place. Instead, the administration made broad strokes to include a travel ban on any and all people coming from the seven countries. While people have different reasons for traveling, the policy explains that “Deteriorating conditions in certain countries due to war, strife, disaster, and civil unrest increase the likelihood that terrorists will use

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<sup>119</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-protecting-nation-foreign-terrorist-entry-united-states/>

<sup>120</sup> For example, the 2003 Iraq war by George W. Bush, behind the rhetoric of “Good Muslim Bad Muslim” (as identified by Mahmood Mamdani, Saddam Hussein is a dictator and that Iraq beholds “weapons of mass destruction.” The US involvement with Syria can be traced to the Obama Administration’s commission the “Islamic Caliphate” (ISIS) and its support in dismantling the Syrian government under the Assad regime.



any means possible to enter the United States. The United States must be vigilant during the visa-issuance process to ensure that those approved for admission do not intend to harm Americans and that they have no ties to terrorism” (Trump, 2017). Hundreds of thousands of people, even those with previously approved visas, were subsequently denied entry into the United States. “We the People Are Greater than Fear” in Fairey’s image is subsequently thought to have been a visually emboldened response to the rhetoric of fear the Order uses as the basis for its justification—the language that was meant to invoke “fear” from what seemed like an imminent attack of terror. In fact, Amplifier had encouraged people to download the poster and email President Trump stating what it meant to them<sup>121</sup>. Accordingly, as the Order calls to protect the United States from immigrants of Muslim majority countries—who would supposedly come into the United States with violent ideologies and potentially cause terror—the caption says that the American people are “greater than fear.” The poster suggests that the American people are not afraid to let Muslims into the country, and to emphasize this notion, the caption sits just beneath a central image of a Muslim woman (a recognizable icon of people who practice Islam) wrapped in the familiarity the American flag.

However, I insist that what is meant to dispel fear actually reinforces a subconscious link between fear and hijab—and maintains domination over what is otherwise considered a “threat” to United States values. The term “fear” directly under a Muslim woman in hijab links the two concepts—that Muslim women are to be somehow feared, even though it appears to be suggesting the opposite. This dynamic—the further assurance of the image that Muslim women remain dominated—becomes apparent when considered from the aspect of the relationship between the

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<sup>121</sup> See, Hillard John. “Obama ‘Hope’ Artist Returns with ‘We the People’ Posters.” *The Boston Globe*. 20 January 2017. Accessed 21 November 2019. < <https://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/2017/01/20/obama-hope-artist-returns-with-people-posters/4f3Fp8gRgDXCd5Xtreq2QN/story.html>>.

producer and spectator, and between the image produced and what the image entails. Considering the ways in which woman have been objectified by male gaze can help elucidate the connection between the dominance of a producer with respect to male gaze and woman as his object of gaze. Again, for emphasis, the origin of the image of the woman bearing an American flag hijab was captured by a male photographer named Ridwan Adhami—about ten years prior, still before Saba Ahmad appeared on Fox news and before Shepard Fairey (also male artist) reproduced Adhami's image. In both instances—the original photo by Adhami and its recreation by Fairey--the spectacle was created by male interpretations of what a Muslim woman in American spaces looks like. In the context of classic Hollywood film, a medium in and of itself at the center of pop culture, Mulvey explores women as the object of the male gaze, and the ways male fantasies are projected onto female figures. Her work is helpful in understanding the way the male producer overcomes his fear through his subject of gaze—essentially through representations that ensure his own dominance. Though Mulvey's theory works regarding the representation of male producers of film in Hollywood, I find this analysis useful here from the perspective of the male producer of an image meant to achieve mainstream acclaim. Here, as I have discussed the ways Fairey's poster and the subsequent adoption of the American flag hijab mediates what a "liberated" Muslim woman figure should be in the context of fear, Mulvey's work enables me to work through one aspect of the simultaneous domination I suggest this figure implies when considered from the standpoint of the producer.

Mulvey establishes that, as a world ordered by sexual imbalance of male/female, and a subsequent active/passive division of labor, the "pleasure of looking" has been split such that active is male and passive is the female figure (156). Male artists, according to this structure, emerge as figures with power, and are enabled to advance stories and create narratives pertaining

to female objectification (Mulvey, 156). In both instances, both Adhami and Fairey were in positions of domination as they visualized what a visual of a “liberated” Muslim women should look like. Furthermore, the spectator is directly influenced by the position of the male creator of the female object. Accordingly, male artists project their own desires for power and control over the female icon, and his gaze extends towards that of the spectator audience. I am begging the question on whether or not Fairey’s position as a white male artist, himself perhaps fearful of the mystery of women in hijab, produces an image of her in familiar visuals to dispel his own fears. The reason I invoke Fairey’s position here rather than Adhami’s is because it was Fairey who added the caption “Are Greater than Fear” in the recreation of Adhami’s photograph. Interestingly, I do note that Fairey’s image does subvert the objectification to some extent because the image of the woman stares directly into the eyes of the view. However, I note that this is offset by the overall dominance of the American flag which takes up the larger part of the image, circles around her face, and completely covers what are presumed to be her shoulders and the remainder body part of this headshot (chest up).

As for the male producers of art, in the context of the active/male and passive/female object, Mulvey discusses male anxiousness associated with female icons. Female icons pose deep psychoanalytic problems for males—because her sexual difference, her absence of the material part which determines category, ensures their symbolic order as “law of the father” (157). This phenomenon, which she calls, castration anxiety is threatened when “woman as icon” is displayed for the gaze<sup>122</sup> and enjoyment by men—who are the active controllers and producers of such (157).

There are two avenues by which the active/male producer can overcome castration anxiety:

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<sup>122</sup> Though I have noted that I do not intend for this project to be a religious interpretation on hijab, it is important to note, here, that while Muslim men do not wear hijab in the physical apparent sense, the Quran does mandate a form of “hijab” for them. This specifically entails casting down their gaze towards the opposite gender. The Quran says,

...preoccupation with the re-enactment of the original trauma (investigating the women, demystifying her mystery), counterbalanced by devaluation, punishment or saving of the guilty object...; or else complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous (hence over-valuation, the cult of the female star (157).

The second avenue is particularly eye-opening when considering the situation of the image and from whose imagination these images emerged. As the narrative of Islam as a threat to democracy, a religion that promotes violence, and one that oppresses women is perpetuated across media outlets, it is not far-fetched that there must necessarily be an effort to combat these representations. As noted in previous chapters by historical examinations, the ideologies of the present day are deeply rooted in imperial agendas and discourse that situates a modern American world versus a barbaric civilization that must be “freed” abroad—much of this work has taken place directly on the bodies of Muslim women. Muslim women have functioned as mystery that must necessarily be unveiled to colonizers. Fairey’s poster takes Adhami’s photograph a step further with the inscription “We the People Are Greater than Fear”—reinforcing the notion that, indeed, people who identify as Muslim are a source of fear for Americans, as the media heavily perpetuates such narratives of “terrorism” caused by Muslims across the globe. With this deep-rooted ideology perpetuated through media, it would not be unusual to suggest that the artists (in this case, male) approach the representation of a Muslim women who will not unveil with an intent to reveal a layer of mystery they cannot otherwise attain because she will not uncover. Nevertheless, wrapping her in fabric of a visual that symbolizes democracy, freedom, and ultimately patriotism demonstrates the desire of the male artists in the active role of creation to maintain hegemony over a Muslim women’s place in American society.

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“Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them: And Allah is well acquainted with all that they do” (translated by Yusuf Ali, 24:30).

## History and Today: Immigration Practices and the American Flag

### **Immigration and Maintaining Domination**

As I Fairey's image in the context of protest and cultural critical claim without historical reference has also mislead the masses into thinking the "Muslim Ban" was a new discriminatory policy. Fairey's poster circulated far and wide amid protests against the "Muslim Ban." This sparked endless cultural conversations and social critics on belonging, freedom, citizenship, etc. However, without history, or a historical frame of reference, the social critics miss an important understanding on how immigration has been shaped by US foreign interests. What is considered as a drastic discriminatory policy turns out to be not really that drastic when examined from a historical perspective, as it is not the first time the United States has discriminated against Muslim immigrants or denied them citizenship. Nor can the image, through the rhetoric of "We the People," as a larger campaign from which the poster emerged, aide protestors in insisting that citizenship is actually open to all people.

A look at how citizenship and immigration has been dealt with historically by the US government can elucidate the subtle ways Islam has been racialized at various historical moments—specifically with regards to immigration policies—depending on United States foreign interests abroad. In "Racing Religion," for instance, Moustafa Bayoumi discusses how Islam has been racialized<sup>123</sup> at various historical moments, in specific, examining the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS) program under the President George W. Bush's administration. The program was instated on September 11, 2002, and "was a government mandated system of recording and surveillance that required all nonimmigrant males in the United

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<sup>123</sup> Here, Bayoumi depends on Fredrickson's definition of racism which "exists when one ethnic group or historical collectivity dominates, excludes, or seeks to eliminate another on the basis of differences that it believes to be hereditary or unalterable" (qtd in Bayoumi, 275). Bayoumi explains that the ways one's religion is apprehended can assume racist characters (276).

States over the age of 16 who are citizens and nationals from select countries to be interviewed under oath, finger printed, and photographed by a Department of Justice official” (Bayoumi, 271). This practice essentially racialized Muslims already in the United States by forcing every citizen—the majority would be Muslims—from the listed nations to register themselves for additional surveillance and monitoring every time they entered and exited the country. These procedures were required when people that met such criteria entered and exited borders of the country (Bayoumi, 271). Prior to this, there was also a program commissioned that targeted the same criteria of people, but those that already lived *in* the United States (271). People who were targeted by NSEERS had to register upon entry into the country, register again if they stayed more than 30 days, and then again annually (272). Interestingly, the initial first five countries of President Bush’s program were five out of the nine countries Trump’s executive order of 2017 included—Iran, Iraq, Libya, Sudan, and Syria. The countries under Bush’s program then expanded to 25, and included essentially all nine registered under Donald Trump’s program. The parallel between the programs was generally overlooked. Recall my earlier discussion that citizens were afraid to question the logic behind President Bush’s commission of the 2003 war in Iraq from fear of being deemed unpatriotic. In Chapter 1, I also noted how the events of 9/11 and government rhetoric creating a “good Muslim/bad Muslim” climate lead Muslims in the United States to frantically declare their allegiance to the government policies. It is little wonder that such similarities in programs were overlooked, as Muslims were too scared to even question their resistance to a program marketed (though not in reality) to vet terrorists.

Bayoumi’s analysis also sheds light on historical approaches the United States has had with immigration policy and shows the ways in which the United States has specially dealt with people of Muslim majority countries to ensure its dominance and hegemony. Again, here, historical

insight can bring forth the continuous domination working through hijab on the figure of the Muslim woman icon in Fairey's image. Such include Between 1904 to 1944, as U.S. citizenship (under the Naturalization Act) had been reserved for "free white persons," religion, particularly Islam, played a primary role in determining one's race when seeking naturalization (Bayoumi, 278). In cases, for example, courts repeatedly commented on the inability for a Muslim man to assimilate into white Christian culture (Bayoumi, 279). Bayoumi contends that such laws were not, as different scholars suggest, a matter of white identity politics. Instead, at different historical moments, citizenship depended on the political climate at the time—depending on United States interests and maintaining global dominance over the rest of the world (with specific regard to Muslim majority countries). For instance, Bayoumi references the case of *Hassan* (an Arab Muslim) in 1942, a Muslim man denied citizenship during a time in which the political culture in the United States did not allow for it. In contrast, he also cites that case of *Mohreiz* (also an Arab Muslim) in 1944, just two years after *Hassan*, whose citizenship was granted as the United States' political situation had changed. At the time, the United States was "shedding its isolationist past for global dominance as the war nears its conclusion" (284). He says, "the point is to recognize how labor or civil unrest or, especially for our purposes, war aids in producing citizenship and inclusion, which in the history of the United States, functions through political power and along the definitional axis of race" (285). What really determines citizenship does not really depend on whether or not the nation trying to keep itself safe from terrorism—it depends on war and imperial interests. Without historical insight, these motives are unclear. Bayoumi notes that President Bush's program is not just about racializing Islam—constructing Islam as a race as it implements blatant discriminatory practices towards Muslims—but that it demonstrates the ways the United States continues to deal with immigration in response to political turmoil (287). As I discussed

previously in the context of inciting irrational fears of Muslims, President Trump ran his campaign on propaganda and elicited fears of terrorism with the threat of the Islamic State (ISIS) operating in the Middle East. The only difference between his policies and those of his predecessors, I suggest, is that perhaps his rhetoric was more abrasive than that of President Bush. “We the People”—calling for citizenship and inclusion of all people in the US--under the face of the animated Muslim woman really depends on whether government deems she is American enough.

Importantly, Bayoumi notes that the special registration program was really a form of political theater, to act as if it were “hard at work” cleansing the country of the threat of “Islamic terrorism” at the expense of Muslims in the United States (Bayoumi, 288). During this performance, where the public is both the actors and the audience, the public gradually “understands what is politically acceptable” (Bayoumi, 288). That is, the instatement of policies and protective measures are a merely empty performance to which the mass public witnesses and accepts based on urgencies and rhetoric mobilized by the nation to justify such practices. This historical reference and insight enable an understanding of the ways President Trump was performing a “Muslim Ban” to deliver on his campaign promises—though nothing about the ban was actually anomalous or new considering immigration history and policy. In light of the fact the ban is simply consistent with previous immigration policies regarding Muslims in the United States, the ban itself (instated within the first 100 days of his presidency) was a performance by Trump to demonstrate to his base of followers that he delivers on his promise to keep America safe. Combatting this rhetoric of fear fell onto the bodies of Muslim women, who suddenly needed to bear the flag atop their heads to push back against discriminative policies. Yet, the emerging image and dawning of the flag hijab did little more than serve the nation to reinforce national values which were simultaneously invoked as needing to be protected. I take Bayoumi’s notion on



performance a step further to insist that image that what emerged from that context in protest was also a performance—and so too, perhaps, was embodying the image by dawning the American flag as a hijab in real life. Accordingly, with this image, the public also sees a quick shot of an image--created by a white citizen--of the right to citizenship for Muslims (women who identify as Muslim) living in the United States. I ask, did wrapping a Muslim woman in the hijab of an American flag satisfy deep rooted fears that they cannot assimilate? Did it satisfy the notion that Muslims are not “white” enough, and the image shows that they can be white? Are they American enough if their hijab is literally the American flag? These questions are rhetorical, and the answer is no. However, as Fairey, a white artist, recreated the visual as part of a social protest, this was the means—the language, even visual--that women who identified as Muslim has access to when they embodied the image as protest. In other words, this is what the language of imperialism—capitalist, economic, and historically rich in all facets of society--had afforded them to express their voices: that even their means of protest, their language of expression, has been shaped by imperial interests and hegemonic ideologies.

### **American Flag and Empire**

Amid the political context in which Fairey’s image first emerged, historical reference that moves beyond representation and visibility of Muslim women can show the ways that this was not the first time the United States had restricted immigration against Muslims—and that the project of national construction continues to fall on the backs of Muslim women, as resistance to Trump’s program largely fell on representation of hijab. Furthermore, investing in the phenomenon of dawning the American flag hijab not only reinforces a liberated Muslim woman figure (liberated through the symbolism of freedom of the flag), but it also implicitly consents to violent colonial histories that symbolism of the flag erases. I also note that dawning the mimicked phenomenon is

an embodiment of new forms of colonial violence taking place quite physically on Muslim women's bodies. Critical acclaim hailed the act (of donning a flag hijab) as one that embodies notions of equality for all and freedom of religion for its citizens. However, considering the ways the flag has functioned in history can elucidate the ways the image incites a continued domination of Muslim women and continues to perpetuate the liberated/dominated binary figure—here, the flag not only suggests that only American Muslim women are liberated (while others are dominated) and entitled to freedoms, but another aspect of the ways the flag hijab itself simultaneously works to ensure her domination as it masks historical realities.

Again, I can only offer glosses of history as it is not the scope of the project to illuminate all instances in which the flag has served in American colonial practices of conquest and domination. Still, relevant instances can illuminate my point on the consequence of only looking towards cultural frameworks that deal with representational practices and notions of choice—in this case, Muslim women begin to symbolically embrace the forces that oppress them. For instance, Kimmelmeier and Winter note that the flag rarely invokes the “darker aspect of American history, such as the enslavement of Black Americans or the genocide of Native Americans” (862). Values that are inherently good are typically associated with the flag; post 9/11 there was a surge in the presence of the American flag all over the nation as people frantically renewed their commitment to values that were largely posited as threatened<sup>124</sup>. Though I do not have enough space in this chapter to divulge an entire history of the American flag's presence and symbolic value in its various moments of historical political upheaval<sup>125</sup>, there are considerable moments of America's history of empire with which symbolism of the American flag has aided to

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<sup>124</sup> For example, when President George W. Bush told the country in various speeches that the terror attacks were attacks on the nation's values of freedom and democracy.

<sup>125</sup> For more the history of the American flag, see Woden Teachout *Capture the Flag: A Political History of American Patriotism* (2009) and Arnold Testis *Capture the Flag: The Stars and Stripes in American History* (2010).

mask or reduce. I offer a few examples to make my point that beyond cultural framework, historical inquiries can reveal the actual violence masked by American colonialism both in the US's formation of itself, its presence overseas, and the ways such are masked today through rhetoric of neoliberal values of nationalism and freedom. Most recently, for example, the United States was able to invoke sentiments of nationalism and patriotism in order to rally support for the unfounded 2003 War in Iraq—this was partly accomplished by the increased use of the American flag by the government at the time (Webster, 2). As defined earlier, sentiments and emotions of unwavering nationalism, through banal nationalism, were evoked; people became afraid to even question the logic behind George W. Bush's commission of war on the basis of weapons of mass destruction for fear of being accused of being unpatriotic (Webster, 2). At the time, the American flag was strategically used to perpetuate by the government (through increasing visual presence) to illicit a sense of American pride, through a symbol of values, that must be protected at any and all costs. As the flag evokes notions of nationalism and pride to the general public, when Muslim women dawn the flags on their heads as their Islamic practice in overwhelming numbers, and people (Muslim and non-Muslim alike) circulate Fahey's posters in the protest, Muslim women become bearers of nationalism. Recall in my introduction the ways American neoliberal freedoms necessarily come at the expense of others. Accordingly, Muslim women validate the American freedom that the flag evokes, while consenting the domination (ie war practices) it entails upon others outside of America.

Here, I draw upon two important aspects the flag alludes towards, as historicized by Arnold Testis. The first is the fight for "freedom" both within the United States and beyond to ask who is entitled to freedom, and what expense does it take shape. Taken from the standpoint of the image, here, I ask what types of liberation is being incited when this same flag is incited as a personal

religious practice (hijab). The second is the flag's implicit symbol of empire and conquest—though not evident even in its most obvious visual. Again, from the visual's standpoint, I ask what simultaneous dominative colonial practices are needed to achieve such freedoms (liberations)—and subsequently masked by a symbol. For the first, Testis notes that the American flag, since its inception was intrinsically connected with notions of “freedom--” as its presence displayed as early as 1814 as people saluted and sang the Star Spangled Banners infamous “land of the free and home of the brave,” and later in 1831 “sweet land of liberty” (Testis, 54). Yet, who was entitled to that freedom was very specific. At its inception, that freedom, or “equality of rights” to all citizens obviously did not extend to black people, as the country was built on the backs of slavery. Later, abolitionists called on colored and black men alike to rally around the flag in order to destroy slavery and attempt at a “multiracial democracy in the years of Reconstruction” (Testis, 55). However, Testis notes that even in the period post war, the same rhetoric of “freedom” that was used to “free” the slaves was remobilized in order to restore dominance for the whites in the South (Testis, 55-56). The rhetoric of “freedom” was used to ensure that whites in the South had the *freedom* to govern themselves independently as Southern states, establishing segregation and reaffirming white supremacy (Testis, 55).

The debate over masking the abhorrent history of Southern racism and segregation with a flag continues to today, and I liken the symbolism of the severity of the American flag on a Muslim women's body to the severity many feel regarding the hanging the Confederate flag. While Muslim women and black slaves have had very different, complex histories in the United States, the masking of the violence each marginalized group has experienced occurs in serving national interests. Recently, for example, the Confederate flag of the South is often flown as a symbol of national pride, of heroic valor, and brave fought militancy to protect American values (Strother,

302). Proponents of the flag of use the terms “tradition” and “heritage” to justify its re-introduction into states in the 1950s and 1960’s. However, the flag symbolizes a nation that was built on slavery, racism, and subsequent segregation (Strother, 302). Accordingly, the implied meaning of its continued presence, despite the public debates its presence has sparked, is that the South would remain preserved for white culture (Strother, 312). Often, many politicians in support of the emblem tend to rewrite Southern history behind a universal story of heritage and struggle, one that mask the vulnerabilities of the blacks that suffered along the way (Strother, 312). Currently, despite many whites in the South claiming that Confederate flag is not a racially charged symbol (Strother, 312), supporting the flag only masks racist undertones that are still alive today. In similar ways, the flag functions with a duality on the head of the Muslim women—she has the freedoms of choice to practice religion in the hijab in the US, while the US simultaneously uses these freedoms afforded to her to dominate others--justified by a rhetoric that it seeks to offer the rest of the world the same freedoms. As Muslim women dawn the flags on their heads, they inadvertently nationalisms that overlook the ways the government used national values to invade countries overseas.

The second aspect of the flag that can only be illuminated through history is its visual role in the context of empire and conquest since its inception. Since I have analyzed the visual aspect of the ways the flag invokes to nationalism audiences, and as I argue that the hijab flag denotes an intellectual violence that results from the domestic colonization Muslim women are subjugated to invest in, understanding how deep rooted the flag has been in the actual service of conquest will illuminate just how dangerous donning the flag as hijab is. Testis points out that the American flag is a unique flag in that it changes with time, depending on territory and conquest (Testis, 79). In 1818, after the number of stars and stripes on the flag had varied with the addition of each new

state to the union, legislatures decided that thirteen stripes would remain and one new star would be added with the addition of each new state (Testis, 79). For example, during the war with Mexico (1846-1847), American colonizers were enthused by the prospect of adding new stars to the flag with the conquest of Mexico and nearby territories. Such conquest and war driven with justification that white men would populate all of North America in the name of “Manifest Destiny,” which claimed that this young revolution would spread its democracy and populate the lands (Testis, 79). As Testis describes, however, it was “a democracy that had ‘sympathies on behalf of liberty, universal liberty,’ and that was hungry for the lands of others, ruthless in its westwards march of conquest, contemptuous of people different from itself” (79). Earliest conquests entailed washing out “confused and mixed blood” of inhabited native populations, with genocides, sacrificing any and all blood it took to cleanse the territories to establish white dominance (79). During such expansion, while the flag had not accompanied conquests prior, the flag became increasingly visible on such conquests (Testis, 79). In the midst of genocide, blood, murder and the usurpation of land—the flag was raised in pride of the expansion of American land. Yet, even after the fifty stars totaled the nation’s state, American colonial practices had never ended—and empire continued in the midst of different world regions through war practices (i.e. West Africa and the slave trade) and new forms of imperial control. The flag denotes that there are only 50 states in the union, even though territories such as Puerto Rico are still very much colonized by the United States. Through its historical conquests, even if not overt, the flag’s presence continues to flutter across the Arab world in the United States continued to military presence that enable it to secure interests. For instance, in 2003, a massive American flag was hurled over a twenty-foot statue of Saddam Hussein just before it (the statue) was torn down in the streets—and the United States would declare “mission accomplished” for Iraqi Freedom (Testi, 132). The flag serves as a

symbolic gloss over the brutal history of colony and conquest that existed with the addition of each new star. Most importantly, it masks United States imperial interests behind sentiments of pride, nationalism, and patriotism. Such values are justified in the name of freedom through wars and preserving American democratic values. Thus, when women who identify as Muslim embrace this symbol superimposed onto an exoteric religious marker, she denotes that she too overlooks these colonial practices and violent histories that have subjugated people. Rather than donning the flag amid land conquests, Muslim women themselves donned the flag as their hijabs amid restrictive immigration policy while simultaneous involvement in the Middle East continues.

There have been instances in which the American flag was used to specifically express disdain opposition to United States empire practices. Notably, in the 1960's, the flag was used to demonstrate severe oppositional protests to US involvement in overseas countries such as Vietnam. Such historical reference can also show when the flag is used to question government practices and values in comparison to the ways in which it was used in protest during the "Muslim Ban" protests. In stark disapproval to the United States commissioning of the Vietnam War, protestors took to the streets across the nation, publicly burning the flag, trashing it, and some companies began to fly it only half-staff (Testi, 99). These demonstrative visuals were meant to signal a message to government that stated the practices of empire go against national values (Testi, 99). However, desecration of the flag was regarded as highly controversial and alienated many who wanted to join the movement against the war, because the American flag, to many, symbolized working class values of freedom (Testi, 100). Importantly, during the Vietnam war, when the masses opposed government practices, war, and murder overseas the flag was not raised. Instead, it was burned, desecrated, etc. It was ritualistically destroyed in public forums to denote a public opposition to militancy that was taking place in other countries—actions that went against

“American values.” While desecrating the flag did get mixed reactions from the public, the American flag was largely not visible at all during such protests. In contrast, while disputing the government’s commissioning of the “Muslim-ban,” people not only raised the flag held with pride, and Muslim women accepted it superimposed on their religious practice. The symbolic sentiments it holds for the nation were re-invoked and reinforced, and emphasized as acceptable even with regard to Muslims as Muslim women themselves embraced the emblem as their hijabs.

### New Forms of Violence and Muslim Women’s Bodies

The values mediated by the image of the American flag hijab, and the consequent acceptance and reenactment of the image by women who identify as Muslim is indicative of the extent to which domestic colonialism has operated on marginalized groups. I argue that the existence of this image, the production of it and its different forms it has taken, is actually a visual enactment of an emerging intellectual violence happening through hijab (on Muslim women’s bodies) in the US. In a colonial context, Frantz Fanon explains the extent to which colonial violence operates even in subtle forms to establish colonial order. Fanon’s work elucidates an understanding of the ways violence is not just a physical form of abuse and punishment to contain the colonized, but it is violence such that the colonizers’ ways of life are imposed to permeate and erase the identities of the colonized. In *Wretched of the Earth*, he explains violence “...governed the ordering of the colonial world, which tirelessly punctuated the destruction of the indigenous social fabric, and demolished unchecked the system of reference of the country’s economy, lifestyles and modes of dress...” (6). In historical forms, as colonialism takes shape, violence is a literal subjugation of the colonizers’ modes of thinking, doing, economics in every aspect of the victims’ existence. Such violence is not only violence in the physical sense, but that it is a literal imposition—stated and forcefully adopted through division, missionaries etc--of white



values on colonized people. While I have emphasized details in the physical presentation of Fairey's poster, I remind the reader of the caption in Fairey's poster, and of her modern red lipstick that perfectly matches the red stripes in her American flag hijab. It is worth mentioning the ways colonial powers have ironically pointed to hijab as evidence of violence upon Muslim women. The practice of veiling itself has been associated by the Western cognizance as evidence of the barbaric nature and excessive nature Muslim women are subjected to (Yegenoglu, 116). However, as such hegemonic discourses interpret Muslim women, other techniques of disciplining, controlling, and training notions of the contrasted "civil" women are elucidated (Yegenoglu, 116). As Meyda Yegenoglu notes, "Emphasizing the culturally specific nature of embodiment reveals, however, that the power exercised upon bodies by veiling is no more cruel or barbaric than the control, supervision, training and constraining of bodies by other practices such as bras, stilettos heels, corsets, cosmetics, and so on" (116). The violence of the practice of hijab can possibly be undone with a superimposition of the American flag, while the "nonviolent" pressures of cultural beauty—red lipstick—will remain.

Fanon also explains how such subtle violence, even during the process of decolonization, is able to subtly continue with hardly any notice. During decolonization, the colonizers offer the supremacy of Western values, by way of insisting that the colonized need to depend on them to avoid regression—as such values have proven to be "worthwhile" and "reliable" (Fanon, 8). Fanon notes, "The supremacy of white values is stated with such violence, the victorious confrontation of these values with the lifestyle and beliefs of the colonized is so impregnated with aggressiveness..." (8). He continues to note that colonizers will not back off of the colonized until the colonized declare that white values are in fact supreme—they ensure the colonized have adapted their values (8). This subtle persistent invasion continues to operate because, as Fanon

explains, the bourgeoisie of the colonizers make connections with certain colonized intellectuals (8). In fact, they, through contacting the colonized “elite”—or the intellectuals—to organize defense campaigns in the culture, technology and other facets of social life (Fanon, 9). Such intellectuals have often been educated by the colonizers, and the colonizer value system has seeped into every facet of their lives; thus, they strive to mediate peaceful place between the colonizer and the colonized for coexistence (Fanon, 9). Through academics, the colonialist bourgeoisie are able to maintain that Western values are essential to man even during periods of liberation (Fanon, 11). Over the course of the past chapters, I have demonstrated the ways authors align themselves with values largely considered to be American, ones I have proved are neoliberal constructs that serve national market interests. In Chapter 1, for example, political advocacy groups and action committees intended to advocate to protect the freedoms of Muslims in the United States, actually mobilize a prototypical Muslim woman that is acceptable to national interests—to white American values. Her hijab mobilized constructs such as tolerance, and reduced freedom to a matter of choice for Muslim women. To its own degree, a similar violent dynamic between the United States as a colonizer and the presence of the Muslim woman—historically colonized—continues to play out through the imposition of values on all people and practices.

### Conclusion

If spectators should equate the American flag with progress, modernity, freedom—or a society that ensures all of these values for its citizens, does using an American flag as hijab also denote a more modern, free, and progressive Muslim women in the United States? The visual was generally hailed far and wide across popular media outlets and adopted by numerous protestors as a revolutionary act: one that signifies the merging of an Islamic practice as one with American values of freedom. With the American flag standing in as hijab, protestors pushed back against

bigoted rhetoric espoused by the President Trump's campaign that Muslims were somehow a threat to the United States, or that they hated America and the "values" it stands for. However, donning the American flag with such hope and promise, assigning it densely vague ideas of progress and patriotism, masks the underlying imperial project that took place in part on the site of hijab and Muslim women's bodies abroad. Accordingly, when women who identify as Muslim donned this hijab themselves, considering the impact of this phenomenon becomes especially confusing and complicated. Here, Muslim women in the US donned the American flag in protest against bigotry that displaced their sense of belonging, and simultaneously used it to assert that American values (or what the flag stands for) secured a sense of freedom. As they donned this emblem, the American government masks their overseas agendas of conquest and occupations in places they label as "barbaric," "backwards," or "uncivil," which they justify as evidenced in part by the presence/absence of hijab. The image is not a symbol of protest, but one of acceptance--of consent--to the practices behind strategies of banal nationalism.

## CONCLUSION: MOVING PAST IDENTITY POLITICS

In the concluding chapter of Leila Ahmed's *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence from the Middle East to America*, amid her final take on the social justice issues that Muslim Americans have taken on in recent years (post 9/11), she quotes Abdul Ghafar's sentiment on experience of Muslim women in America: "most of us are exhausted with the hijab debate and envision a future where we move beyond the judgement of women with and sans hijab" (qtd in Ahmed, 284). As a woman who practices hijab myself, I am also growing weary of this conversation on Muslim women that must inevitably center around hijab. In my own conclusion, I'd like to echo Abdul Ghafar and others' sentiments, not only noting the exhaustion of the topic, but also push this idea further to note that the real and serious stakes of placing the identity of women who identify as Muslim dependent on hijab. Through the course of this dissertation, what I've attempted to do is highlight the ways that neoliberalism subjugates people such that even through modes of resistance, they are inadvertently investing in the same constructs they are pushing back against.

In a changing society where the nation's borders are fluid with the influx of migration (into and out of the US), imperialism takes on new forms. My analysis of discourse on hijab in the US has enabled me to demonstrate the ways imperialism has taken on shape in the contemporary world, such that people who are oppressed are conditioned to invest in their own oppression. Accordingly, the stakes in continuously investing in discourse on hijab, particularly through notions of freedom/unfreedom, are great as this project demonstrates that imperialism depends on people's consent. The stakes increase if scholarship on Muslim American women in the United States continues to remain within frameworks of identity politics—ones that imagine freedom to depend on choice. I have attempted to demonstrate that discourse on hijab that centers on notions

of freedom/unfreedom are two sides of the same coin: they are oppositional discourses that fuel the “us” vs “them” narrative the United States has depended on to construct itself against foreign nations.

The stakes will continue to grow as these narratives will continue to reproduce and emerge in new ways. The narratives I have shown in each of the distinct forms I have examined are not always distinct—sometimes they merge, and sometimes narratives take on new venues. For example, while in chapter 4 I examined Shepard Fairey’s political iconography, the same concept of the flag on a Muslim women’s body reemerged with the election of Ilhan Omar to US Congress<sup>126</sup>. Similarly, Hirsi Ali took to twitter to contest hijab as a sign of oppression, and called on all Muslim women to remove their hijabs in solidarity with Muslim women who are forced to wear hijab all over the world<sup>127</sup>. Through these discourses, concepts of race, culture, and gender reproduce on the site of hijab, and capitalism is ensured through the categorical divisions of marginalized groups.

I do not yet attempt at a viable alternative solution to the problem of discourse on hijab. Nevertheless, I insist that there can be alternatives. The first step is to identify the problem, which has been my primary objective in this project. That is, Muslim women resist through same language that subjugates them, contributing to new forms of colonialism within the United States—a domestic colonialism that ensures and justifies imperial projects abroad. A second small step would be to move away from discourse that identifies hijab through a context of freedom/unfreedom, or liberation/ domination. Here, I think through scholars who have written on the ways to get past cultural frameworks that limit our understanding of cultural to fixed spaces and representation. That is, cultural frameworks on the representational practices of Muslim

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<sup>126</sup> Appendix K

<sup>127</sup> Appendix L

women in the US limit our understanding to how Muslim women are viewed within the United States. Without an understanding on how such cultural constructs that result in representational reductions, are necessary for international imperial gain, imperialism continues as a social project that operates domestically to justify itself abroad. I would not be too far overreaching to suggest that one solution for all marginalized people would be a move past capitalism all together—to imagine a world that is not governed by capitalist structures.

It is not the scope of this project to think through what alternatives to capitalism might look like. Still, in thinking of an alternative framework to address the operational rhetoric that has consumed discourse on hijab, and conscious of the complex histories of other colonized people in the United States, I want to emphasize that narratives aimed to combat capitalism and imperial practices of representation are not an ineffective means of resistance. However, they need to be accompanied with an awareness of the forces at work. Analyzing the works of Deloria, Morris notes that even he contended that political activism is not enough to decolonize Indians; instead, any such activism and resistance must be accompanied with strategy and critical reflection (Morris, 102). Narratives of resistance that do not question the forces that have constructed representational practices in the first place, and without critical reflection and strategy on how such narratives are working in capital society will continuously fuel the same forces being resisted. Fanon notes that for decolonization to occur in Third World countries, and subsequent rehabilitation of man in totality and triumph everywhere, the European masses themselves must rise up and cooperate towards this achievement (Fanon, 61). As colonization takes new shape within the United States on marginalized people, it becomes increasingly difficult to identify the oppressive mechanisms operating on people within the nation--and how such oppressions directly affect government interests and operations outside of the nation. However, this does not mean that all efforts are

hopeless. For one, as Fanon suggests of the European masses, masses within the nation must “first of all decide to wake up, put on their thinking caps and stop playing the irresponsible game of Sleeping Beauty” (62). Strategic understanding on the way cultural ideology fuels economic and imperial interests can be a step towards ensuring marginalized people stop participating in their own oppressions.


As these mechanisms of race, culture, and gender reproduce themselves, what’s seen as anomalous discrimination should be contextualized as continuous processes intended to subjugate people. Events that strike people as anomalous, or outrageously discriminative are not so outstanding when contextualized with historical reference. They are strategically intended to continuously take place in order to ensure the marginalization of people. Akhil and Gupta urge, “If...it is acknowledged that cultural difference is produced and maintained in a field of power relations in a world always already spatially interconnected, then the restriction of immigration [for example] becomes visible as one of the main means through which the disempowered are kept that way” (Gupta and Ferguson, 47). Such was the case of the immigration ban, whereas hundreds of thousands across the nation flocked to streets to protest the “Muslim Ban” policy of 2017 (a restriction on immigration that largely targeted people from Muslim majority countries), a similar policy had been instated almost two decades prior just after the September 11 attacks. This is not to suggest that people should not be outraged, nor do I say that no narratives that emerge in response to response to oppression and other abhorrent social conditions are not effective. However, there must be an awareness—that will come with continued and increased sociopolitical and economic understandings—that imperial strategies reoccur and have drawn upon practices before them.

In no way should this project be considered an evaluation of authors' attempting to write back against popular narratives as either "successful" or not. Instead, I attempted to demonstrate that discourse on hijab specifically centered on freedom/unfreedom is peddling neoliberal rhetoric used to justify foreign interests, such that even narratives of resistance are integral to US imperial projects. This inadvertent participation has gone largely unnoticed and will continue to be overlooked if scholarship on Muslim American women remains with cultural frameworks that pertain to identity politics and representation. It is my hope that this project will serve not only the purpose demonstrating the very real presence of domestic colonialism on Muslim women, but also suggest ways that marginalized groups are investing in their own oppression.



# APPENDIX A

LETS CONNECT facebook YouTube flickr DONATE INTERNSHIPS EVENTS GET EMAILS CONTACT

 **MUSLIM PUBLIC AFFAIRS COUNCIL**

CONVENTION PROGRAMS BLOGS HOLLYWOOD PUBLICATIONS ABOUT DONATE

f 1010

t

+ 1919

## Women's Empowerment

How women fare correlates directly with how society fares overall. In recent years, many small but important victories for women in the Muslim world have been won. In the last decade, women in Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Morocco, Bahrain and Qatar have won political and legal reforms that would have been considered unthinkable a decade before.

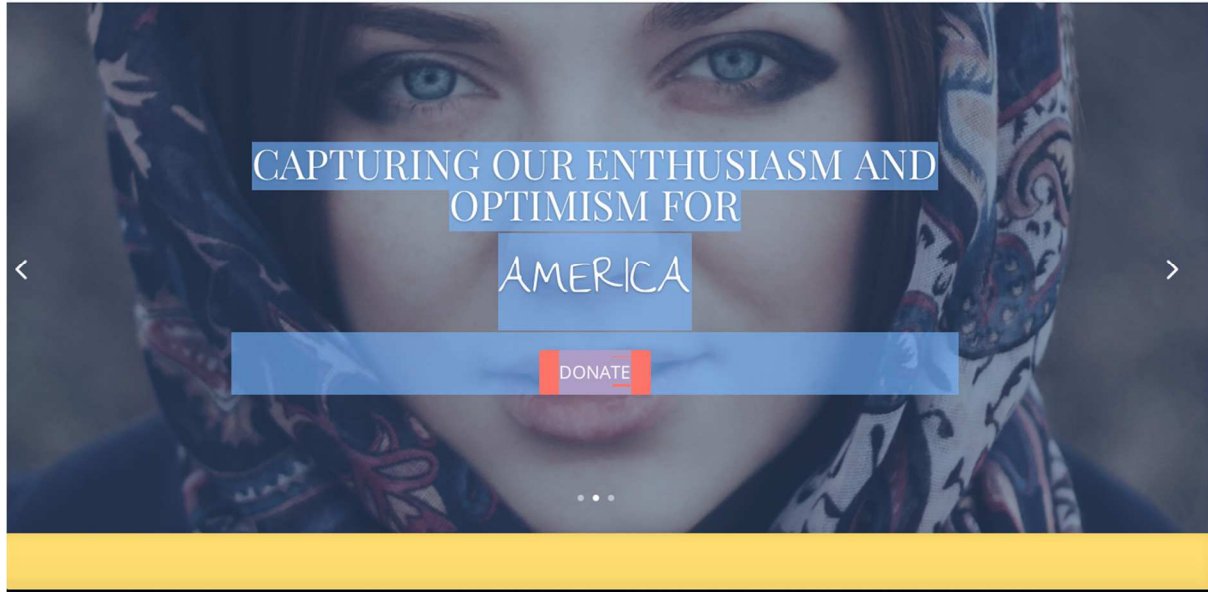
Meanwhile, the complex and appalling stream of news reports describing Muslim women being punished under Islamic law for everything from wearing pants to not having sex with their husbands to being raped cannot be ignored. Muslim women around the world are being disproportionately abused using outdated Islamic rulings and ages-old customs, while men who commit the same actions often go free.

For MPAC, women's empowerment is a core issue of concern. We believe it is our Islamic obligation to uphold the teachings of the Quran, in which God describes men and women as equal

## STAY UP TO DATE

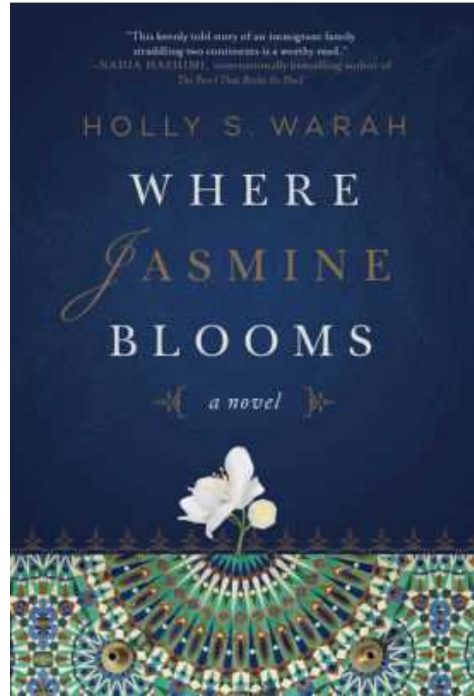
[SUBSCRIBE TO OUR EMAIL LIST](#)

APPENDIX B



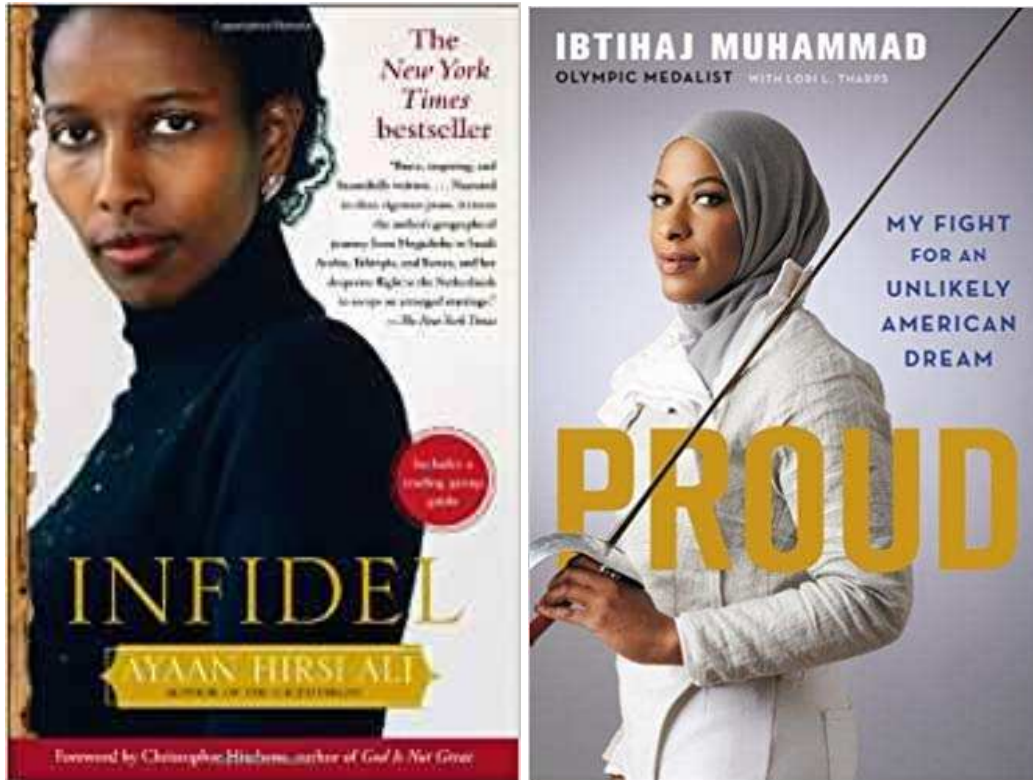
APPENDIX C

Covers of Novels:



APPENDIX D

Covers of Memoirs:



**APPENDIX E**

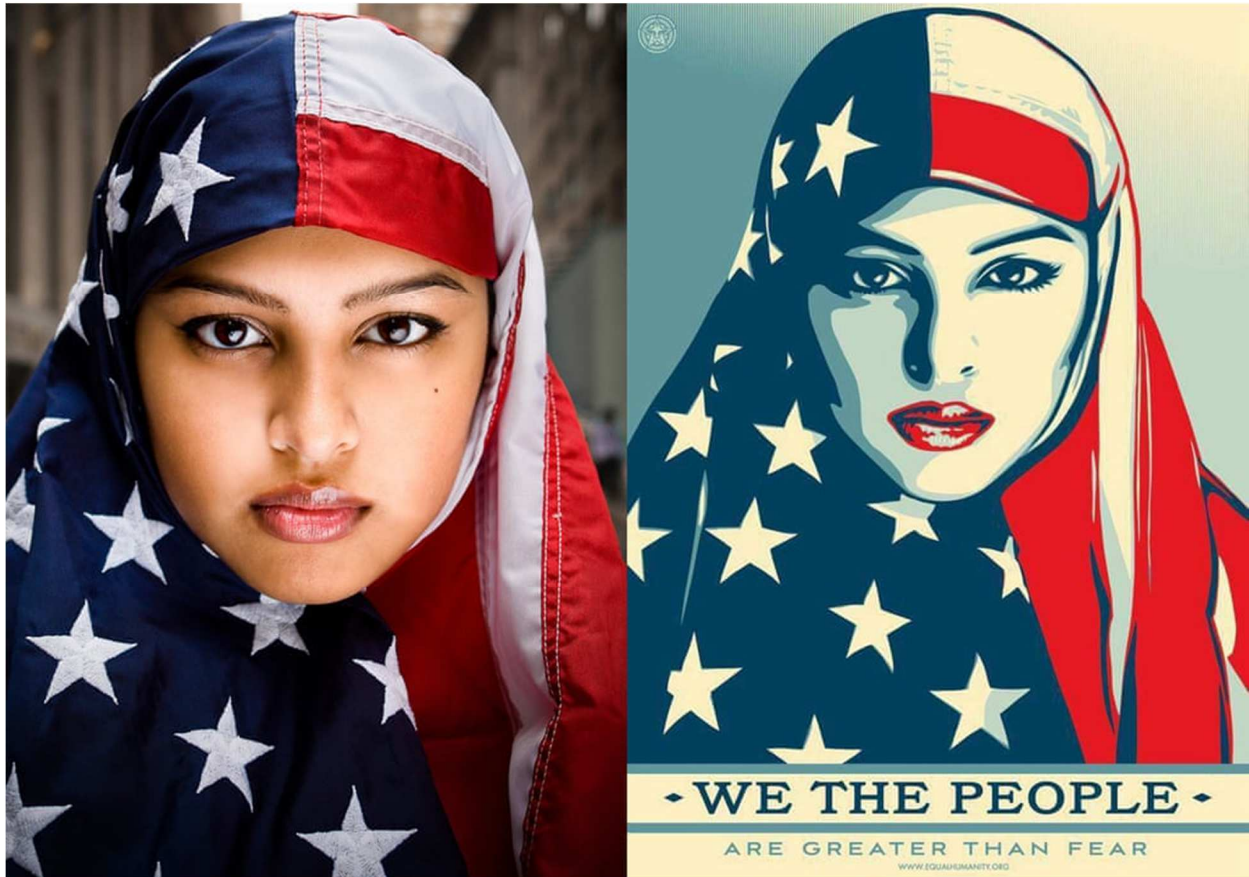


“Saba Ahmed wears an American flag as a hijab on Fox News Channel's The Kelly Show”

Image & Caption from Source:

<https://www.smh.com.au/world/meet-saba-ahmed-the-muslim-woman-who-wore-a-us-flag-hijab-on-fox-20151120-gl3glu.html>

## APPENDIX F



“Ridwan Adhami’s I Am America photo next to Shepard Fairey’s We The People illustration. Munira Ahmed, the subject, calls the work ‘an honor’. Photograph: Ridwan Adhami, Shepard Fairey”\*

\*Image & Caption from Source:

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jan/23/womens-march-poster-munira-ahmed-shepard-fairey-interview>

APPENDIX G



Image Source:

<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/womens-march-images-art-world-826481>

APPENDIX H



Image Source:

<https://www.politico.com/gallery/2017/01/the-womens-march-on-washington-in-photos-002398?slide=0>



APPENDIX I



Image Source:  
<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4182600/Women-don-stars-stripes-headscarves-New-York-rally.html>

APPENDIX J



Image Source:

<https://images.theconversation.com/files/153425/original/image-20170119-26567-x7ghc1.png?ixlib=rb-1.1.0&q=45&auto=format&w=1000&fit=clip>

**APPENDIX K**



Source:

<https://www.thedailybeast.com/trump-would-have-banned-ilhan-omar-from-the-usnow-shes-headed-to-congress>

APPENDIX L

The image displays two side-by-side screenshots of a Twitter profile for Ayaan Hirsi Ali (@Ayaan), showing her tweets and interactions. Both screenshots show the profile header with a back arrow, the name 'Ayaan Hirsi Ali', and '463 Tweets'. Below the header are tabs for 'Tweets', 'Media', and 'Likes'. The left screenshot shows a tweet from 2 days ago with the text: 'As Muslim women, we actually ask you not to wear the 'hijab' in the name of interfaith solidarity'. Below the text is a photo of a woman wearing a white hijab and a red patterned scarf, sitting at a table with a coffee cup. Below the photo is a quote: 'As Muslim women, we actually ask you not to wear the hijab in the name of in... washingtonpost.com'. The tweet has 600 retweets and 586 likes. The right screenshot shows a tweet from 2 days ago with the text: 'The truth about the hijab is anything but modest. All it does is reduce a woman to her genitalia!'. Below the text are 804 retweets and 885 likes. Below this tweet is a retweet by M. Zuhdi Jasser (@DrZuhdiJasser) from 2 days ago, with the text: '@AsraNomani: As Muslim women, we ask u not to wear 'hijab' in name of interfaith solidarity! washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-f...'. Below the retweet is a photo of the same woman in the hijab. The bottom of both screenshots shows the Twitter navigation bar with icons for Home, Notifications, Moments, Messages, and Me.

Source: (my own screenshots taken on December 24, 2015 from Twitter)

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**ABSTRACT****THE POLITICS OF HIJAB IN AMERICAN CULTURE**

by

**NOHA F BEYDOUN****May 2020****Advisor:** Dr. Sarika Chandra**Major:** English**Degree:** Doctor of Philosophy

*The Politics of Hijab in American Culture* analyzes the relationship between hijab and US imperialism in contemporary American culture. This project examines the ways in which neoliberal notions of freedom work through discourse on hijab in the U.S. from the vantage point of narratives produced by individuals invested in Muslim American identity. What emerges is a liberated/dominated Muslim woman figure which, I argue, justifies U.S. practices overseas. By looking at how hijab is situated in narratives produced for self-representation of Muslim American identity in the U.S., this project demonstrates the ways in which American imperialism operates such that those marginalized are conditioned to resist through the same language that subjugates them. This work critiques current critical discourse on Muslim women identity that remains circumscribed to discussions of representations, arguing that such theoretical frameworks offer a limited understanding of the stakes involved in investing in neoliberal notions of freedom and identity politics. My analysis shows the limitations of these models, and makes clear that this representational inclusion accompanied with choice and freedoms is to be better understood materially through a socio-political and economic framework.

**AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT**

Noha F. Beydoun is a graduate of Wayne State University, where she earned her PhD in English Literary and Cultural Studies. She is currently a part-time faculty member at Wayne State University, where she has also lectured in Master level courses and a research assisted in the field of digital humanities. Her research interests include gender studies and Muslim women in contemporary American literature and media, globalization, and American imperialism.