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Scheherazade At Ground Zero: Muslim Women's Agency, Identity, And Space In Euro-America From The 1893 World's Columbian Exposition To The Islamic State

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Scheherazade at Ground Zero:
Muslim Women's Agency, Identity, and Space in Euro-America
from the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition to the Islamic State

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APPROVAL PAGE

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the requirements for the degree of

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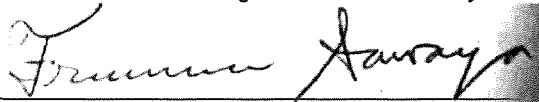

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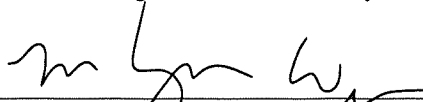


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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines three periods in Euro-American history that appear disparate but reflect the West's changing relationship with the Muslim majority countries and with Muslims, in particular with Muslim women, in Muslim-majority countries, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Specifically, this dissertation examines how Muslim women's agency in the United States evolved from the erotic, provocative performance of the *hootchy-kootchy* at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition to the political and economic activism after post-September 11th, the Trump Era, and finally a different kind of agency through radicalization through the Islamic State (IS). The structure of this dissertation uses the voice of the narrator Scheherazade, from the *1001 Arabian Nights*, co-opted by the Western literary canon, secularized, and made into a fairy tale princess through popular culture into a secular entity. It also uses the post-9/11 site of "Ground Zero" as both the actual and metaphorical site where Muslim women's agency and visibility, dictated until this point by popular culture, media, and fairy tale, began to evolve into a more assertive presence both within the Muslim communities in the West but also as citizens of Western nations. The research for this dissertation draws upon a cross-section of the material culture from the Maghreb, the newly industrialized United States, political protest, entrepreneurship, and social media woven together to illustrate a century of navigating a religious, social, and political identity and citizenship borne of conflict with, and assimilation within, Western nations.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	ii
Dedication	iv
List of Figures	v
List of Terms	vii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1. SCHEHERAZADE IN THE WHITE CITY: Gender, Performance, and Muslim Womanhood at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition	37
Chapter 2. SCHEHERAZADE'S CLOSET: Hijab, Activism, and "Generation M"	93
Chapter 3. SCHEHERAZADE'S CIRCLE OF KNOWLEDGE: Young Women, ISIS, and the Stories they Tell	143
Conclusion	207
Bibliography	214
Vita	242

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To anyone who I have omitted from these acknowledgements, I will attempt to remedy any omissions I have made in the future.

Alexandra M.A.E. Brandon
June 2021
Maynard, MA

*Beneath these jasmine flowers
Amidst these cypress trees
I give you now my books
And all their mysteries*

For Mummy & Daddy

LIST OF FIGURES

1. "Pool in a Harem," painted by the French Orientalist painter, Jean-Leon Gérôme (1875). 54
2. *Scenes et Types* (Scenes and Kinds) – *Ouled-Naïl* woman featured on a postcard published by Lehnert and Lockhart. (Algiers, c. late 19th century). 55
3. "On Midway Plaisance Street of All Nations at the World's Fair. The Oriental Dancing Girls." *Idaho Statesman* 18 Aug. 1893. 61
4. "Algerian Girl," from J.W. Buel's, "The Magic City" (1893). 74
5. Postcard, Algerian woman performing. 75
6. "An Odalisque Straight from the Seraglio," from J.W. Buel's, "The Magic City" (1893). 77
7. A belly dancer on the stage of the Egyptian Theatre on the Midway Plaisance. 79
8. "Algerian Chief and Girls, from J.W. Buel's "The Magic City" (1893)." 80
9. A series of advertisements from Pear's Soap published around 1895. The series is entitled, "Flowers of the East" and painted by William Stephen Coleman. 81
10. "Colona, the Sudanese Baby Dancer." 83
11. "Romanian Dancers" from J.W. Buel's "*The Magic City*" (1893). 84
12. "Moorish Dancers" in Professor Putnam's *Types of the Midway Plaisance*. 84
13. Photograph by Ottoman Court Photographer, Abdullah Frères, of girl students posing with diplomas at the *Mekteb-i Edeb-i* in Istanbul. 87
14. Nurses attend female tuberculosis patients at the Hasköy Hospital for Women in Istanbul. 89
15. Advertising for the 8th Annual World Hijab Day on February 1, 2020 by @idotdoodle. 103
16. Photo of Emilie Scott wearing *hijab* on World Hijab Day. 105

17. Photo of Danalin Beckett wearing <i>hijab</i> on World Hijab Day.	106
18. The logo for “Global Pink Hijab Day.”	112
19. Poster of Muslim woman in American flag <i>hijab</i> created for Women’s March on Washington, D.C. by Shepherd Fairey (2017).	116
20. Women attend the Women’s March on Washington on January 20, 2016 carrying the image of the Muslim woman produced by Shepherd Fairey on-behalf of Amplifier (2017).	117
21. Boushra Almutawakel’s portrait of a woman wearing an American flag as <i>hijab</i> (2001); Ridwan Adhami’s portrait of Munira Ahmed (2007); and Sheard Fairey’s interpretation of Adhami’s portrait created for the first Women’s March (2017).	120
22. Cover of <i>Hustler</i> magazine (June 2017).	124
23. Screenshot of The HauteHijab shop homepage featuring Muslim supermodel Halima Aden in a <i>hijab</i> from HauteHijab, styled by <i>Elle Magazine</i>	130
24. The “New Hijabi Starter Kit” marketed by HauteHijab.	131
25. The HauteHijab edit, “Sweater Weather.”	132
26. American Eagle’s denim <i>hijab</i> (July 2017).	133
27. Ibtihaj Muhammad Barbie Doll (Mattel Corporation, 2018).	135
28. Images from the Tumblr account “Diary of a <i>Muhajirah</i> .”	169
29. Tweet by Aqsa Mahmood (2014).	177
30. “Covered Girl: Because I’m worth it.”	186
31. IS Propaganda of Woman in Desert.	186
32. Images from Al-Amriki’s Tumblr.	189
33. Kadiza Sultana, Shamima Begum, and Amira Abase pass through airport security (February 2015).	196
34. Shamima Begum’s age progression from age 15-21	198
35. Tweet from Hoda Muthana (2014).	200
36. Tweet from President Donald Trump (2019).	201

LIST OF TERMS

Dar al-Harb – Literally translated as “The House or Abode of War” it exists in direct opposition to *Dar al-Islam*. The term comes from classical/medieval Islamic jurisprudence to demarcate geographies where Islam does not dictate the governing principles of a society and where there are few, if any, Muslims.

Dar al-Islam – The opposite of *Dar al-Harb*, *Dar al-Islam* is “The House or Abode of Islam” where Islam and Islamic jurisprudence serve as the foundations of government and society.

Dawah – The act of calling or inviting people to embrace Islam. This is primarily done through sharing educational materials, community service and activism, and politics. It is never to be a coercive action.

Du’a – Is a supplication made to God, separate from the five daily prayers.

Hajj/Hadj – The annual pilgrimage to Mecca. *Hajj/Hadj* is one of the Five Pillars of Islam and is incumbent upon every Muslim to complete if they are physically and financially able to do so during their lifetime.

Hijab – For the purposes of this dissertation, *hijab* is defined as a scarf or fabric covering of a woman’s head that does not obscure her face and does not cover her the length of her torso or body.

Hijrah – Refers to the early Muslim community’s flight from the pagan stronghold of Mecca to Medina. The Medinans offered sanctuary to Muhammad and his early followers. In the context of contemporary issues, the Islamic State utilizes *hijrah* to encourage adherents to flee their non-Muslim countries in favor of Muslim lands, thereby participating in their own *hijrah*.

Jihad – There are three separate forms of *jihad*. In this dissertation, I use the popular usage of *jihad*, which is a shortened form of “jihad by the sword.” This type of *jihad* became more prevalent in the 20th century with the rise of Islamist thought and postcolonialism.

Muhajirah – The feminine version of *muhajid* (m.), one who is engaged in *jihad*. In the context of contemporary extremist movements, including the Islamic State, the title of *muhajirah* is widely used by women who participate in *jihad* as non-combatants but supporters of male fighters.

Purdah – An antiquated word for seclusion, sometimes used interchangeably with *harem*. It may also extend to dress in which a woman is completely covered and does not interact with men who

are not her relations. Purdah also exists in some Hindu communities.

Salafism – School of thought within Sunni Islam that looks back to the first three generations of Islam for guidance on practice and belief. The movement is the product of Western colonialism. In the 21st century, it is the predominant iteration of Sunni Islam followed by extremist groups like the Islamic State (IS).

Umma(h) – Originally referred to the early community of Muslims but expanded in contemporary understanding to encompass the entire Muslim world regardless of national identity or citizenship in non-Muslim countries.

Wahhabism – Ideologically related to Salafism, Wahhabism is another interpretation of Islam rooted in Sunni Islam. Its origins are attributed to Muhammad Ibn-Abd-Al-Wahhab (c. 1703-1792) a Sunni jurist from what is now Saudi Arabia. Wahhabism is considered by some to be distinct from Salafism, as Wahhabism's center of political and social power is concentrated in the Arabian Peninsula, while Salafism has a global appeal. Despite these differences, both interpretations of Sunni Islam have significant ideological overlap.

“She derived, however, great consolation, (during the tightening of the bowstring) from the reflection that *much of the history remained still untold*, and that the petulance of her brute of a husband had reaped for him a most righteous reward, in depriving him of many inconceivable adventures.”

- “The One-Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade.”
(Edgar Allan Poe, 1845)¹

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is set among three periods in Euro-American history that appear disparate but reflect the West’s changing relationship with the Muslim majority countries and with Muslims in Muslim-majority countries, the United States, and the United Kingdom. The organization of this dissertation from the Columbian Exposition in 1893 to the emergence of the Islamic State (IS), traces the emergency of an *umma* (the global community of Muslims) negotiating boundaries of nation states and identity in the context of postcolonialism.² The fact is that there was engagement with the Middle East and Muslim-majority countries during the early-mid 20th century, but it was mediated by colonial governments, not indigenous rulers. European governments stymied the efforts of independence movements until the mid-20th century when the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood (1928) expanded thanks to the work of Egyptian scholar-activist Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) and the success of other independence movements galvanized other anti-colonial groups. In this timeline, this work highlights important moments in the post-colonial decades of the Muslim-majority countries: Algerian Independence (1962); the Iranian Revolution (1979); and the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan (2001) and the social changes among Muslim communities in the West that were precipitated by these events. These events were precipitated by resistance to Western interference in a desire for national autonomy. A major

¹ Edgar Allan Poe, “The Thousand-and-Second-Tale of Scheherazade,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, February 1845.

² Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Penguin Books, 1979).

element of these three historical moments was the weaponizing and propagandizing of women's bodies and intense scrutiny of Muslim women living outside of the borders of Muslim-majority countries, regardless of whether or not they claimed citizenship in any of these countries.³ Much has been written about Muslim women claiming identities and modes of agency within Muslim-majority countries and about how Muslim women are perceived in the West, but material on how Muslim women negotiate identity and agency in the West remains limited.⁴ This dissertation connects the earliest iterations of Muslim women in this periodization through the *1001 Arabian Nights* (1704).

This work uses Scheherazade and the *1001 Nights* and Ground Zero to structure its argument, but unlike the *1001 Nights*, there is no conclusion, no happy ending where violence abruptly ends and Scheherazade can finally rest as a Sultana and mother. Unlike Ground Zero, there is no monument to the evolving struggle for citizenship or historical markers acknowledging Muslims or their contribution to the history of the United States. Over a century since the Columbian Exposition in 1893 and twenty years since the September 11th attacks, Muslims, especially Muslim women, continue to navigate communities where their presence is tolerated and problematic. They remain the subject of media stories with recycled tropes of oppression and gendered violence. In recent months, as countries begin to re-open in anticipation of the end of the Covid-19 Pandemic, banning veiling as a form of counter-terrorism has

³ Jessica Davis, *Women in Modern Terrorism: From Liberation Wars to Global Jihad and the Islamic State* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017): 13.

⁴ Juliane Hamer, *American Muslim Women, Religious Authority, and Activism: More than a Prayer* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012). Hamer's study of Muslim American women's activism is the most recent comprehensive study of Muslim American women. Other texts focus on "normalizing" Islam through conversion narratives or immigrant experiences writing about a non-threatening, what I refer to as a "neighborhood Islam." See: G. Willow Wilson, *The Butterfly Mosque: A Young American Woman's Journey to Love and Islam* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2010); Ayser Salman, *The Wrong End of the Table: A Mostly Comic Memoir of a Muslim Arab American Woman Just Trying to Fit In* (New York: Skyhorse, 2019); and Sabeeha Rehman, *Threading My Prayer Rug: One Woman's Journey from Pakistani Muslim to American Muslim* (New York: Arcade Books, 2017).

traction.⁵ The pandemic brought a lull in anti-Muslim violence (shifted to Asians and Asian-Americans) but in correlation with the return to normal life is a resurgence of Islamophobia and counterterrorism measures that focus on aesthetics rather than social services of education.⁶ Despite these challenges, Muslim women continue to force a paradigm shift in the way their image is articulated through commerce, worship, politics, and political violence.

In 1979, Edward Said's *Orientalism* named the phenomenon that informed and framed every interaction between "West" and "East."⁷ Said acknowledged that Europe's collective anxiety about Muslims and the Muslim majority countries was justified by the trauma of both conquest (Spain, 711 C.E.) and the threat of conquest (Vienna, 1529 C.E.).⁸ A centuries-long project of routing Muslims and their influence culminated with the decline of Muslim power and Europeans (and later Americans) recasting the Islamic "East" to the Christian "West" as a contrast between licentiousness and complacency to modesty and industry.⁹ In the 19th century, the power of Orientalism reached its zenith as the "East" became something that the "West" could control politically and culturally.¹⁰ Women occupying this Orientalist landscape are "usually creatures of a male power-fantasy. They express unlimited sensuality, they are more or

⁵ Voice of America News, "Muslim Group, UN Rights Office Object to Swiss Veil Vote," *Voice of America*, March 9, 2021. <https://www.voanews.com/europe/muslim-group-un-rights-office-object-swiss-veil-vote>. Accessed March 14, 2021. Sri Lanka also announced the week of March 8, 2021 that they would seek to ban the full-face veil as the country anticipates a return to in-person services for Easter Week. Other sources claim it is a move to appease the country's Buddhist majority. See: Shereena Qazi and Easwaran Rutnam, "'Racist agenda': Fear, worries over Sri Lanka's burqa ban," *Al-Jazeera*, March 14, 2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/14/all-about-control>. Accessed: March 14, 2021.

⁶ Voice of America, "Swiss Veil Vote."

⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, 50.

⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, 59. Said refers to the European interaction with Muslims as the "Trauma of Islam." The conquest of the Iberian Peninsula (711) and the incursion of Muslims as far into European lands as the Gates of Vienna (1529). Anxiety about Islam was present from the first century of revelation as the new religion made its way from Mecca to Seville. See also: Maxime Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002) and W. Montgomery Watt, *The Influence of Islam on Medieval Europe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994).

⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, 59.

¹⁰ Said, *Orientalism*, 244.

less stupid, and above all they are willing.”¹¹ The template that emerged from Orientalist scholarship, art, and literature was of a Muslim woman with autonomy created by and bestowed upon her by a man.¹² She was confined by the walls of a harem, guarded by eunuchs, or, as discussed later, clever salesmen.¹³ Her presence at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago made the Muslim woman a tangible commodity capable of being mass produced. Various performers took on the persona of the belly dancer, “Little Egypt,” and joined traveling carnivals bringing the exoticism of the “East” and a literally and figuratively stripped-down version of Muslim womanhood to towns and cities across the United States.¹⁴ The diaphanous belly dancer became the template for Muslim womanhood until this artificial form was contested and challenged by Muslim women in America, Europe, and in Muslim-majority countries. Postcolonialism, beginning with the French retreat from Lebanon (1946) and the end of British Mandate rule in Palestine (1948), ushered in an era of Muslim women negotiating identities that challenged or dovetailed with Western influences, much of it predicated on the degree of Western hegemony and violence their communities experienced.¹⁵ This is where the figure of

¹¹ Said, *Orientalism*, 207

¹² Mary Roberts, *Intimate Outsiders: The Harem in Ottoman and Orientalist Art and Travel Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). See also: Sarah Graham Brown, *Images of Women: The Portrayal of Women in Photography of the Middle East, 1860-1950* (London: Quartet Books, 1988) and Julie F. Codell and Dianne Sachko MacLeod (Eds.), *Orientalism Transposed: The Impact of the Colonies on British Culture* (London: Scholar Press, 1999).

¹³ Sol Bloom, *The Autobiography of Sol Bloom* (New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1948). Bloom’s legacy will be discussed later in this dissertation. He was the salesman who organized and imported the dancers and other inhabitants of the “Street in Cairo” for the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition. Despite his commercial identity, he remains an important agent in the story of Muslim women’s agency and identity in the United States due to his role in the Columbian Exposition.

¹⁴ Donna Carlton, *Looking for Little Egypt* (International Dance Discovery, 1995). Carlton’s text is the only substantive examination of the elusive character from the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition. “Little Egypt” represented multiple iterations of belly dance and Arab and Muslim performers across the United States. The original “Little Egypt” is never identified.

¹⁵ Mounira Charrad, *States and Women’s Rights: The Making of Postcolonial Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 51.

“Little Egypt” gave way to a more dynamic, culturally, and religiously aligned fictional iteration of Muslim women: Scheherazade.

SCHEHERAZADE: SITUATING THE STORYELLER

The character of Scheherazade is the most recognizable character from Arabic literature and also the most malleable. Over the three centuries since the *1001 Arabian Nights* was introduced in Europe – first in French, and then later translated into English – the heroine of the tales, whose appearance bookends each of the stories, has appeared across many mediums. In every iteration of her tales, save for one written by the American novelist, Edgar Allan Poe, she emerges as virtuous, faithful, and wise, preserving her life, along with the lives of her sister, Dunyazad, and the young women of her kingdom, by reforming the aggrieved Sultan Shahryar through her tales.¹⁶ She takes the place of a wife whose voracious, adulterous sexual appetites ruined her husband’s faith in women, and restores them not only through her endless tales, but also through her virtue. At the end of the *1001 Nights*, Scheherazade is the mother of three princes and her husband’s faith in women is restored through the honor of his storyteller wife. However, Scheherazade as a character is more complex than her storytelling and represents a more nuanced encounter between East and West; Islam and Christianity. To fully understand the utility of Scheherazade as a storyteller beyond the *1001 Arabian Nights*, it is necessary to draw upon archival fragments of the literature, the early Muslim majority countries, and the United States’ intermittent engagements with the Muslim Middle East. The *1001 Arabian Nights* is

¹⁶ The American novelist, Edgar Allan Poe, drawing-upon the series’ astonishing popularity in translation, published an addendum to the storyteller’s fate in his short story, “The Thousand-and-Second-Tale of Scheherazade” in *Godey’s Lady’s Book* in February 1845. At the conclusion of Poe’s tale, the storyteller, having bored her royal husband, is sentenced to death: “These words, as I learn from the "Isitsoornot," both grieved and astonished Scheherazade; but, as she knew the king to be a man of scrupulous integrity, and quite unlikely to forfeit his word, she submitted to her fate with a good grace. She derived, however, great consolation, (during the tightening of the bowstring,) from the reflection that much of the history remained still untold, and that the petulance of her brute of a husband had reaped for him a most righteous reward, in depriving him of many inconceivable adventures.”¹⁶

situated in the history of Islam as much as the Qur'an is, first as an oral tradition and then as a written one, a means of transmitting and interweaving religion and culture.¹⁷ The *1001 Nights* offers a snapshot that is less discomfiting than that of the Qur'an, which as Said illustrated in *Orientalism* is too proximate to Christianity for comfort.¹⁸ Stripped of its historical context, its original preface that included the *shahada*, and replete with fantastic illustrations, it represents a firm boundary between Christianity and Islam, but one which the storyteller, Scheherazade, transgresses.¹⁹

The earliest fragment of the *1001 Nights* was dated in 1945 by the Islamic historian, Nabia Abbott to the year 879 C.E.²⁰ Abbott's analysis of the fragment is significant and often overlooked in discussions of the *1001 Nights*. First, the fragment of the *1001 Nights* is written on paper, a commodity that was introduced to Iran via Chinese captives in Samarkand, dates to approximately the 9th century C.E (266 A.H.).²¹ Neither Persians nor Arabs had access to paper prior to the 7th century, relying instead on papyrus, skins, and oral storytelling to preserve religious, literary, and social histories.²² Second, Abbott draws our attention to the style of calligraphy used to copy the text, "It is a light but well-schooled hand used at the time primarily for the smaller Qur'ans and occasionally for other valued works of a religious and linguistic character" and it is limited to the first three centuries of Islam, making the origin of the *1001*

¹⁷ Mustafa Shah and M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies* (London: Oxford University Press, 2020).

¹⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, 59.

¹⁹ David Ghanim, *The Sexual World of the Arabian Nights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 7. See also: Marilyn Jurich, *Scheherazade's Sisters: Trickster Heroines and their Stories in World Literature* (New York: Praeger, 1998).

²⁰ Nabia Abbott, "A Ninth-Century Fragment of the "Thousand Nights" New Light on the Early History of the Arabian Nights." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 8, no. 3 (1949): 129-64.

²¹ A.H. is the abbreviation for "After the Hijra." The *Hijra* was the early Muslim community's flight from Mecca to Medina in 622 C.E. It is from this historical moment that the Islamic calendar originates. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will use A.H. in the introduction and when referencing important historical moments related to the Islamic calendar, but will not translate every date in the Gregorian calendar to the *Hijra*.

²² Paul McMichael Nurse, *Eastern Dreams: How the Arabian Nights Came to the World* (London: Viking Press, 2010), 75.

Nights tantalizing proximate to the revelation of Islam.²³ Finally, Abbott notes from the fragments that the introduction to the text is written as, “A Book of Tales from a Thousand Nights. *In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate* (بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ).”²⁴ The story is introduced as if it were a chapter of the Qur’an, commencing with an invocation to Allah, adding a dimension of reverence to the text that is missing from modern translations that excise the tales’ relationship to the Muslim majority countries. What remains unknown is how many of the tales predate Islam or if they came to be anthologized as a single work in the 9th century. Abbott argues that the tales originated in Iran as, *Hazar Afsana* (“A Thousand Fanciful Tales”) and that the 1001st night was added much later.²⁵ Abbott situates this fragment of text in Syria, rather than the Tales’ traditional point of origin in Baghdad, Iraq.²⁶ In the version that has come down to Western audiences, the tales are centered around the rule of the Caliph of Baghdad, Harun Al-Rashid (766-809 C.E.) during the Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258). This period of Harun Al-Rashid’s rule is considered to be the peak of the “Golden Age of Islam,” with an empire that stretched to the Mediterranean and down the Silk Road.²⁷ The fragment in Abbott’s study from following Harun Al-Rashid’s rule is so limited that we do not know if the tales originally

²³ Abbott, “A Ninth-Century Fragment,” 131.

²⁴ Abbott, “A Ninth-Century Fragment,” 132. The Bismillah is considered to encompass the entire essence of the Qur’an and is stated by Muslims as a preface to any significant undertaking. Its inclusion in this early iteration of the *1001 Nights* is important because it elevates the tales above simply the act of storytelling and indicates that the contents are important for reasons beyond entertainment. The early iterations of the tales likely communicated Islamic belief, custom, and culture in an accessible and entertaining manner. Later iterations became more like fairy tales, but echoes of Muslim identity are still reflected in the prose.

²⁵ Abbott, “A Ninth-Century Fragment,” 133.

²⁶ Nurse, *Eastern Dreams*, 123.

²⁷ The “Golden Age of Islam” was a period of rule during the ‘Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258 C.E.). Baghdad was the center of learning (medical, theological, linguistic) and a crossroads between East and West. The caliphate, but especially Baghdad, was the site of cultural exchange. See Amira K. Bennison, *The Great Caliphs: The Golden Age of the ‘Abbasid Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010) for an overview of the ‘Abbasid Empire. The term was first applied in the 19th century by Josias Leslie Porter in his book *A Handbook for Travelers in Syria and Palestine* (1868). It is originally a term coined by an Orientalist but later claimed by Islamist rhetoric to identify a set point before a period of decadence that followed Abbasid Rule and coincides with the increase of European hegemony in the region, limiting Muslim agency and innovation.

contained in the folio included allusions to the caliph or the cosmopolitan capital of Baghdad. However, although Harun Al-Rashid is often referenced in the tales and in analyses of them, they were not written as a hagiographic portrait of the Caliph.

Significantly, analysts of the *Arabian Nights* and Scheherazade often overlook the text's elevation of a female character in a book that originated in the Muslim majority countries. The Moroccan sociologist, Fatima Mernissi, who spent her childhood in a harem in Morocco (*Dreams of Trespass*, 1994) waited until the end of her career in Quranic exegesis to tackle the phenomenon of Scheherazade.²⁸ In her last book, *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different harems* (2001), Mernissi uses Scheherazade of the tales she was told as a child, and not the contemporary Western iteration, as a traveling lens through which to study the differences between the genders in the West versus the East.²⁹ Mernissi's analysis continues her memoirs' process of reconciliation of her past inside her father's harem with her career as a sociologist, theologian, and feminist. Framed as both a travelogue and an analysis of the *1001 Nights*, she makes her way through various European cities on her book tour, framing those experiences in the context of the *1001 Nights*. Ultimately, through her use of Scheherazade, she concludes that the difference between East and West is the forms of spatial limitations put on women: in the West, women aspire to beauty, and youth, while making oneself physically small so as to not take-up space. In the Muslim World, women are not cloistered in aesthetics but in segregated spaces (not related to veiling) meant to control and limit their agency.

²⁸ Fatima Mernissi, *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* (London: Perseus Books, 1995). See also: Hoda Shaarawi, *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1987) and Leila Ahmed, *A Border Passage: From Cairo to America—A Woman's Journey* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999). Contemporary scholars of women and gender in Islam like Mernissi and Ahmed published memoirs in the late 1990s about childhoods inside traditional households with harem-like arrangements. Hoda Shaarawi's memoirs are considered the first of the "harem memoir" genre and the formulaic harem childhood to liberated adulthood.

²⁹ Fatima Mernissi, *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems* (New York: Washington Square Books, 2001).

The fluidity of borders is evident in Abbott's fragment of the *1001 Nights* and Mernissi's travels, but also in the work of Muslim-American writers. In her essay, "My Arabian Superheroine (2013)", Alia Yunis describes Scheherazade as "a feminist before the word became part of Western society. While she was hanging out in the Middle East, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, and Rapunzel were self-absorbedly waiting to be rescued."³⁰ Yunis uses Scheherazade as a tool for asserting her identity as a first-generation Arab Muslim in white American suburbia emphasizing her Lebanese and Palestinian identities, Scheherazade is a vehicle through which she can perform her "Arabness" and control the narrative of being brown, Arab, and a woman. Like Mernissi, Yunis negotiates space between competing identities and worlds and the dichotomy between East and West. Scheherazade is an ideal vehicle to navigate and express these tensions, adding dimensionality by simply speaking as a woman from a Muslim-majority country. The *1001 Nights* are "often seen as the Muslim counterpart to European fairy tales...unlike most Western fairy stories, good does not inevitably triumph over evil," argues Paul McMichael Nurse in *Eastern Dreams: How the Arabian Nights Came to the World* (2010). Nurse emphasizes this important element of the *1001 Nights* and, by extension, Scheherazade's role in them: it is not a fairy tale world of black-and-white dichotomies, but a series of complex social interactions and exchanges that are fantastical, but also deeply human. The character of Scheherazade is the privileged daughter of the Sultan Shahryar's Vizier, which grants her immense privilege, but she is also a very vulnerable pawn in a world dominated by men, honor, and physical as well as emotional boundaries. Scheherazade appears in the *1001 Nights* neither as a captive princess nor as a woman with complete autonomy, making her an ideal representative for Muslim women negotiating agency and identity. However, Scheherazade's

³⁰ Alia Yunis, "My Arabian Superheroine," in *Scheherazade's Children: Global Encounters with the Arabian Nights*, Eds. Philip F. Kennedy and Marina Warner (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 398.

complex character did not originate in an historic vacuum but likely developed in the earliest days of Islam and within the text of the Qur'an itself.

In Arabic literature, the *qasida* (“intention”) is best described as an epic poem originating with pre-Islamic tribes and continuing through the Abbasid dynasty (including that of Harun al-Rashid).³¹ The *qasida* is divided into three parts: the *nasib*, in which the storyteller reflects on an incident or pursuit of his beloved (from whom he is still separated); the *rahil*, the middle element of the poem, where the protagonist journeys to reunite with his tribe and describes the various impediments and challenges that lie between his nostalgia and reunification; and finally, the *madih*, which is message of the poem that may praise a ruler, satirize another tribe, or offer some moral observation.³² Rodney Koeneké, relating his first experience with the *qasida*, writes, “And if the *qasida*’s essentially a study in motion—oscillating between experience and memory, trace and presence, campsite and camel ride, desire and resignation, abasement and boast—its progress depends, paradoxically, upon its boundedness.”³³ The tales themselves subscribe to these finite limits, hemmed in by both the duration of time (the night) and social boundaries. While the *1001 Nights* may have drawn upon this format, the narrator of all *qasidas* is a man. Deviation from this would represent a radical departure from the art form and one that I do not think storytellers would have challenged, as women in *qasidas* served a structural purpose inside of the poem as a goal, a boast, or a paradigm for femininity. In pre-Islamic *qasidas*, men boasted of multiple lovers and women had social and sexual agency not confined to the boundaries of marriage.³⁴ Replacing a male storyteller with that of a female in the early centuries of Islam

³¹ Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy: Myth, Gender, and Ceremony in the Classical Arabic Ode* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2002).

³² Pinckney Stetkevych, *The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy*, 75.

³³ Rodney Koeneké, “Qasida,” Blog Post (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2014/08/qasida>) Accessed December 10, 2020.

³⁴ Kamaldeen Yakubu Zahrrah, “The Image of Woman in Pre-Islamic Qasida: The *Mu’allaqat* Poetry as a Case Study,” Thesis, The American University in Cairo

required, to borrow from Quranic exegesis, an *isnad* (chain of transmission) used to validate *hadith* (sayings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad) to repurpose the *qasida* from the pre-Islamic *jahiliyya* (period of ignorance prior to the revelation of Islam) to an Islamic art form. The *isnad* for justifying Scheherazade as the central storyteller, and the precedent for her form living within the prescribed religious, social, and ethical codes of the period.

The first translation of the *1001 Arabian Nights* from Arabic was in 1704 by Antoine Galland, who translated the Arabic into French.³⁵ Several more editions, including the most popular English translation by Sir Richard Burton published between 1885-1888, would follow as the book and its provocative and exotic tales were translated through the 18th and 19th centuries. Each subsequent publication of the text seemed to be more embellished than the last, dovetailing with yet another moment in the zeitgeist of a rapidly industrializing West and subsequent dramatic social and economic changes. The texts included elaborate illustrations of the exotic and forbidden worlds of that formed the backdrop and cultural milieu of the tales.³⁶ For Europeans and eventually, Americans, “the *Arabian Nights*...is the prime example of a polyphonic, traveling text, which leaped over borders of creed, nation, allegiance, its stories spreading irrepressibly, immediately after they were translated.”³⁷ The tales themselves continue to evolve and still exist in some iteration in every kind of commodity from books to ballet to

(<http://dar.aucegypt.edu/bitstream/handle/10526/3172/MA%20Thesis%20AUC.pdf?sequence=3>) Accessed February 15, 2021.

³⁵ Nurse, *Eastern Dreams*, 24.

³⁶ Susan Nance, *How the Arabian Nights Inspired the American Dream, 1790-1935* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 23.

³⁷ Philip F. Kennedy and Marina Warner, Eds., *Scheherazade's Children: Global Encounters with the Arabian Nights* (New York: New York University Press, 2013)

cosmetics to Disney films to pornography.³⁸ The East, in its exoticism, escapism, and sensuality remains a marketable commodity translated through the *Arabian Nights*.³⁹

If Scheherazade was originally a character strongly linked to the Muslim majority countries in both origin and faith, her introduction to the West gradually secularized and sexualized her so that her relationship Islam was erased. By 1888, her image had become more magical than historical, which Nurse attributes to, “the *Arabian Nights*’...seemingly spontaneous appearance as a book.”⁴⁰ In this way, again, the stories appear as revelations, witnessed by Scheherazade and, at some point compiled and arranged into a single text. The text itself was introduced to Europeans in twelve volumes translated from Arabic to French and then to English by an anonymous London press.⁴¹ The 1839 translation by Edward Lane excised the eroticism of the original text and replaces it with footnotes that situate the stories in Egypt, where Lane believed the tales originated and whose culture was reflected in the tales.⁴² In 1882, John Payne translated the *1001 Nights* and included all of their explicit scenes. Payne circulated just 500 copies of his translation before ceding it to Sir Richard Burton whose 1885 edition is perhaps *over* eroticized.⁴³ A children’s version of the tales was adopted from Lane’s work in 1898 and became the standard version of the *1001 Nights* albeit stripped of both its ethnographic content so it became, like Payne and Burton’s editions, a fairy tale onto which the West could project its

³⁸ Holly Edwards, *Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures: Orientalism in America, 1870-1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). See also: Faegheh Shirazi, *The Veil Unveiled* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2004); Matthew Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar, Eds., *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997); and Hjar Eddarif, “Beauty and the (B) East: A Postcolonial Reading of Disney’s Arab Woman,” *International Journal of New Technology and Research* Vol. 2, Issue 6 (June 2016): 61-65.

³⁹ Christiane Staninger, “Disney’s Magic Carpet Ride: *Aladdin* and Women in Islam,” in Brenda Ayres, Ed., *The Emperor’s Old Groove: Decolonizing Disney’s Magic Kingdom* (New York: Peter Lang Publishers, 2003): 66.

⁴⁰ Nurse, *Eastern Dreams*, 24.

⁴¹ C. Knipp, “The Arabian Nights in England: Galland’s Translation and its Successors,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* Vol. 5, Issue 1 (January 1974): 44-54.

⁴² Nurse, *Eastern Dreams*, 35.

⁴³ Muhsin Jassim Ali, *Scheherazade in England: A Study of Nineteenth-Century English Criticism of the Arabian Nights* (London: Three Continents Press, 1982): 8.

desires about the Muslim majority countries.⁴⁴ Lane “created an English-language adaptation for a broad middle-class and upper-class readership that was more literally translated to capture and celebrate, he hoped, the creative agency of Middle Eastern artists. It came with ample footnotes that described the stories as the performance of actual Egyptian storytellers and sought to engender the reader’s sympathy toward a part of the world routinely criticized by Europeans.”⁴⁵ The serialization and bound publication of the Lane’s translation of the *1001 Nights* prompted a sympathetic response that was imperially paternalistic thus the intent of the American edition of the *Nights*.

Responding to the popularity of the *1001 Nights*, Edgar Allan Poe published the short story, “The One-Thousand-and-Second Night of Scheherazade” in the February 1845 *Godey’s Lady Book*. Poe’s work is traditionally excluded from any discussion of Scheherazade and the *1001 Nights*, but this short piece is an important cultural moment and frames future discourse around Scheherazade and Eastern femininity. Although it was meant to parody the popularity of the serialized *1001 Nights*, Poe’s short story ends with Scheherazade’s execution after the 1002nd night when her husband Shahryar is finally so bored with her that he has her killed. Poe writes of Scheherazade’s execution, “She derived, however, great consolation, (during the tightening of the bowstring,) from the reflection that much of the history remained still untold, and that the petulance of her brute of a husband had reaped for him a most righteous reward, in depriving him of many inconceivable adventures.”⁴⁶ Poe’s writing is as much a parody as it is a commentary on Western perceptions of the East: Muhammad is situated as the antichrist leading a spiritual community driven by violence and misogyny. This common approach to writing about Muslims

⁴⁴ Knipp, “The Arabian Nights in England,” 44.

⁴⁵ Nance, *Arabian Nights*, 27.

⁴⁶ Edgar Allan Poe, “The Thousand-and-Second-Tale of Scheherazade,” *Godey’s Lady Book*, February 1845.

is the prescribed formula for a millennium of writing about Islam.⁴⁷ Poe's execution of Scheherazade removes her from the historical record and strips her the authority she inherited from her cultural and religious ancestors like A'isha. Poe panders to Orientalist tropes and also removes Scheherazade from her own narrative: she tinkers with power and authority only to have it revoked by her Shahryar. Poe makes sure that Scheherazade is not savvy enough to realize that her husband is bored with her and exhausted by both her power and novelty, his only concession to her is to give her the fleeting satisfaction that her execution will somehow deprive her already morally vacant husband of some fulfillment. Poe's writing is somewhat prophetic because in the continuous publication of the *1001 Nights*, Scheherazade's authority, identity, and agency gradually disappeared until she became an empty vessel into which Americans and Europeans

⁴⁷ Medieval portraits and descriptions of Islam centered around the Prophet Muhammad juxtaposed against the image of Christ. Muslims were regularly referred to as "Mahommedans" as Christian writers equated Muhammad's role in Islam with that of Jesus Christ in Christianity, making no distinction between the similar, but different theologies. This continued through the early twentieth-century and is reflected in texts authored by missionaries to the Middle East. This deliberate theological contrast originated in the 9th century in Islamic Spain/Andalusia. Religious figures and writers from among the Mozarabs (Spanish Christians living under Islamic rule), like the most famous written by Álvaro of Córdoba (800-861 C.E.), who wrote of Muslims: "Muslims are puffed up with pride, languid in the enjoyments of the fleshly acts, extravagant in eating, greedy usurpers in the acquisition of possessions... without honor, without truth, unfamiliar with kindness or compassion... fickle, crafty, cunning and indeed not halfway but completely befouled in the dregs of every impurity, deriding humility as insanity, rejecting chastity as though it were filthy, disparaging virginity as though it were the uncleanness of harlotry, putting the vices of the body before the virtues of the soul." (*Indiculus luminosus*.) Álvaro of Córdoba also wrote that Muhammad was the antichrist, a theme that carried on through Dante's *Divine Comedy* where Muhammad is portrayed as a heresiarch, split in two with his entrails spilling out in Hell (c. 1308). Late medieval depictions of the Prophet continue the theme of Muhammad being a false prophet, a demon, and the antichrist, a leader of a larger group (Muslims) sent to destroy or assimilate Christians. For portrayals of the Prophet Muhammad see: Brian A. Catlos, *Kingdoms of Faith: A New History of Islamic Spain* (New York: Basic Books, 2018); Richard Hitchcock, *Muslim Spain Reconsidered: From 711 to 1502* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2014); Jerry Broton, *This Orient Isle: Elizabethan England and the Muslim majority countries* (London: Penguin, 2016); Kenneth M. Setton, *Western Hostility to Islam and Turkish Prophecies of Doom* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1992); Minou Reeves, *Muhammad in Europe: A Thousand Years of Western Myth-Making* (New York: New York University Press, 2003); and Ahlam Sbaihat, "Stereotypes Associated with Prototypes of the Prophet of Islam's Name till the 19th Century," *Jordan Journal of Modern Languages and Literature* Vol. 7, No. 1 (2015): 21-38. For early-20th century Christian writing on Muslims see: Samuel Zwemer, *The Moslem Christ* (New York: 1911); Annie Van Zommer and Samuel M. Zwemer, *Our Moslem Sisters: A Cry of Need from Lands of Darkness Interpreted by Those Who Heard It* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1907); A.E. and S.M. Zwemer, *Moslem Women* (North Cambridge, MA: The Central Committee on the United Study of Foreign Missions, 1926); and Thomas S. Kidd, *American Christians and Islam: Evangelical Culture and Muslims from the Colonial Period to the Age of Terrorism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

poured their sentiments about the Muslim majority countries. But Scheherazade re-emerged with a potential for autonomy in the late 19th century, with the rise of middle-class consumerism and American imperialism that stretched into the 21st century.

GROUND ZERO

This dissertation examines the trajectory of the perception and agency of Muslim women through the U.S.-based consciousness from the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago through the post-9/11 and Trump era. It examines the points of tension between the desperate American and European desire to control the political narrative of Middle Eastern relations with the West and Muslim women's challenges to the narrative. In the following chapters, U.S. Muslim women reclaim identities, social spaces, and real battlefields through their entanglement in Islam, the Middle East and the Islamic State. This work builds upon recent work that examines the ways in which the Muslim World, Europe, and America continue to negotiate layers of interconnectedness, in much the same way that Scheherazade's *1001 Nights* were told and compiled, never static, always somehow imbibing at least part of popular sentiment about the Middle East. This work also connects two landscapes local to the United States: The Midway Plaisance, part of the 1893 Columbian Exposition, now a stretch of green land serving as a line of demarcation between the University of Chicago campus and one of Chicago's impoverished urban neighborhoods. The only remnant of the area that was once the origin of a living, performing, storytelling community of Muslims, including women, is a street sign that acknowledges the segment of the exposition but does not name or acknowledge its significance. The second site is "Ground Zero," the site of the World Trade Center destroyed in the terror

attacks of September 11, 2001. From that site this dissertation takes its title: “Scheherazade at Ground Zero.”

“Ground Zero” is a place *and* an historical moment. As Marc Redfield writes, “as a proper name, uncontextualized and capitalized, it refers to the site formerly occupied by the World Trade Center towers; as an idiom in more general use, it refers to the impact point of a bomb or the exact locus of an explosion.”⁴⁸ The 9/11 Museum, situated alongside the memorial (officially called “Reflecting Absence”) is “an institution dedicated to understanding how strength was expressed in a time of sorrow, how unimaginable problems were solved, how resilience and hope grew out of tragedy, the 9/11 Memorial & Museum is uniquely placed to offer insight, empathy, and expertise towards our past and present challenges.”⁴⁹ As a museum and public landmark, “Ground Zero” is a site of mourning, education, and nationalism. The museum offers public programming, most of it focused on counterterrorism, the historic aftermath of September 11th, al-Qaeda, and other security-related topics.⁵⁰ It presents a history highlighting the manifestation of all that was claimed to be wrong or deficient in the Muslim majority countries. The museum relates a story where angry, violent, male co-religionists attack a “Christian” nation. The museum presents the site carefully, delicately laid out in something less than the “locus of an explosion.” The narrative deliberately omits the complex history and series of events that led to the attack on the World Trade Center.⁵¹ The strategic omission of context is

⁴⁸ Marc Redfield, *The Rhetoric of Terror: Reflection on 9/11 and the War on Terror* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 23. See also: Susan Faludi, *The Terror Dream* (New York: Picador, 2008).

⁴⁹ 9/11 Memorial and Museum Homepage (<https://www.911memorial.org/>). Accessed December 10, 2020.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Osama bin Laden, “Letter to America,” *The Guardian*, November 24, 2002, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/nov/24/theobserver>. Accessed February 20, 2021. Bin Laden’s “Letter to America” appeared a year after the September 11th attacks and outlined the grievances against the United States (and its Western allies). The material spans from U.S. support of Israel to intervention in Somalia. Reading his letter in retrospect, the goals outlined by Bin Laden and al-Qaeda are still reflected in contemporary Islamic militant movements but transmitted through more sophisticated mediums but still not deviating from lack of discernment between civilian and military. See also: Ronald Brownstein and Robin Wright, “Bin Laden’s Goals Seemingly

a response to the original plan to make a memorial that was multi-faceted: that memorialized but was also reflective of the intent and outcome of terror.⁵² Families of victims allied themselves under the banner of “Take Back the Memorial.” In a letter to then-Mayor Michael Bloomberg, they wrote: “We, the undersigned, believe that the World Trade Center Memorial should stand as a solemn remembrance of those who died on September 11, 2001 and not as a journey of history’s ‘failures’ or as a debate about domestic and foreign policy in the post-9/11 world.”⁵³ The families of those killed along with the survivors of September 11th demanded that the memorial be about them. They guided mourning and remembrance of a catastrophic event too recent to memorialize permanently. The rush to create a memorial overshadowed the process of national grief and reckoning that should have preceded and informed a permanent installation. The rush to add permanence to collective grief and trauma also expedited the process of securitization of the State. Adrian Parr argues, “the homogenizing force of striated space was already at work when September 11th occurred; the traumatic memory of September 11th simply became the excuse to increase and legitimize the interpretation of space solely in terms of security.”⁵⁴ Securing the nation entailed the creation of the Department of Homeland Security in November 2002 to preserve American exceptionalism. Instead of naming the new department the “Department of National Security,” the Bush Administration instead chose, “homeland” to create

Elusive,” *The Chicago Tribune*, October 5, 2001, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/nation-world/sns-worldtrade-binladen-lat-story.html>. Accessed February 20, 2021. Analysts originally believed that Bin Laden’s goal was to pressure/coerce the Saudi government to remove the presence of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia and the Arabian Peninsula as the presence of non-believers (or infidels (*kufir*)) were disruptive to the sacred landscape of Arabia as Islam’s site of revelation. Although that was the catalyst, it was not the primary motivation for Bin Laden’s violent opposition or creation of a large-scale terror network.

⁵² James E. Young, *The Stages of Memory: Reflections on Memorial Art, Loss, and the Spaces Between* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 86.

⁵³ Erika Doss, “De Oppresso Liber and Reflecting Absence: Ground Zero Memorials and the War on Terror,” *American Quarterly* Vol. 65, No. 1, (March 2013), 201.

⁵⁴ Adrian Parr, *Deleuze and Memorial Culture: Desire, Singular Memory, and the Politics of Trauma* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2008), 135.

the illusion that this new office was exclusively focused on protecting the virtues of a Christian, American home life from another Muslim incursion. The department polices geographical and cultural borderlands which ensures that American Muslims, in particular, are kept captive and surveilled outside of America's national and cultural borders. At the national level, Homeland Security Committee Chair Representative Peter T. King claimed, in an interview with Fox News' Sean Hannity in 2004, that "no American Muslim leaders are cooperating in the War on Terror."⁵⁵ King continued to adhere to and repeat claims that up to 80% of American mosques were controlled and/or funded by fundamentalists, holding four hearings between 2011-2012 to address what he claimed was a massive radicalization of American Muslims and claims that terror groups were operating widely throughout the United States.⁵⁶ Those claims were contested by Muslim groups, including Alejandro J. Beutel of the Muslim Public Affairs Council: "Our heads aren't in the sand... The threat clearly exists, but I also want to put it in perspective. The threat exists, but it is not a pandemic."⁵⁷ King also advocated for a national surveillance system of Muslims, a practice that the New York Police Department (NYPD) had already implemented as of 2002 and used with impunity until 2011.⁵⁸ During the decade following 9/11, only 172 Muslim-Americans were identified as having some role in terrorist activities and those not necessarily in designing attacks on the United States.⁵⁹ Attacks since September 11th, 2001 on U.S. soil have largely been committed by individual or "lone wolf" attackers not part of a larger

⁵⁵ Joseph Alexiou, "Meet Peter King: The Man Behind Today's HUGELY Controversial Muslim Extremism Hearings," *Business Insider*, March 10, 2011, <https://www.businessinsider.com/peter-king-muslim-hearings-2011-3#king-airs-his-first-public-views-on-american-islam-6>. Accessed December 10, 2020.

⁵⁶ Raymond Hernandez, "Muslim 'Radicalization' is Focus of Planned Inquiry," *The New York Times*, December 16, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/17/nyregion/17king.html>. Accessed December 10, 2020.

⁵⁷ Laurie Goodstein, "Muslims to Be Congressional Hearings' Main Focus," *The New York Times*, February 7, 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/08/us/politics/08muslim.html>. Accessed February 20, 2021.

⁵⁸ Diala Shamas and Nermeen Arastu, "Mapping Muslims: NYPD Spying and its Impact on American Muslims," *CUNY School of Law*, 2012.

⁵⁹ Charles Kurzman, David Schanzer, and Ebrahim Moosa, "Muslim American Terrorism since 9/11: Why So Rare?" *The Muslim World* Vol. 101, No. 1 (September 2011): 464-483.

network, usually motivated by domestic or workplace conflict such as the 2015 attack at the Inland Regional Center in San Bernardino, California and the massacre at Pulse nightclub in Orlando Florida in 2016.⁶⁰ These numbers remain fairly steady despite the rise of the Islamic State in 2014. Current and would-be members of these organizations are present mostly online where they are also monitored by security agencies.⁶¹

A brief discussion of the NYPD policing of Muslims is important here as the center of the attacks and casualties: New York emerged as the focal point of memorialization. In 2002, “the NYPD Intelligence Division took advantage of the climate of “public tolerance” for aggressive police practices and began systematically spying on American Muslim enclaves throughout New York City and its surrounding metropolitan area.”⁶² The unit systematically mapped neighborhoods in New York City and the surrounding area with populations representing 28 “Ethnicities of Interest.”⁶³ All these ethnic groups originated in countries with a Muslim majority and also included Black Muslims who were largely American born.⁶⁴ The NYPD paid so-called “mosque crawlers” to attend services and events at a variety of mosques and even meetings of the Muslim Students Association (MSA) and report back to the unit with keywords such as “jihad” and “revolution.”⁶⁵ The program, and others like it, such as the FBI surveillance of Southern California mosques in 2019, has not publicly netted any terrorists or intelligence.

⁶⁰ John Roth, “Memo on the December 3, 2015 – San Bernardino Incident,” *Department of Homeland Security* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Homeland Security, 2015) and Ariel Zambelich and Alyson Hurt, “3 Hours in Orlando: Piecing Together an Attack and its Aftermath,” *NPR News*, June 26, 2016, <https://www.npr.org/2016/06/16/482322488/orlando-shooting-what-happened-update>. Accessed February 20, 2021.

⁶¹ Lorenzo Vidino and Seamus Hughes, “ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa,” *Program on Extremism at the George Washington University* (Washington, D.C.: The George Washington Program on Extremism, 2015).

⁶² Diala Shamas and Nermeen Arastu, “Mapping Muslims,” 29.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 10.

⁶⁵ Adam Goldman and Matt Apuzzo, “Informant: NYPD paid me to ‘bait’ Muslims,” *Associated Press*, October 23, 2012, <https://www.ap.org/ap-in-the-news/2012/informant-nypd-paid-me-to-bait-muslims>. Accessed December 10, 2020.

Surveillance and securitization strategies only succeeded in alienating non-Muslim Americans from Muslim Americans and endorsing Islamophobia.

The aftermath of 9/11 saw violent, xenophobic attacks on American Muslims (and those perceived to be Muslim); justified a now twenty-year war in Afghanistan under the pretense of “liberating” Afghanistan and Afghan women; and catalyzed extremist groups abroad such as the Islamic State (ISIS) to respond to the incursion of Western, non-Muslim aggression.⁶⁶ “Ground Zero” was also used to contest and prevent the expansion of Islam in New York City proper as opponents to Daisy Khan’s Cordoba Center labeled her project, “The Ground Zero Mosque” due to its proximity to “Ground Zero.”⁶⁷ Any infringement upon the sanctity, real or perceived, of Ground Zero is a blasphemy against American nationalism and a threat to national security. The September 11th attacks obliterated (or sought to destroy) not only significant national landmarks, but also the fragile peace that existed between American Muslims and non-Muslims. By 2001, the First Gulf War (1990-1991) was a distant memory, with a decisive victory by Americans against Saddam Hussein (1991): suicide bombings and the potency of the PLO were diminished by the start of the second *intifada*, the Palestinian uprising in the West Bank and Gaza (2000); and, stretching further back into America’s engagement with the Muslim Middle East, the 1979 Hostage Crisis in Iran remained in diminished form as a vague memories of anti-Iranian bumper

⁶⁶ Denise N. Baken and Ioannis Mantzikos, *Al Qaeda: The Transformation of Terrorism in the Middle East and North Africa* (New York: Praeger, 2015). See also: Raymond Ibrahim, *The Al Qaeda Reader: The Essential Texts of Osama Bin Laden’s Terrorist Organization* (New York: Crown Books, 2007).

⁶⁷ Laurie Goodstein, “Across Nation, Mosque Projects Meet Opposition,” *The New York Times*, August 7, 2010, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/08/us/08mosque.html>. Accessed December 17, 2020. The dispute over “Park51”/The Cordoba Center proposed for Manhattan and proximate to Ground Zero was part of a larger national debate over mosques in the United States even nine years after September 11^a, Americans across the country, rural and urban, opposed the development of new mosques and even Islamic cemeteries in the United States. See: Sarah Larimer, “‘Put it in your back yard. Not mine’: Feds investigating after Mass. Town rejects Muslim cemetery,” *The Washington Post*, August 19, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2016/08/19/put-it-in-your-backyard-not-mine-feds-investigating-after-mass-town-rejects-muslim-cemetery/>. Accessed December 17, 2020. Residents of Dudley, Massachusetts fought zoning for a Muslim cemetery. Opposition to Muslim cemeteries also occurred in Texas and Pennsylvania.

stickers.⁶⁸ There were, of course, in popular culture mediated images of veiled women. As Faegheh Shirazi and Reina Lewis both illuminate, America's hostile engagement with the Muslim majority countries inevitably generated a flood of images and literature centered on the violence of Muslim men, the subjugation of Muslim women, and a new catalogue of images of veiled women for Americans to consume.⁶⁹ The months and years after September 11th followed this same pattern of Islamophobic, deeply reductive images and narratives about Muslim women who were controlled by American men, and in a cultural shift, also by women.⁷⁰ In response to this tired recycling of anti-Muslim tropes, Muslim women, especially those coming of age and of the second and third generations of Muslims in America, seized this historical moment to fashion and promote their own narratives and claim their own agency in public.

CHAPTER OUTLINES

CHAPTER 1: Scheherazade in the White City: Gender, Performance, and Muslim Womanhood at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition

The first chapter of this dissertation, "Scheherazade in the White City," presented a template for how Muslim women were introduced to the American public. Their presentation at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition was the latest iteration of their identities as Muslim women. The women's identities, Arab, Jewish, Oud Nail, and Ghawazi, were filtered through the European tourist trade along the Nile before being transported to Paris for the Exposition *Universelle*. In Paris, some of the dancers were transformed into cabaret stars and minor celebrities, assuming

⁶⁸ Michael Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East: 1776 to the Present* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2008).

⁶⁹ Faegheh Shirazi, *The Veil Unveiled* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2004); Reina Lewis, *Muslim Fashion: Contemporary Style Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

⁷⁰ Faegheh Shirazi, *Brand Islam: The Marketing and Commodification of Piety* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016).

elements of French culture while shedding the aspects of their Arab, Muslim, Jewish, and tribal identities that did not enhance their art. Finally, some of the dancers were brought to the United States and established themselves on the “Street in Cairo” within the Egyptian theatre where their daily performances were scrutinized and editorialized. Americans, in contrast to the French, did not make celebrities of the dancers. With the exception of “Little Egypt,” celebrity and respectability was eluded the women of the Midway. The women who danced on the Midway in 1893 are still anonymous and tracing them after 1893 is futile. There is no way of tracing “*La Belle Fatma*” or “Colona, the Sudanese Baby Dancer.”⁷¹ They left no written record, no newspaper interview, or passenger manifest. Their work was entirely transactional. The only historical record of the dancers was left by white, middle class Americans who recorded their observations in newspaper editorials.⁷²

The chapter on the Midway Plaisance and its dancers deliberately excluded the adoption of belly dancing by white American women in the mid-twentieth century as a secularized form of entertainment and exercise.⁷³ Professional belly dancers, particularly white women, adopted personas based-on Orientalist writing and art as a form of sexual liberation.⁷⁴ In this way, they continue the secularization of the dance and its use as a way of expressing desire and sexuality in the same way that men and women who encountered the dance at the fair did in 1893.⁷⁵ Seventy years later “two major factors fueled the appeal of belly dancing in the age of flower power and

⁷¹ Putnam, *Types of the Midway*.

⁷² “On Midway Plaisance Street of All Nations at the World's Fair. The Oriental Dancing Girls,” *Idaho Statesman*, August 18, 1893. See also: “Mrs. Palmer Misrepresented: She Did Not See the Midway Dance at the World's Fair,” *The New York Times*, December 6, 1893.

⁷³ Rosina-Fawzia Al-Rawi, *Grandmothers Secrets: The Ancient Rituals and Healing Power of Belly Dancing* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2009). See also: Rachel Kraus, *Gendered Bodies and Leisure: The Practice and Performance of American Belly Dance* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

⁷⁴ Sunaina Maira, “Belly Dancing: Arab-Face, Orientalist Feminism, and U.S. Empire,” *American Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (2008): 319.

⁷⁵ van Nieuwker, *A Trade Like No Other*, 32.

political protest and continue to be important today. First, the 1960s and 1970s were a period of second-wave feminist activism marked by a focus on the ‘body as a site of pleasure and discovery,’ especially for white liberal feminists.”⁷⁶ Many contemporary belly dancers have blogs where they attempt to parse the history of belly dancing and link themselves to a secular, pre-Islamic form of female power. Some blogs, like *The Honest Courtesan*, *The Gilded Serpent*, and Eva Sampedro’s blog on tribal fusion, manage to uncover elements of the dance and its link to North African tribes like the Ouled Naïl.⁷⁷ As an art form, “belly dancing has become a site for staging a New Age feminism and liberal Orientalist perspective on Arab and Muslim women.”⁷⁸ Sunaina Maira labeled belly dancing among white American women “Arab Face.”⁷⁹ Similar to World *Hijab Day*, belly dancing is a byproduct of imperial feminism where non-Arab, non-Muslim, white women can play at exoticism without relinquishing either their privilege or power as white women. The Egyptian Theatre of the Midway Plaisance is now a constellation of dance studios and Middle Eastern restaurants where the narrative of Middle Eastern/Arab/Muslim is constructed to appeal to white, middle class Americans, just as it was in Chicago in 1893.

In this chapter, I rely on the histories of the Columbian Exposition like Robert Rydell’s *All the World’s a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (1987); Stanley Appelbaum’s *Spectacle in the White City* (2009); and even Erik Larsen’s *Devil in the White City* (2002) to introduce the premise of the Columbian Exposition to promote

⁷⁶ Maira, “Belly Dancing: Arab-Face,” 323.

⁷⁷ “Tribal Fusion” refers to a combination of “American Style” belly dancing with American cabaret style belly dancing first performed in the early 1990s. Tribal Fusion also includes elements from hip-hop and flamenco dancing among other forms of international dance.

⁷⁸ Mair, “Belly Dancing: Arab-Face,” 324.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 333.

American innovation, masculinities, and empire.⁸⁰ Rydell and Larsen are also useful, in distinct ways, to examine the burgeoning social tensions within the United States including the increasing economic and political agency of women within specific social and architectural parameters established by men.⁸¹ The valorizing of white masculinity, as Gail Bederman argued in *Manliness and Civilization* (1996), was deeply integrated in the design and participation of the exposition, which lifted whiteness and its associated moral and industrial achievements above other races.⁸² I examine the role of masculinities (and in some instances, white femininities) through the placement and production of ethnographic exhibits on the Midway Plaisance, specifically through the mapping of exhibits and bodies of Muslim women at the fair.

Inside the Columbian Exposition, the Midway Plaisance housed the amusement area apart from the White City. Rydell describes the Midway as a “Sliding Scale of Humanity (1987),” a reflection upon the popular work of eugenicist Francis Galton.⁸³ The Midway Plaisance contained living ethnographic exhibits set apart from the industrial achievements and innovation of the White City; among others it contained Muslim bodies and heavily promoted those of Muslim women.⁸⁴ Ethnographic displays did not originate at the Columbian Exposition,

⁸⁰ Robert Rydell, *All the Worlds a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Stanley Appelbaum, *Spectacle in the White City* (New York: Calla Editions, 2009); Erik Larsen, *Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic, and Madness at the Fair that Changed America* (New York: Vintage, 2004).

⁸¹ I am tempted to include a more robust discussion of Larsen’s work on H.H. Holmes, a prolific American serial killer who used the 1893 Columbian Exposition to source women to murder. Holmes used his overt masculinity to coerce young women into his employ and ultimately to their demise. His promises of economic independence coupled with marital success were ultimately false as he murdered and dissolved (literally) his victims in a secret chamber in his hostel. Holmes in this way serves as something more than just another “feature” in some way at the Columbian Exposition but a metaphor for larger debates on women’s citizenship and masculinities that the fair highlighted.

⁸² Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

⁸³ Debbie Challis, *The Archaeology of Race: The Eugenic Ideas of Francis Galton and Flinders Petrie* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014) and Thomas C. Leonard, *Illiberal Reformers: Race, Eugenics, and American Economics in the Progressive Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

⁸⁴ Zeynep Çelik, *Displaying the Orient: Architecture of Islam and 19th Century World’s Fairs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Zeynep Çelik and Leila Kinney, “Ethnography and Exhibitionism at the Exposition Universelles,” *Assemblage* 13, (December 1990).

but occurred at earlier French *Exposition Universelles* in 1878 and 1889. The architecture and mapping of the Columbian Exposition presenting a vision of Western supremacy deliberately joined race and empire. Historians like Zeynep Çelik primarily focus on the architecture and placement of all Muslim bodies on the Midway. This chapter brings deep scrutiny to how Muslim women inhabited the exhibits and deliberately performed a Muslim identity that was simultaneously contrived and authentic.

I trace the trajectory of Muslim women's involvement with the Columbian Exposition through the origins of their engagement with the West in North Africa in an effort to not just offer another reductive reading of images of Muslim women. I rely on the work of Lawrence Morgan, author of the only ethnography of the Ouled-Naïl tribe (1956), Karin van Nieuwkerk's history of dance and female religious performance in Egypt (1995), and Donna Carlton's history of the belly dancer, "Little Egypt," (1995) to unravel the history of Muslim women's performance and economic agency as it traveled from the Maghreb to Chicago.⁸⁵ Malek Alloula's *The Colonial Harem* (1986) and his reading of a selection of French colonial postcards of Ouled-Naïl women facilitates a discussion of how members of the Muslim Ouled-Naïl tribe engaged with the colonizer at home and also abroad through photography of costumes and "harem scenes."⁸⁶ The three-dimensional exoticization of Muslim women originates with these postcards. Alloula's guides theoretical reading of the postcards guides later readings of images like those of Sarah Graham Brown (1988), Mohja Kahf (1999), and Amira Jarmakani (2008).⁸⁷ Graham Brown's analysis places the images contextually within social developments and the

⁸⁵ Lawrence Morgan, *Flute of Sand: Experiences with the Mysterious Ouled-Naïl* (London: Odhams Press Limited, 1956); Karin van Nieuwkerk, *A Trade Like Any Other: Female Singers and Dancers in Egypt* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995); and Donna Carlton, *Looking for Little Egypt* (International Dance Discovery, 1995).

⁸⁶ Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem* (St. Paul: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

⁸⁷ Graham-Brown, *Images of Women* (1988); Mohja Kahf, *Western Representations of Muslim Woman: From Termagant to Odalisque* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999); and Amira Jarmakani, *Imagining Arab Womanhood: The Cultural Mythology of Veils, Harems, and Belly Dancers in the U.S.* (New York: Palgrave, 2008).

continuum of colonial tension in the Middle East, especially North Africa. Graham Brown's work, coupled with Alloula's analysis guide my reading of images taken from Buel (1893) and Putnam's (1893) albums where images of Muslim women are featured. I disagree with scholars like Kahf and Jarmakani who argue that women's power over these images was entirely subsumed by men. A cultural and economic exchange was ongoing and continuously negotiated, even if the exchange did not benefit Muslim women. Women's agency was limited by men, but not subsumed, and Muslim women participated in the cultural forgery still manufactured today.

The performances by and featuring Muslim women on the Midway Plaisance is the precursor to the post-9/11 art, activism, and engagement with and by Muslim women in the United States. The Midway Plaisance and Ground Zero are distinct spectacles of empire, built, dismantled, and destroyed. Their cultural legacies widely overlap in their purposes as testaments to the intentions of empire, but a part of each also more narrowly relates to how Americans engage with the Middle East, the Muslim majority countries, and the tensions that persist in those encounters. Finally, the Columbian Exposition's conclusion marked the end of even a vaguely "authentic" engagement with Muslim women in the U.S. This narrative ended abruptly in 1893. For a few "hootchy-kootchy"-inspired acts that traversed the country for the next decade, the women performers left no historical record and even sixty years later, Lawrence Morgan's ethnography of the Ouled-Nail omitted the transnational experiences of the tribe's women.⁸⁸ A gap was left to be filled with the whims of American consumers and an expanding U.S. empire while the Middle East navigated profound social changes and independence movements lasting decades into the late 20th century.

CHAPTER 2: Scherazade's Closet: Hijab, Activism, and "Generation M"

In the West, another boundary, an aesthetic one that transcends race and class, is still a point of contention in communities and politics. The *hijab* is in the midst of a process of Americanization in multiple forms: as an aesthetic device worn by Muslim women as part of their religious identity; as a form of *dawah*; an act of protest against the Trump administration; a commodity and in the form of the Women's Mosque of America. *Hijab* is one of the most fluid of concepts within Islamic material culture. Muslim women used the removal of the veil as a symbol of women's liberation in Egypt (1922); the veil was a tool of revolutionary struggle in Algeria, allowing women to move weapons undetected (1954-1962); and in Iran, *chador* was a simultaneously a statement against the aggressive secularization and despotism of the Shah's rule and support of Ayatollah Khomeini (1979).⁸⁹ In the United States, after 9/11, the *hijab* was symbolic of Islam and a way to identify Muslims, but it was also used for *dawah* and solidarity with non-Muslim women. Various iterations of World *Hijab* Day occurred in the years following 9/11 with try-on events eventually codified into one international event held annually every February. The American flag was converted into a *hijab* on at least three occasions in post-9/11 art. The American flag *hijab* increased Muslim women's visibility and emphasized their claim to citizenship.⁹⁰ The most recent iteration designed by artist Shepherd Fairey from the 2017

⁸⁹ Sahar Ghumkhor, *The Political Psychology of the Veil: The Impossible Body* (London: Palgrave Books, 2021). See also: Katherine Bullock, *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil: Challenging Historical and Modern Stereotypes* (International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2007).

⁹⁰ Bozena C. Welborn, Aubrey Westfall, Özge Çelik Russell, and Sarah A. Tobin, *The Politics of the Headscarf in the United States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018). See also: Nadja Sayej, "Muslim Women Respond to Shepard Fairey's American Flag Hijab Poster," *ArtSlant*, February 2, 2017, <http://www.artslant.com/ew/articles/show/47290-muslim-women-respond-to-shepard-faireys-american-flag-hijab-poster>. Accessed January 10, 2020; Munira Ahmed, "The Face of the Movement Addresses Her Critiques on Her Famous Photo." *The Islamic Monthly*, April 7, 2017, <http://www.theislamicmonthly.com/face-of-movement-addresses-critiques/>. Accessed January 10, 2020.

Women's March was complicated by its use by white women to protest the Trump presidency but the exploitation of *hijab* in this context still supported the presence of Muslims and Muslim women as citizens. The leadership of Linda Sarsour at the march helped to mitigate concerns that the image was purely exploitative.⁹¹

Western fascination coupled with commercial and political exploitation of Muslim women's dress continued long past the Orientalism of the 19th century is an ongoing phenomenon.⁹² This chapter concerns the emergence of Muslim women's negotiation of identity and religion in the U.S. This reimagining took place in the wake of direct U.S. war with Islamic nations. Knowledge of veiling expanded following 9/11, but the various iterations of the veil: *burqa*, *hijab*, *niqaab* assumed specific meanings assigned mostly by non-Muslims rather than by Muslim women themselves.⁹³ For the purposes of this dissertation, I focus on *hijab*, the most recognizable and popular form of veiling (Ahmed 2012) and how *hijab* enabled a generation to forge and negotiate a social, consumer, and even political identity in the wake of September 11th. This generation, also referred to as "Generation M" is learning how to leverage their power as participants in the political and consumer processes in the United States and Europe.⁹⁴

In the months following 9/11, a dramatic upsurge in hate crimes that centered on women wearing *hijab* prompted both feminist organizations and university campuses to host "Hijab

⁹¹ Rebecca Traister, "The Complicated, Controversial, Historic, Inspiring Women's March," *The Cut*, January 20, 2017. <https://www.thecut.com/2017/01/the-complicated-controversial-inspiring-womens-march.html>. Accessed March 14, 2021.

⁹² Shirazi, *Veil Unveiled* (2004); Emma Tarlo, *Visibly Muslim: Fashion, Politics, Faith* (New York: Berg Publishers, 2010); Leila Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence from the Middle East to America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012); Lewis, *Muslim Fashion* (2015).

⁹³ Shelina Janmohamed, *Generation M: Young Muslims Changing the World* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016). "Generation M" is an expanded version of Janmohamed's work for Ogilvy/Noor advertising including "Islamic Branding" (<https://www.ogilvy.com/uk/capabilities/islamic-branding>). An earlier example of this phenomenon was covered by Allegra Stratton, *Muhajababes: Meet the Middle East's Next Generation* (London: Constable Books, 2006).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

Day” events for non-Muslim women to wear *hijab* and learn about Islam.⁹⁵ The events were meant to help mitigate further attacks and also served as a form of *dawah* for Muslim students.⁹⁶ The Feminist Majority’s pivot from using scraps of *burqa* to advocate for the liberation of Afghan women from the Taliban in 2000 to hosting “Hijab Day” in 2001 is an example of the shallow understanding of veiling in the West. Commodifying *hijab* by Muslims in a way that was recognizable and palatable to American communities began in 2004 with “Pink *Hijab* Day” to coincide with Breast Cancer Awareness Month.⁹⁷ Commodification of “Hijab Day” came in February 2013 as part of a clever marketing scheme developed by Nazma Khan to promote her own *hijab* business in New York.⁹⁸ The day is still celebrated and non-Muslim women regularly partake in the event.

The 2016 Presidential Elections and the anti-Muslim rhetoric of the Trump campaign made Muslims, especially Muslim women, perhaps even more visible than in the immediate months and years following 9/11. Muslim activists like Linda Sarsour took Trump’s election to highlight the violence that plagued Muslim communities in the United States and abroad, but soon realized that the trauma of the 2016 election did not include an opportunity for Muslims to speak about gross abuses of their autonomy. Instead, Sarsour took up one of three leadership

⁹⁵ Ahmed, *Quiet Revolution*; Bozena C. Welborne, Aubrey L. Westfall, Özge Çelik Russell, and Sarah A. Tobin, *The Politics of the Headscarf in the United States* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2018); and Feminist Majority Foundation, 2001.

⁹⁶ *Dawah* means “call” and is a form of proselytizing in the context of Islam. It focuses on education and good deeds as a means of bringing people closer to and into Islam. In a contemporary context it deemphasizes conversion and focuses on transnational and interreligious relationships where the focus is on education and community rather than expanding the *umma* through conversion.

⁹⁷ Donna Abu Nasr, “Surpassing Stigma,” *Associated Press*, October 25, 2007, <https://www.dailynews.com/2007/10/25/surpassing-stigma/>. Accessed December 10, 2020; Rebecca S. Robinson, “Pink Hijab Day: Mediation of the Hijab as a Symbol of Protest,” *International Journal of Communication* 10, (2016); Lewis, *Muslim Fashion* (2015); Anne Stein, “Faith-Based Messaging Leads to More Mammograms for Muslim Women.” *University of Chicago Medicine*, May 29, 2018, <http://www.uchicagomedicine.org/forefront/cancer-articles/faith-based-messaging-leads-to-more-mammograms-for-muslim-women>.

⁹⁸ Melissa Berman, “That’s My Hijab,” *Narratively*, January 14, 2014. narratively.com/thats-my-hijab/.

positions in the Women’s March and images of Muslim women created by non-Muslim artists like Shepherd Fairey and homemade signs dominated the discourse of the post-election period.⁹⁹ The now famous image of a woman (model Mounira Ahmed) wearing an American flag *hijab* did very little other than to offer non-Muslim women the opportunity (to borrow from Lila Abu-Lughod’s essay), to play at “saving Muslim women.”¹⁰⁰

Political engagement was one path way to stronger advocacy for Muslim women, as the election of Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib in 2018 demonstrated. So was entrepreneurship in the expanding consumer market driven by young Muslims. Traditionally, conservative clothing for Muslims had to be made locally or purchased overseas or from conservative Christian clothing sites, but the 2010s saw an increasing demand for “Pious Fashion” in a religious market that was as diverse in its demands and taste for women’s fashion in the secular one.¹⁰¹ To illustrate these consumer demands, the chapter looks at the success of HauteHijab, American Eagle’s attempt to merge the iconic American blue jean into *hijab*, aspirational brands and the rise of Muslim influencers, known as “#hijabaes.”¹⁰² Adopting secular consumer trends accelerated and

⁹⁹ Christina Cauterucci, “A Q-and-A with Muslim Woman Whose Face Has Become a Symbol of Trump Resistance,” *Slate*, February 25, 2017, <http://www.slate.com/human-interest/2017/01/a-q-and-a-with-the-muslim-woman-whose-face-has-become-a-symbol-of-trump-resistance.html>; Nadja Sayej, “Muslim Women Respond to Shepard Fairey’s American Flag Hijab Poster,” *ArtSlant*, February 2, 2017; Edward Helmore, “Munira Ahmed: the woman who became the face of Trump resistance,” *The Guardian*, 23 Jan. 2017, www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jan/23/womens-march-poster-munira-ahmed-shepard-fairey-interview; Amplifier Foundation, 2017.

¹⁰⁰ Lila Abu Lughod, “Do Muslim Women Need Saving?” *American Anthropologist* Vol. 104, No. 3 (September 2002).

¹⁰¹ Banu Gökarıksel and Ellen McLarney, “Muslim Women, Consumer Capitalism, and the Islamic Culture Industry,” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* Vol. 6, No. 3 (Fall 2010); Elizabeth Bucar, *Pious Fashion: How Muslim Women Dress* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017); and Nathaniel S. Palmer, “The Muslim Fashion Market is Not a Monolith,” *Business of Fashion*, February 3, 2018, <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/opinion/op-ed-the-muslim-fashion-market-is-not-a-monolith>.

¹⁰² Instagram hashtag search to locate Muslim influencers who model and promote pious, *hijab*-centered fashion. “Bae” is a term of endearment that evolved from urban slang. See: Jane Solomon, “The Baest Bae to Ever Bae: Bae Isn’t Just a Noun Anymore,” *Slate*, January 22, 2015, <https://slate.com/human-interest/2015/01/that-s-so-bae-not-just-a-noun-anymore-here-s-how-bae-gets-used-as-a-verb-and-an-adjective.html>. Accessed February 21, 2021.

sustained the assimilation of Muslims and Islam into American culture in a way that activism failed to accomplish.

Finally, American Muslims, especially women, used their visibility for women within the community seeking change. Ongoing debates about what it means to be Muslim and American were used as a platform for American Muslim women to challenge accepted norms that were cultural rather than Islamic (Hamer, 2012; Elkhaoudi, 2014; ISNA, 2015).¹⁰³ I look at the practice of segregated prayer (Mernissi, 1987; Fewkes, 2019) as precedents for women's leadership and the founding of the Women's Mosque of America.¹⁰⁴ The Women's Mosque of America reflects issues surrounding *hijab*, since feminist scholarship around *hijab* included discussion and controversy about women's role in worship and the mosque (Wadud, 2006; Nomani, 2006). The establishment of a mosque for women in Los Angeles, represents a sustained presence of Muslim women into a new public space.

Chapter 3: SCHEHERAZADE'S CIRCLE OF KNOWLEDGE: Young Women, ISIS, and the Stories they Tell

The final chapter of this dissertation focuses on the displacement and radicalization of young, American and European-born women in the two decades following 9/11 and the 7/7 London Bombings.¹⁰⁵ Whereas the previous chapter highlighted Muslim women's identities

¹⁰³ Juliane Hamer, *American Muslim Women, Religious Authority, and Activism*, Austin: University of Austin Press, 2012; Salma Elkhaoudi, "Women's Mosque of America: In the Founder's Own Words," 2014, *MuslimGirl*. <http://muslimgirl.com/10157/womens-mosque-america-interview-m-hasna-maznavi/3/>; ISNA'S Taskforce for Women-Friendly Masjids, "ISNA Statement on the Inclusion of Women in Masjids," September 4, 2015, <http://www.isna.net/isna-statement/>

¹⁰⁴ Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* (New York: Basic Books, 1992); Jacqueline H. Fewkes, *Locating Maldivian Women's Mosques in Global Discourses*, London: Palgrave Books, 2019.

¹⁰⁵ Two complicating factors in writing this chapter are: first, the only recent active involvement of women in terror organizations and second, much of this chapter was written shortly after or during events concerning the women involved. At the time of writing, new developments including challenges to repatriation of Shamima Begum (UK) and Aqsa Mahmood (US).

within the U.S. and Euro-American contexts, this chapter analyzes how Muslim women make meaning for Islam in the twenty years since the attacks. Like others who examined this issue recently including Deeyah Khan, Meredith Loken and Anna Zelenz, and most recently, Azadeh Moaveni (2019), I grapple with the motivation for young women's engagement with the Islamic State (ISIS).¹⁰⁶ Khan argues that joining IS was a means of escape from racism and Islamophobia, while Loken and Zelenz claim that the escapism that Khan describes is an escape from post-9/11, state-mediated identities. Loken and Zelenz argue that, "extremism is not built on factors inherent in fundamentalism, but that individual disaffection with the West-spurred by colonialism and exclusion-finds comfort in extremism."¹⁰⁷ IS and their iteration of Salafism makes an appealing, uncomplicated option for disenfranchised adolescents.¹⁰⁸ I expand upon the observations made by these scholars to argue that the global upheaval of September 11th continues to shape the ways young Muslim women, negotiate their religious and cultural identities within a secular state fixated on security and targeting their faith.

¹⁰⁶ Deeyah Khan, "For ISIS Brides, it's not about 'jihadi brides,' it's about escape," *The Guardian*, June 20, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/21/isis-women-its-not-about-jihadi-brides-its-about-escape>; Meredith Loken and Anna Zelenz, "Explaining extremism: Western women in Daesh," *European Journal of International Security* 3, No. 1 (Feb. 2018); Azadeh Moaveni, *Guest House for Young Widows: Among the Women of ISIS* (New York: Random House, 2019).

¹⁰⁷ Loken and Anna Zelenz, "Explaining extremism," 19.

¹⁰⁸ A complete definition of "Salafi" from the Oxford Dictionary of Islam: "Name (derived from *salaf*, 'pious ancestors') given to a reform movement led by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh at the turn of the twentieth century. Emphasized restoration of Islamic doctrines to pure form, adherence to the *Quran* and *Sunnah*, rejection of the authority of later interpretations, and maintenance of the unity of *ummah*. Prime objectives were to rid the Muslim *ummah* of the centuries-long mentality of *taqlid* (unquestioning imitation of precedent) and stagnation and to reform the moral, cultural, and political conditions of Muslims. Essentially intellectual and modernist in nature. Worked to assert the validity of Islam in modern times, prove its compatibility with reason and science, and legitimize the acquisition of Western scientific and technological achievements. Sought reforms of Islamic law, education, and Arabic language. Viewed political reform as an essential requirement for revitalization of the Muslim community. Its influence spread to Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Syria, India, Indonesia, and Egypt in particular. The most influential movements inspired by Salafi were the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt and Jamaat-i Islami of Pakistan. In the late twentieth century, the term came to refer to traditionalist reformers." "Salafi," *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e2072>, Accessed February 21, 2021. See also: Jacob Olidort, "What is Salafism? How a Nonpolitical Ideology Became a Political Force," *Foreign Affairs*, November 24, 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/2015-11-24/what-salafism>. Accessed February 21, 2021.

A preliminary discussion in the chapter focuses on Salafism and women's involvement with Salafi groups. Annabel Inge's 2016 study of Salafi women in London, including motivation for conversion and social exchanges is the only current ethnography of Salafi women. I draw upon Inge's experience with Salafi women to contend that Salafism's appeal lies in its articulated and enforced gender norms that allow some measure of autonomy and community for disenfranchised groups. Inge claims that Salafism (and Wahhabism) are not inherently linked to IS and that they actively challenge IS and its ideology. But I concur with the arguments made by Maher (2014) and Lauzière (2015): although Salafism is not inherently violent, this iteration of Islamic teaching does form the theoretical and theological framework for Islamic terror groups.¹⁰⁹ Inge cites some prominent Salafi leaders in the UK as speaking-out against IS but the fact remains that Salafism is without question intertwined with and supporting the ideology of terror groups.¹¹⁰ Despite these efforts, Salafism retains its appeal to young Muslims, including women.

In disentangling the motivations for women's engagement in what became terror to some (the West) and *jihad* to others (sympathetic Muslims and affiliated terror groups), I trace women's engagement in state warfare back to the early Muslim community and also examine the engagement of women in guerrilla warfare in mid-century independence movements like the Algerian War of Independence. Since the early centuries of Islam, women have played a part in defending the *umma* through military engagement with other tribes, political foes, or, in the contemporary period, colonizing powers. After September 11th, 2001, women's engagement against terror changed through the use of women suicide bombers by Hamas in the Occupied

¹⁰⁹ Shiraz Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Henri Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism: Islamic Reform in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

¹¹⁰ Anabel Inge, *The Making of a Salafi Muslim Woman: Paths to Conversion* (London: Oxford University Press, 2017), 235.

Territories, carefully documented by Barbara Victor in 2003.¹¹¹ Suicide bombings, an anomaly through the early 2000s became commonplace as independent, militant Islamic organizations began to appreciate and rationalize the utility of women for combat and state building (IS). Lara Sjoberg and Caron Gentry seek to downplay its extent arguing that women suicide bombers are “a strategy specific to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and not indicative of an entire organization.”¹¹² However, that assertion is false, as women performed suicide bombing before the formation of al-Zarqawi’s organization, Al-Qaeda in Iraq.¹¹³ The use of women in terror operations emerged during the beginning of the Palestinian Second *Intifada* in 2002 as a tactic against Israeli occupation, later to be adopted by al-Qaeda and their affiliate groups.

In this chapter, I argue that the motivations of young women recruited into IS were vulnerable due to being untethered to any stable identity or community. I profile a selection of women who were indoctrinated into the ideology of ISIS (IS) and some who made *hijra* to the Islamic State.¹¹⁴ Martha Crenshaw (2000); Joel Day and Scott Kleinmann (2012); and Katharine Kneip (2015) theorize that radicalization is the culmination of experiences over a period of time rather than a single event.¹¹⁵ For young women who join IS, I argue that September 11th and the subsequent normalizing of Islamophobia, securitization, and war were the “culmination of

¹¹¹ Barbara Victor, *An Army of Roses: Inside the World of Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers* (London: Constable and Robinson, Ltd., 2004).

¹¹² Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women’s Violence in Global Politics* (London: Zed Books, 2007), 124.

¹¹³ Sjoberg and Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores*, 124. See also: Christopher Dickey, “The Women of Jihad,” *Newsweek*, December 12, 2005, 26; Kevin Peraino and Evan Thomas, “Odyssey of an American Wife,” *Newsweek*, January 14, 2002, 40; and Christopher Dickey and Gretel C. Kovatch, “In bin Laden’s World, an Ambivalent Role for Women,” *Newsweek*, January 14, 2002, 48.

¹¹⁴ *Hijra* refers to the emigration of the early Muslim community to Medina where they took sanctuary from the Pagan tribes persecuting the early community in Mecca. It is used frequently by recruiters to the Islamic State to encourage (young) Muslims to flee Western countries for sanctuary in the “Islamic State” in Syria (Raqqa).

¹¹⁵ Martha Crenshaw, “The Psychology of Terrorism: An Agenda for the 21st Century,” *Political Psychology* Vol. 21, No. 2 (2000): 170; Joel Day and Scott Kleinmann, “Combating the Cult of ISIS: A Social Approach to Countering Violent Extremism,” *The Review of Faith and International Affairs* Vol. 15, Issue 3 (2017): 143; Katharine Kneip, “Female Jihad: Women in the ISIS,” *Politikon: IAPSS Political Science Journal*, Vol. 29 (2015): 94.

experiences.”¹¹⁶ Some of the women were born after September 11th or were infants in 2001, and not immediately conscious of the long-term political and social implications or directly affected by the event.¹¹⁷ Sjoberg (2018) writes that, “women who have joined IS are framed as manipulated by recruiters and susceptible to that manipulation,” an assertion that I agree with, although, like Sjoberg, I acknowledge the process is more complex.¹¹⁸ Mia Bloom (2010) asserts that the “men in these women’s lives do play a crucial role in mobilizing them and facilitating their entrance into the organization.”¹¹⁹ The recruiters are often pictured as men (“Brothers”), but they are often joined by women (“Sisters”) in recruitment.¹²⁰ The process of recruitment is more complex, and increasingly sophisticated, using social media, WhatsApp, YouTube, etc. carefully crafted to appeal to specific vulnerable, isolated audiences.

The final segment of this chapter is comprised of profiles of some of the women who joined the IS. The group comprises both American and British women who came of age in the decade following September 11th. The public does not yet have access to a complete roster of successful recruits to the Islamic State, so trying to assemble a profile of a “typical” recruit results in several shallow, distorted, and fragmented images. The most recent attempt to configure a robust profile including motivations was published by Moaveni (2019) and although it does give us a more nuanced picture of the women, it is still not a complete narrative.¹²¹ Instead of relying on Moaveni, I compiled profiles of women through news sources (*CNN, The Guardian, The New York Times, BuzzFeed*) to attempt to add some three-dimensionality to my

¹¹⁶ Kneip, “Female Jihad,” 94.

¹¹⁷ Sjoberg and Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores*, 130.

¹¹⁸ Laura Sjoberg, “Jihadi brides and female volunteers: Reading the Islamic State’s war to see gender and agency in conflict dynamics,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* Vol. 35, Issue 3 (2018): 296-311.

¹¹⁹ Mia Bloom, “Female Suicide Bombers: A Global Trend,” *Daedalus* Vol. 135, No. 1 (Winter 2007): 94-102.

¹²⁰ Kneip, “Female Jihad,” 94. See also: Anita Perešin, “Fatal Attraction: Western Muslimas and ISIS,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* Vol. 9, No. 3 (June 2015): 21-38.

¹²¹ Moaveni, *Guesthouse for Young Widows*, 2019.

subjects which was, inevitably, a deeply frustrating exercise. However, even with these limited details about the women, I felt a surprising level of empathy and sadness, despite (as in the case of Aqsa Mahmood), their embrace of a grossly violent and misogynistic organization. After spending so much time with these women, the realization that they were still children when they were radicalized makes understanding the process of recruitment and radicalization paramount, as well as advocating for their repatriation, essential to state security. Understanding recruitment into IS can be leveraged for anti-Islamophobia campaigns and creating a more secure, integrated society.

CONCLUSION

Unlike the fictional heroine, Scheherazade, Muslim women negotiating space and identity in Euro-America have not achieved their happy ending, having won over the Sultan and assumed the role of Sultana. The women in this dissertation are still weaving their tales: stories of seeking personal and religious autonomy while crafting an identity that either dovetails with Western culture or rejects it entirely. Muslim women now work on challenging two forms of Orientalism: the classic tropes of belly dancing, sex, and aggression from Islamic lands that Said theorized, and the newer form, “neo-Orientalism,” which informs state security and emboldens the Islamophobic.¹²² The decisions Muslim women make about how to navigate the challenges to community in the U.S. and Europe are to either adapt to or reject the circumstances of living outside of a Muslim-majority country. Some Muslim women adapt Islamic precepts (prayer) and aesthetics (*hijab*) to be workable in a Western context and strive to normalize (and neutralize)

¹²² Neo-Orientalism evolved following September 11^a as a new iteration of Orientalism. Neo-Orientalism is informed by the rise in terror attacks and a new military and cultural engagement with the Middle East and the Muslim majority countries. It is no longer an Orientalism comprised of harem scenes and passive observations by Westerners looking into the Muslim majority countries. It is a more active and complex form of Orientalism because of transnationalism, globalization, and securitization of Western states with significant Muslim populations. See: Tugrul Keskin, *Middle East Studies after September 11: Neo-Orientalism, American Hegemony, and Academia* (New York: Haymarket Books, 2019).

Islam an “Islamic Threat” while maintaining their identity and values.¹²³ Other women reject Euro-American culture altogether in favor of a “purified” version of Islamic society in the form of the Islamic State (IS/ISIS). From the Columbian Exposition to the *hijabaes* and the women of IS, Muslim women are collectively negotiating, navigating, and resisting an identity co-opted and created by the West. The outcome of this identity will be shaped by U.S. and European governments and citizens reckoning with the long-term impact of colonialism, imperialism, and globalization on Muslim-majority countries for the benefit of the West.

¹²³ John Esposito, *The Islamic Threat* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). The “Islamic Threat” is a term coined by Esposito in 1999. The book is on its third edition as it evolves through two decades following September 11^o and the definition of an “Islamic Threat” changes with each new manifestation of political Islam and the influence of Salafism.

CHAPTER I: SCHEHERAZADE IN THE WHITE CITY: GENDER, PERFORMANCE, AND MUSLIM WOMANHOOD AT THE 1893 WORLD'S COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION

“Now that we are not afraid of Turks, Arabs, and Saracens, the Orient has become for us a sort of hippodrome where grand performances are given... We take the Orient for a theater.”

Le Figaro, 26 June 1867

Introduction

The 1893 World's Columbian Exposition imported Muslim women, invented Muslim womanhood in the United States and everywhere, and established a national mythology around Muslim women. The Street in Cairo, an area of the Midway Plaisance meant to replicate an average street in Cairo featured women belly dancing, lounging in a harem, and women in “Muslim” dress wandering through the streets interacting with guests. I argue in this chapter that Muslim women had significant agency as actors by leveraging some indigenous, folk practices tangentially related to Islam (*zar*) and various costumes to their advantage to create agency that did not exist or was curtailed in their home countries and under Ottoman rule. The Columbian Exposition forever cemented the expectation of Muslim womanhood as hyper-sexual, ephemeral, and subservient and thus fodder for the American imagination. This imagined Muslim woman became ingrained in popular imagery, fantasy, and ethnic stereotyping well into the 20th and 21st centuries. Indeed, much of the agency constructed during the 1893 World's Fair was undone over the next century by the commercialization and politicization of Muslim womanhood from through advertising, television, and US conflicts abroad with Iran and Afghanistan. However, contemporary Muslim women have adopted the same techniques that early women did: subverting the colonial gaze, appropriating dress, and challenging what has become normative practice in Islamic communities to create and perform a new, perhaps even “Americanized” version of Islamic practice and belief. The new, multicultural, multiracial, multiethnic Islam that

now inhabits America is a conglomeration of different iterations of Islamic practice and belief. The strategies that Muslim women are adopting to build agency and visibility in the American *umma* (global community of Muslims) and the American social and political landscape, originated in the dancers and of late 19th century both in Cairo and on Chicago's Midway Plaisance.¹²⁴

The 1893 World's Columbian Exposition hosted a myriad of national displays and cultural curiosities. Along its famous Midway Plaisance outside the formal fairgrounds, exhibits portraying Muslim-majority countries were perhaps amongst the most heavily attended. As John Mackenzie writes:

The 'native villages' were in fact among the most enduring features of all the exhibitions... They repay closer attention because here was the prime way in which people in the metropolis were brought into contact with the conquered peoples of the Empire. Here were the racial stereotypes illustrated, Social Darwinism established in the popular mind, and control of the world expressed in its most obvious human form. Moreover, the numbers of programs and postcards of these exhibits that can still be found seem to indicate that they caught the public imagination. Yesterday's enemies, the perpetrators of yesterday's 'barbarism' became today's exhibits, showing of quaint music, dancing, sports, living crafts and food, but now set on the path to civilization.¹²⁵

At the Algerian Village, the Egyptian Theatre, and the Persian Palace, dancers from the Muslim majority countries together with American-born dancers performed Muslim womanhood through belly dancing. Through their dancing and the photographic record of their costume and performance provided in souvenir guides by cultural anthropologists like F.W. Putnam and intrepid entrepreneurs like Sol Bloom, Muslim women subverted the imperial gaze. They actively engaged, in a medium they could control, with the colonizer, in this instance the

¹²⁴ The *Umma* is the global community and, especially, the unity of Muslims under the umbrella of Islam.

¹²⁵ John Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 113.

designers of the exhibit (Bloom) and the fairgoers, a diverse cross-section was not simply limited to wealthy Americans and European travelers abroad, in a medium that they could control. Dancers wore a modified Islamic dress, a hodgepodge of ornaments and textiles from various regional communities of North African Muslims. These costumes included the now ubiquitous “harem pants,” bare torsos, and nomadic ornamentation, together with other signifiers like *hijab* and ritual movements associated with mysticism and the Egyptian *Zar*. The dancers also contributed to Americans’ changing attitudes about sex and bodies through their simultaneous visibility (public performance) and invisibility (veiling). Dancers utilized Islamic mysticism and female power in Islam to their advantage, controlling their colonizers in ways that extended into the public sphere and altering the ways in which Americans thought about sex and the body. Americans at the Columbian Exposition could experience desire through Islam. Muslim dancers undermined the celebration of imperialism and the accomplishments of the Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic races through their performance of desire vis-à-vis Islam. Dancers, through their gyrations, also thrust sex into a shared public space through the non-Protestant narrative of Islam, thereby doubly undermining both the imperial gaze and the Christian narrative of the neighboring White City.

In the medieval tales of *The Thousand and One Arabian Nights* the character of Scheherazade uses her intellectual and political savvy, as well as her gender to preserve her life and her livelihood. After she takes the bold initiative of arranging her own marriage with Sultan Shahrayar, Scheherazade begins the first of one-thousand-and-one nights of storytelling, in which she, together with the help of her sister, Dinarzad, harnesses both her intellect and her sexuality. In so doing, she retained some of her own female power while subduing the impulses of a murderous sultan. In the tales, Scheherazade’s storytelling is the commodity upon which she

trades for her survival. In 1893, nearly one-thousand years later, inside of the White City and like their fictional predecessor, female dancers from Muslim North Africa also plied their wares in the form of their bodies, sexuality, and cultural knowledge inside another marble palace. These modern Scheherazade's also sought to tell tales, but their stories were exiled to the carnivalesque atmosphere of the Midway by white American women manifested as the Board of Lady Managers, the group of women responsible for the execution of exhibits that celebrated women's achievements.¹²⁶ Together with the men who designed and hosted the Columbian Exposition, white Protestant bodies conspired against brown Muslim bodies to craft a new narrative, separate from the intimate, feminine ritual of the dance, that exploited the gyrations of Muslim women's torsos and reinterpreted their fables. However, like Scheherazade, these women simultaneously contested their portrayal as sexual and served as willing participants in the spectacle because their very survival depended upon the men who bought, rented, and imported them to the United States.¹²⁷ With no choice but to perform, the Muslim dancers fought back against a narrative that framed their dancing as savage and sexual.

The White City served as an architectural metaphor to showcase the accomplishments of white men. It did not feature brown men or women, nor did it elevate white women. The city was erected for the purpose of exhibiting the industrial and commercial achievements of these white men, particularly those of Americans. The failure of peoples to meet the requisite criteria of whiteness with corresponding intellectual or cultural achievement was marked by their relegation to the Midway Plaisance, a carnivalesque ghetto on the outskirts of the White City. Here on the

¹²⁶ "On Midway Plaisance Street of All Nations at the World's Fair. The Oriental Dancing Girls," *Idaho Statesman*, August 18, 1893. See also: "Mrs. Palmer Misrepresented: She Did Not See the Midway Dance at the World's Fair," *The New York Times*, December 6, 1893.

¹²⁷ Sol Bloom, *The Autobiography of Sol Bloom* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1948). In his autobiography Bloom writes that he paid \$1000 to a French businessman for the rights to import the village from the *Paris Exposition Universelle* in 1889 and exhibit it throughout the United States and South America.

Midway the world's nations congregated in a variety of exhibits that simultaneously exploited and celebrated their unique cultural commodities: commodities neatly packaged within bodies.¹²⁸ It is within this setting, mostly upon the bodies of the "other," that organizers of the fair, entrepreneurs, and fairgoers themselves translated Islam: they stripped Middle Eastern culture of its Muslim signifiers and appropriated Islamic cultural artifacts, gender, and especially mysticism, exploiting a dizzying array of religious and cultural products for entertainment. However, despite these limitations, Muslim women found ways to circumvent the restrictions placed upon them; like the famous storyteller, they ensured their survival by manipulating a public masculinity that faced challenges from changes brought by modernization to sex and gender. Through their dancing, Muslim women subverted both the imperial and colonial gaze and challenged public attitudes about the performance of sex and sexuality.

The removal of these women from their traditional venues of performance on the streets and villages also removed them from their local economies and transferred them into the economies of entrepreneurs and anthropologists alike. More than anyone else, Businessman Sol Bloom, who imported the Algerian Village. G.B. Putnam, the Harvard-trained anthropologist who took a particular interest in Muslims¹²⁹ and other investors in the Exposition created the economy of the Midway.¹³⁰ Women in Muslim-majority countries were never guaranteed income, but relied on goodwill, sometimes manipulating one of the central tenets of Islamic belief, *zakat*, a tax that takes the form of a charitable donation or philanthropy. In countries with regular tourist trade like Algeria and Egypt, women relied upon peddling exoticism and desire,

¹²⁸ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

¹²⁹ F.W. Putnam, *Types of the Midway Plaisance* (St. Louis: N.D. Thompson Publishing Company, 1894).

¹³⁰ Bloom, *Autobiography*, 107. Bloom discusses his entrepreneurial role in the Columbian Exposition, including his importation of the Algerian Village for display on the Midway Plaisance in his autobiography. Bloom is widely credited as being the developer behind the Midway Plaisance, taking over the exhibit from the Department of Anthropology. Under Bloom's guidance, the Midway Plaisance became a center of entertainment rather than a venue of serious anthropological study.

not a connection to holiness through poverty, to sell sex and desire. They thereby developing a micro economy built-around a conscious bastardization of religious ritual, all to ensure their economic survival.¹³¹ The Algerians possessed enough economic savvy and knowledge of Western culture through colonization by the French and the subsequent tourist trade, to understand that even a short-stay in the United States had the potential to be quite lucrative, even if it required self-exploitation, especially for women.¹³² The *New York Herald Tribune* reported that the dancers were paid a sum of \$30 for their services for the duration of their stay in the United States, not an insignificant amount of cash for women of that time.¹³³ The promise of a larger income and opportunities associated with Western civilization may have galvanized performers, as well as other poor urban and rural women to emigrate first to Paris where they performed at the 1889 Exposition and then to Chicago in 1893.¹³⁴

The Hootchy-Kootchy in the *Jahiliyya*¹³⁵

The dancers imported the *danse du ventre* to the Midway Plaisance with the assistance of white male entrepreneurs who sought to exploit the thriving and well-established tourist trade in

¹³¹ Karin van Nieuwker, *A Trade Like Any Other: Female Singers and Dancers in Egypt* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 26.

¹³² Algeria remained under French colonial rule until 1962, while Egypt remained under British colonial rule until 1922, with the exception of the Suez Canal Zone.

¹³³ "The Midway Dancers Fined: Their Manager Paid \$30 For Each Of The Three Women," *New York Herald-Tribune*, Dec. 7, 1893, 3.

¹³⁴ Aileen Vincent-Barwood, "The Arab Immigrants," *Saudi ARAMCO World Magazine*, September/October, 1986, 15. Early Arab emigrants to the United States did not intend to settle in the United States. The majority of Arabs emigrating from the Ottoman Empire (which included Egypt) intended to remain in the United States for up to two years, generating income through peddling. Income earned was to then provide for the establishment of businesses in their home countries.

¹³⁵ "Pre-Islamic period, or "ignorance" of monotheism and divine law. In current use, refers to secular modernity, for example in the work of Abu al-Ala Mawdudi, who viewed modernity as the "new *Jahiliya*." Sayyid Qutb interpreted *Jahiliya* as the domination of humans over humans, rather than submission of humans to God. The term denotes any government system, ideology, or institution based on values other than those referring to God. To correct this situation, such thinkers propose the implementation of Islamic law, values, and principles. Radical groups justify militant actions against secular regimes in terms of jihad against *Jahiliya*." Oxford Islamic Studies Online, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e1157>, Accessed November 27, 2020.

North Africa and the Levant in the late 19th century.¹³⁶ The dancers' agency, their willing participation in first the vibrant and often *lucrative* tourist trade and the Columbian Exposition, demonstrate that women had a more sophisticated understanding of the colonial (male) gaze, allowing them to capitalize upon and exert their power over the colonizer through belly dancing. As colonial citizens, Egyptian and Algerian dancers had survived under the authority of the metropole, but in matters pertaining to *cultural* authority, the dancers negotiated a space between the Islamic and the colonial, creating a sophisticated yet subtle new source of power that gave them a particular agency.

By 1876, the end of the Tanzimat Reforms, the Ottoman state, corrupt and gradually ceding power to European powers, was unable to support its population.¹³⁷ Traditionally in Muslim-majority countries, *waqf* (religious endowments) were established with the intention of donating one's earthly goods, a parcel of land, or cash "in charity of poors or other good objects."¹³⁸ But that safety net was inadequate. As a result, female dancers understood that their survival both as performers and as women, depended on manipulating and negotiating the area between colonizers and colonized, Muslim and non-Muslim, first in Egypt and Algeria, and then in the United States.

¹³⁶ Elvan Cobb, "Learning Vicariously: Tourism, Orientalism and the Making of an Architectural Photography Collection of Egypt," *Architectural Histories* 5, no. 1 (2017): 2.

¹³⁷ The Tanzimat Reforms (1839-1876) represented a period of social reforms focused on modernizing the Ottoman Empire and consolidating power structures. See: Jakub Mazanec, "The Ottoman Empire at the Beginning of Tanzimat Reforms," *Prague Papers on the History of International Relations* 2 (2016): 24 and E. Attila Aytakin, "Peasant Protest in the Late Ottoman Empire: Moral Economy, Revolt, and the Tanzimat Reforms," *International Review of Social History* 57, no. 2 (2012), <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-review-of-social-history/article/peasant-protest-in-the-late-ottoman-empire-moral-economy-revolt-and-the-tanzimat-reforms/71E8BB89C36FE8160E4B939E62BE668A>.

¹³⁸ Joseph Schacht, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (London: Clarendon Press, 1963). This definition comes from the Hanafi School of Islamic Law. A *waqf* is meant to be used for the betterment of Muslim society and the *umma* as a whole through the creation of a trust that will ensure the development or sustainability of educational and welfare mechanisms within Muslim communities both local and national. It is more than *zakat*, the religious tax for the living, but its ultimate purpose remains to continue to do God's work on Earth even after death.

Belly dancing originated in Egyptian culture, having evolved from an existing tradition within Egyptian practice of Islam performed by the *Awâlim*, a group of female religious scholars who used dance for the purposes of religious devotion.¹³⁹ Other innovators included the *Ghawâzî*, a second group of dancers who “performed unveiled in the streets and in front of coffeehouses.”¹⁴⁰ In Islam, dance is permitted if it is a means of becoming closer to the divine and is an intrinsic element of Islamic mysticism. The rise of the tourist industry (in tandem with colonization) in the early-mid-19th century in North Africa forced the dance away from its religious origins.¹⁴¹ The medieval Islamic jurist al-Ghazali wrote, “A performance is not acceptable if too much time is devoted to it, so that it interferes with higher Islamic goals and distracts believers’ attention from their devotion to God.”¹⁴² While the public performances of the *Awâlim* coincided with Saints Days or religious holidays, the *Ghawâzî* performed in public for the purposes of entertainment rather than religious vocation.¹⁴³ These two groups of dancers would eventually merge as a result of government attempts at religious and moral reform, obscuring some of the original signifiers of Islamic mysticism and female performance.¹⁴⁴

In the mid-nineteenth century, under the rule of Muhammad ‘Ali, the Ottoman governor of Egypt, the government instituted a heavy tax on female performers. In 1834, the governor, under the advisement of the Ottoman-Egyptian *‘ulama*, who disapproved of public performances given by women, issued an edict that officially banned female dancers and public performers in

¹³⁹ Exact dates for the origin of the *Awâlim* are unknown as the Muslim conquest of Christian and Pagan societies inevitably Islamicized dance as part of ritual in some communities, especially in the Levant (Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon).

¹⁴⁰ vanNieuwker, *A Trade Like No Other*, 26 and 35. “The word *‘alma* completely lost its original meaning of ‘learned woman.’ At the beginning of the 19th century, its meaning had changed to singer-dancer, and by the 1850s it denoted a dancer-prostitute.” (pages 26 and 35) In contrast, linguistically the Arabic word *‘alim*, the masculine equivalent, has never lost its meaning.

¹⁴² Al-Ghazali (Paris, 1902), ascited in van Nieuwker, *A Trade Like No Other*, 9.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 23

¹⁴⁴ van Nieuwker, *A Trade Like No Other*, 32.

Cairo, regardless of the intention of the performance. The ban also included the *Awâlim* despite their conforming to the recommendations of Muslim jurists. The Ottoman governor's edict also banned prostitutes from the capital, eliminating yet another source of income for poor women.¹⁴⁵ The *'ulama* hoped that the ban would safely restore moral order to the city and the province. The ban also served as a response to the growing incursion of European travelers and colonial influence or simply a method through which 'Ali could gain traction with Al-Azhar University, the center of Sunni learning, to establish the legitimacy of his leadership. Both motivations for establishing some kind of control mechanism, most effectively addressed the regulation of morality and desire. The taxes and subsequent ban of the dancers inadvertently created a black market and a lascivious tourist culture in Upper Egypt where dancers and prostitutes migrated to ply their trades among European and American travelers. In Southern Egypt, where much of the tourist culture was centered around the Valley of the Kings and other Egyptological delights along the Nile. Provincial governors and the police looked away in the interest of the economic benefits that the dancers brought through European and American tourism. Interestingly, it seems that both Egypt and the United States shared a common interest in legislating morality and desire, however as Egypt discovered through its tourist trade and Anthony Comstock, United States Postal Inspector, learned through his visit to the Columbian Exposition, selling and policing desire was a lucrative commodity.¹⁴⁶ Comstock's visit to the fair in 1893 resulted in fines for several of the Midway Dancers levied by the City of Chicago; the *New York Herald* (published in the state where Comstock also served as Secretary of the Society for the Suppression of Vice) discovered that dancers were paid upwards of \$50 for their performances

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 32

¹⁴⁶ Here I am referring specifically to the "Comstock Laws." Parallels between the edict issued by Muhammad 'Ali and the laws galvanized by Anthony Comstock were similar in their attempts to control vice and virtue and ultimately use desire as a mechanism for social control.

for the duration of the fair, a vast sum for transient women accustomed to being compensated through informal transactions and the whims of religious authorities and endowments.¹⁴⁷

Economics at the state level also played a part in the creation of these communities of dancers who began to work exclusively for the tourist industry and not for purposes of devotion or popular religious celebrations. Certainly, the dancers were always generating some kind of meager income for their services as a result of charity or *zakat*. The inclusion of widowed and other impoverished women in the ranks of dancers toward the mid to latter half of the century in Egypt resulted from the breakdown and ultimate failure of both the *waqf* system and the levying of *zakat*, a mandatory tax paid by Muslims.¹⁴⁸ The revenue from *zakat* was meant to support the care for the poor and disenfranchised the majority of who were women. The *waqf*, according to Islamic jurists, is an endowment established for charitable purposes, especially philanthropic efforts that promote *dawah* and welfare services for the poor.¹⁴⁹ *Zakat* theoretically functions as a kind of supplementary model of support for all members of the *umma*.¹⁵⁰ It also enabled women to inherit from their fathers under the laws set forth by the *Shari'a* that governed inheritance. Until the twentieth century, when significant changes reformed the *waqf* system, fathers would “bypass women’s inheritance rights...a father would specify that upon marriage, his daughter would lose her share” of the family’s wealth.¹⁵¹ Under Ottoman rule, male family members regularly excluded daughters and husbands excluded wives from their wills, leaving widowed and orphaned women at the mercy of their families. Women’s subsequent

¹⁴⁷ “Midway Dancers Guilty and Fined: Police, Justices McMahon, Koch and Divver Brand the Danse Du Ventre as Sinful,” *New York Herald*, Dec. 7, 1893.

¹⁴⁸ Donna Carlton, *Looking for Little Egypt* (Bloomington: IDD Books, 1994), 24.

¹⁴⁹ *Dawah* refers to spreading Islam, mostly done through educational outreach and good works.

¹⁵⁰ Schacht 90; *Umma* is the worldwide Muslim community. It is understood by scholars and Muslims to be a nation of Muslims without national borders.

¹⁵¹ John L. Esposito, *Women in Muslim Family Law* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982), 68

impoverishment, and lack of legal recourse or agency in the family courts, meant that they would have to seek alternative forms of income.

The diaspora of dancers to Southern Egypt conflated the dance cultures of the religious *Awâlim* and the *Ghawâzî*. The restrictions placed upon public devotion, especially in the form of female dancers, drove the *Awâlim* into the *Ghawâzî*.¹⁵² These women, together with prostitutes, discovered financial benefits among these *agent provocateurs*-rich tourists- along the Nile. The arrival of the European and American elite in Egypt “provided a new opportunity for entertainers, particularly female dancers, to earn a living. The travelers invited dancing girls to entertain them on their boats while they were anchored in one of the towns in the Delta or in the South.”¹⁵³ As Karen vanNieuwerker notes, “drastic changes took place in 19th century entertainment, changes for which the travelers themselves were crucial agents.”¹⁵⁴ It was on the boats of the Nile that contemporary belly dancing was born and harem fantasies were fulfilled.

Those travelers who attended parties where the dancers were featured described them as being unveiled, their bodies tattooed and their nose rings as prominent accessories. Their costume “was like other women’s, except for the girdle,” indicating that the dancers wore their *gallabeyas*, the traditional, shapeless gown of both Egyptian men and women, cinched at the waist.¹⁵⁵ French colonial interpretations of these accounts appeared in postcards and souvenir albums from the Columbian Exposition. The accounts of gender ignored or rejected the Islamic social standards for modesty. The costumes themselves thus flaunted the dancers’ position as part of the Egyptian and Islamic subaltern. These performers, as members of the entertainment profession, were “outside the community of believers,” according to religious authorities,

¹⁵² van Nieuwker, *A Trade Like No Other*, 25.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

because they continued to dance a variation of the *Zar* within the parameters of a new public sphere: the tourist “public” populated by infidels and Egyptians themselves, most prominently the dancers themselves. Although the dance experienced a paradigm shift from sacred to profane, it still remained profitable for the performers, arguably more so when it moved into the tourist’s semi-private “public” and off the streets. Although the performances in this new public space and received secular billing, the dance was still very much taboo and remains such into the present.¹⁵⁶ A tug-of-war between protecting the virtues of Muslim women and exploiting Middle Eastern sexuality began between secular Egyptian authorities and the European and American elite. Religious authorities turned their opposition to the dance from the impropriety of the dance in itself, to its audience, claiming “the profane eyes of the ‘Infidels’ ought not to gaze upon women of the true faith.”¹⁵⁷ However, with the Egyptian state unable or unwilling to remedy the material circumstances under which the dancers were exploited, Western visitors inevitably won the privilege of indulging in Egyptian women.

Prior to the opening of the Columbian Exposition in 1893, only upper-class travelers from Europe and the United States could attend the performances of female dancers in the Middle East. The image of the belly dancer that travelers writing about their experiences brought back, coupled with existing Orientalist imagery of women, gave validity to the notion that the East was a place of unbridled sensory indulgences. Rarely did these accounts describe the dancers as prostitutes. Although some dancers did exchange sexual favors for cash or goods, the dancers were described as “gypsies.”¹⁵⁸ Travelers, which marked them as a people apart, as

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 27. See “Egyptian belly dance ‘in crisis,’” *BBC News*, March 30, 2005. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4393035.stm and “Belly dancing out, cinema in, says Hamas,” *The Guardian*, April 6, 2006, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/apr/06/filmnews.israel>. Accessed: July 17, 2009.

¹⁵⁷ Warburton (1864) 295 as cited in van Nieuwker, *A Trade Like No Other*, 35.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 26.

well as artists, were fascinated by the exotic and sensual contrasted against the demurer ideals of womanhood in Europe and the United States. The vast majority of accounts of the dancing came from men who no doubt indulged themselves in both the visual eroticism of the performance and also in erotic adventures for a fee.¹⁵⁹ Men engaged in the sexual pursuit of Muslim women where Muslim women, and to a certain degree, Islam itself, was conquered, possessed, and then discarded. The women balanced dancing as a ritual while simultaneously attempting to maintain a viable livelihood, a feat that required them to be both public (in their performance space) and private (sexual favors and as prostitutes). As a result, these public perceptions of Muslim women, imported from travelers from abroad, and blending truth and salacious imagination, shaped their image in the Western imagination. Through visual culture, the Muslim woman's body became both a vehicle for sexual pleasure and a challenge to European and American normative gender ideals.

Back in Chicago, entertainments created a provocative, and at times sexually subversive subculture, showcasing the *danse du ventre*. On the Midway, the belly dance, a contrived cultural artifact, now became a signifier of Muslim and Middle Eastern culture in the United States. A reporter from *The New York Herald* aptly described the dance “denounced one moment as a wholly degraded exhibition and defended the next as the representation of a state of ecstatic bliss, due to the frenzy of a religious devotee.”¹⁶⁰ The reporter was correct as contemporary observations of both the *zar* movements and the *danse du ventre* confirm that belly dancing did evolve from the *Zar*. The imported product was thus a piecemeal rendering of movements associated with both ritual performance in Islamic mysticism and the colloquial Egyptian ritual

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 25.

¹⁶⁰ “Midway Dancers Guilty and Fined: Police, Justices McMahon, Koch and Divver Brand the Danse Du Ventre as Sinful,” *New York Herald*, December 7, 1893.

of the *Zar*. The dance was meant only for the *female* gaze. The dance associated with the *Zar* was a means through which women, particularly those women who were part of the poor and disenfranchised classes, could simultaneously establish both an intimacy with God and perform a ritual of healing.¹⁶¹ This intimacy otherwise stood exclusively as a privilege reserved only for men, within Sufi Islam.¹⁶² In the new form, the dance shifted in meaning when appropriated for European and American audiences: no longer sacred, through its new, nuanced adaptation the dance emerges as profane through exaggerated changes in gesture and also as its relocation to a secular space such as the Midway Plaisance.

The *Zar* is not unlike the practice of *Vodou*, something that some nineteenth-century Americans were familiar.¹⁶³ The *Zar* was adopted from pre-Islamic tradition and may be related to the Islamic tradition of the *jinn*, mischievous fire spirits who meddle in the affairs of mortals.¹⁶⁴ Similarities between *Vodou* and the *Zar* include animal sacrifice, the use of amulets, and being “ridden” by the spirits who control various elements of one’s life. These spirits are made manifest through trance-like dancing accompanied by the rhythms of tambourine music. Also much like *Vodou*, the *Zar* is performed amongst women and requires a lengthy process of training including the development of a holistic knowledge that encompassed local and orthodox religious practice, medicine, history, and social dynamic.¹⁶⁵ The dancing closely resembles that

¹⁶¹ SerpentineVideo, “The Zar,” Documentary, November 20, 2007. YouTube. Accessed 19 Mar. 2011.

¹⁶² In Sufism, dance is an important element of worship. The so-called “Whirling Dervishes” are the most popular example of this mode of worship and their performances have moved from the private to the public sphere as a way of generating income through the tourist trade.

¹⁶³ Jeffrey E. Anderson, *The Voodoo Encyclopedia: Magic, Ritual, and Religion* (New York: ABC-CLIO, 2010).

¹⁶⁴ The Egyptian author Out El-Kouloub describes the *Zar* in detail in her novel *Zanouba* published in 1947 by Éditions Gallimard, Paris. The novel’s protagonist, Zanouba, is brought to a *Zar* in an effort to eliminate the impediments to her becoming pregnant. El-Kouloub’s novel, which takes place at the turn-of-the-century is one of the only existing published descriptions of the *Zar* and its utility amongst all classes of Egyptian society.

¹⁶⁵ Heba Fateen BizZari, “The Zar Ceremony,” (<http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/Zar.htm>) Accessed June 6, 2010.

of belly dancers in its sensuality and hypnotic movement.¹⁶⁶ It is possible that Western travelers had the opportunity to witness these ceremonies or those women who performed as *Khodias*, the leaders of the *Zar*, joined the ranks of the professional dancers.¹⁶⁷

The dancers on the Midway, appearing mute and docile in the numerous souvenir volumes documenting the fair, consciously inverted the White City's discourse of power through their very own manipulation of a colloquial Maghreb-Islamic practice. The dancers rejected, at least publicly, their spiritual purpose, and entered into a partnership with tourists and entrepreneurs to capitalize on art. The results of this partnership was short-term economic agency for the dancers who found profitability in secularization. Its long-term effect generated an image of the Muslim majority countries completely secularized and devoid of its original, sacred signifiers. The dancers, through deliberately profaning the dance, did not simply gain economic agency, but to a certain degree, they attempted to protect the original, authentic dance.¹⁶⁸ The *dance du ventre*, then, can also be understood as a way of protecting women's sacred spaces by creating a diversion for the imperial gaze. Altering the location and context of the dance enabled women to preserve its original meaning.

The Paris Exposition, 1889: A Street in Cairo, A Parisian Cabaret, and The Ouled-Nail

The inspiration and precursor to the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition was the 1889 Paris Exposition (*Exposition Universelle*). The latest in a series of ambitious exhibitions of French industry and colonialism, this was not the first exposition where iteration of an Islamic

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. Also see Neil, J.S., "Muscle Dancing: It originated in darkest Africa. Graphic description by one who saw it there," *The Chicago Inter-Ocean* 1893.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. See both El-Kouloub and BizZari for more detailed description and function of Khodia.

¹⁶⁸ See specifically: Donna Carlton, *Looking for Little Egypt* (1995); Karin van Nieuwker, *A Trade like Any Other: Female Singers and Dancers in Egypt* (1995); and Sherifa Zuhur, *Images of Enchantment: Visual and Performing Arts of the Middle East* (1998).

architectural landscape was imagined and presented to Parisians and a handful of Muslim visitors. Prior expositions in 1867 and 1868 also featured interpretations of “Islamic” (North African) street scenes.¹⁶⁹ The inspiration for the architecture was taken from accounts of French travelers to North Africa, in particular Algeria and Tunisia. The French presence in Algeria began in 1830 and its colonization made it possible for artists, travelers, and diplomats to write and create dispatches from the fragments of North African Islamic culture that they encountered. One of the most popular exports from this early era of French colonial rule was the imagined life inside of the harem, popularized and translated into paint by the acclaimed Orientalist painter, Jean-Léon Gérôme. In architecting the interior landscapes of the Street in Cairo, French designers drew inspiration from Gérôme’s body of work, creating sumptuous if not purely imaginary, rooms of decadence and lasciviousness (Figure 1).¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Zeynep Çelik, *Displaying the Orient: Architecture of Islam and 19th Century World’s Fairs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

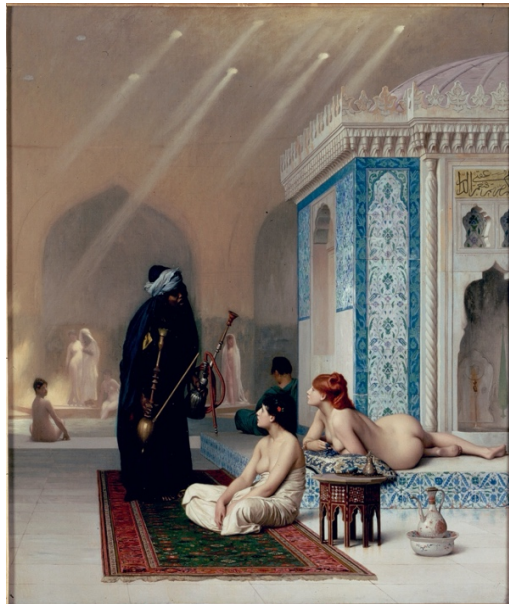


Fig. 1. “Pool in a Harem,” painted by the French Orientalist painter, Jean-Léon Gérôme (1875).

However, for the scenes to be perceived as authentic, “culture” must also be performed there by “native” women.¹⁷¹ Many of the women who came to occupy these spaces were from the Ouled-Naïl tribe, one of the poorest, most rural tribes in North Africa. The French encouraged prostitution as part of the urban economy and “the Ouled-Naïl exploited it to enhance their marriageability,” using the money to provide their own dowries.¹⁷² Ouled-Naïl women also posed for souvenir photos and postcards in various costumes and stages of undress (Fig. 2).¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Mohja Kahf, *Western Representations of Muslim Woman: From Termagant to Odalisque* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999).

¹⁷² Zeynep Çelik and Leila Kinney, “Ethnography and Exhibitionism at the Exposition Universelles,” *Assemblage* 13, (December 1990): 34. The rural culture of the Ouled-Naïl was eventually dismantled by French colonists who forced the tribe into urban neighborhoods by 1960. The traditions and culture of the tribe were radically altered by this shift in landscape, so ultimately the French were victorious in exploiting the Ouled-Naïl, rather than the tribe exploiting them.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 38.



Fig. 2. *Scenes et Types* (Scenes and Kinds) – *Ouled-Naïl* woman featured on a postcard published by Lehnert and Lockhart. (Algiers, c. late 19th century).¹⁷⁴

Common belief is that belly dancing originated in Egypt, but as alluded to above, its origins are the result of performers coming from multiple, ethnically and culturally-related areas in Berber centers across North Africa into performance spaces in France and the United States.¹⁷⁵ The women came from communities where women had greater agency than imagined by Westerners. At the 1889 Paris Exposition, the focus and stars of the show were Berber women from the Ouled-Naïl.¹⁷⁶ The Ouled-Naïl were a Berber tribe who were early converts to Islam, embracing the new faith around the 7th or 8th century, within a century of the Prophet

¹⁷⁴ Postcard of Ouled-Naïl woman from personal collection of Algerian postcards.

¹⁷⁵ Çelik and Kinney, “Ethnography and Exhibitionism,” 40.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

Muhammad's death in 632.¹⁷⁷ The women of the tribe, known as the *Nailiyat* (Arabic plural for female members of the tribe), were free to travel outside of the rural, mountainous regions where their tribe lived, to Algeria's towns and its capital city of Algiers.¹⁷⁸ The *Nailiyat* sold their bodies through dance and sex, but they were always independent of men, living together with other women from their tribe and managing their own business affairs.¹⁷⁹ Absent from their tribal lands, wealthy they earned was under their personal control; in the event of marrying, they still retained control over their assets.¹⁸⁰ This level of agency and an already established tradition of consumer performance allowed the Ouled-Naïl in particular to be well-suited to the business of performing at the Paris Exposition. They understood it as simply an extension of the work they had performed for centuries transferred from local towns and cities to locations abroad.¹⁸¹ Some women, after the closure of the exposition, went on to continue their careers in Parisian cabarets and venues designed to showcase these human wares from the Maghreb.¹⁸²

Belly dancing at the Paris Exposition was an export facilitated by French colonialism. Its performers not only numbered women from the Ouled-Naïl tribe, but also by women like Rachel Bent-Eny, the daughter of a Jewish musician who, recognizing French enthusiasm for exotic performances by Arab and North African women, encouraged his daughter to dance while he accompanied her. Bent-Eny was known as, “‘La Belle Fathma,’ after the Prophet Muhammad's

¹⁷⁷ Lawrence Morgan, *Flute of Sand: Experiences with the Mysterious Ouled-Naïl* (London: Odham's Press Limited, 1954). Morgan's text is the definitive ethnography of the Ouled-Naïl, describing in great detail the life of women within the tribe including their fiscal and bodily agency which run contrary to perceptions and practice of Islam among other tribal groups and in other Muslim-majority countries and communities.

¹⁷⁸ Maggie McNeill, “The Ouled-Naïl,” *The Honest Courtesan*, Blog Post (September 11, 2011), <https://maggiemcneill.wordpress.com/2011/09/11/the-ouled-naïl/>. Accessed November 20, 2020.

¹⁷⁹ Morgan, *Flute of Sand*, 55.

¹⁸⁰ McNeill, “Ouled-Naïl.”

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Zeynep Çelik, *Displaying the Orient: Architecture of Islam at 19th Century World's Fairs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

daughter, even though she was of Algerian Jewish origin. She came to Paris from Tunisia.”¹⁸³ In Chicago, this same codeswitching would take place along the Midway with women whose phenotype could “pass” as an Arab, a Jew, or even, as discussed later, a Romanian. Some degree of authenticity was required to make the exhibits and performances passable, but the “extras” could be borrowed from other exhibits or recruited from neighborhoods and theaters of Paris or Chicago.

European and American male travelers described the dancers through a frame of Western superiority to women and to Egyptians themselves: African, non-Christian, and pre-industrial. The writers described the dance as “ ‘voluptuous’; ‘shameful’; ‘stupid’; ‘abject’; or ‘savage’.”¹⁸⁴ A French traveler characterized the dance as “at first voluptuous, but then it became lewd...it was no more than the most outrageous and indecent expression of bestial desires.”¹⁸⁵ Additionally, these adjectives resonate with a morally conservative audience, but also belied a kind of shame in the travelers’ having witnessed, and perhaps enjoyed, such lasciviousness. One can certainly argue that such a vehement critique of the dance is less a statement about the dance and more about its audience.¹⁸⁶

In 1893, writers visiting the Columbian Exposition made similar observations of belly dancing.¹⁸⁷ The same adjectives and tropes of earlier European and American travelers reappeared in descriptions of the dance in the Chicago papers when it was imported to the Midway Plaisance. On the Midway in America, the descriptors assigned a rigidly Puritanical

¹⁸³ Çelik and Kinney, “Ethnography and Exhibitionism,” 43. “La Belle Fathma” was approximately 7-8 years old when she began dancing in front of crowds, accompanied by her father, a musician who was originally part of the 1878 exhibition.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁸⁵ V. Denon, *Reize in Opper-en Neder Egipte Gedurende den Veldtocht van Bonaparte* (Amsterdam: Johannes Allart, 1803) 175 as cited in vanNieuwerker 1.

¹⁸⁶ Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem* (St. Paul: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

¹⁸⁷ J.S. Neil, “Muscle Dancing. It Originated in Darkest Africa,” *Tacoma Daily News*, September 5, 1894.

mask to the licentious indulgences of a generation of Americans with shifting viewpoints on sexual and social prescriptions. Compounding this were changing American theories on race and empire, as the United States began to expand its imperial and industrial visions: nowhere was this more explicit than on the Midway Plaisance during the summer of 1893.¹⁸⁸

The Midway Plaisance

Perhaps the more important vestige of the Midway however are the images taken in the summer of 1893 of the exhibits that were featured there. The Midway was one of the most photographed elements of the fair with the major souvenir albums written by J.W. Buel, *The White City* (1893) and Professor F.W. Putnam's *Portrait Types of the Midway Plaisance* (1893) that deployed photography to relay the experience of the fair.¹⁸⁹ The textual elements of the books are limited to brief descriptive paragraphs. As such, nineteenth-century audiences would have relied almost exclusively on inference to understand the images depicting the panoply of racial and ethnic populations at the fair. In the albums, Muslim women comprise the vast majority of women photographed, the pages displaying an array of different "types" labeled as "Moslem" or "Mohammedan" women depending on the preferred terminology of the author.¹⁹⁰ Books published exclusively to commemorate the fair also acknowledged the ethnic exhibits and the racial types that peopled them. These are vast, heavy volumes full of large, glossy pictures but that contain little way of any substantive knowledge or observation about the people who populated the Midway. Further, they did little to substantiate the additional materials produced

¹⁸⁸ See Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

¹⁸⁹ J.W. Buel, *The Magic City* (Chicago: Historical Publishing Company, 1894); F.W. Putnam, *Types of the Midway Plaisance* (St. Louis: N.D. Thompson Publishing Company, 1894)

¹⁹⁰ The terms in both Buel and Putnam are used interchangeably. The assumption about Islam at the time was that it was the rough equivalent to Christianity in that Muhammad was a Christ-figure and thus should be centered in describing Islam as "Mohammedanism" instead of "Islam."

for the Midway, including the Souvenir guide for the “Street in Cairo” which depicted various Cairene scenes, including belly dancers, Bedouins, camel drivers and other iconic images of the Middle East, but with very few reliable observations or facts.¹⁹¹

Extending outward from the White City and separate, the Midway was simultaneously a living museum and a racial and ethnographic foil for the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race celebrated inside the White City. It was a micro-empire, delicately situated on what Robert Rydell calls “a sliding scale of humanity” little more than an ethnographic side show.¹⁹² The design of the Midway followed the blueprint for nineteenth-century anthropology, situating the more “advanced” races in closer proximity to the White City.¹⁹³ These groups included the Teutonic races and Northern Europeans; one exception found the Irish Village nestled away with the Pygmies.¹⁹⁴ Those designated as “savage” and “primitive” peoples outside of Europe were arranged according to how closely “evolved” they were in relationship to the Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic races. Grouped into the conglomeration of ethnicities and ethnological wonders were the Moorish Palace, the Algerian Theatre and Village, and the presumably paradigmatic “Street in Cairo.”¹⁹⁵

The model for the Midway adopted the work of eugenicist Francis Galton, whose racial typing established the formatting for ethnic exhibits at late nineteenth and early twentieth century

¹⁹¹ *A Street in Cairo: An Illustrated Souvenir Guide* (Chicago, 1893). This guide is particularly well-illustrated with belly dancers, snake charmers and the like, but offers little in substantive observation of the inhabitants of the Street or their cultural significance.

¹⁹² Robert Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 65.

¹⁹³ For a copy of one of the original maps printed of the Midway Plaisance see: “Studebaker Map of World’s Columbian Fairgrounds,” re-published by the Chicago Historical Society. The cartographer is unknown. (<http://encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/3895.html>). Also see J.J. Flynn, *Official Guide to Midway Plaisance, Otherwise Known as, the Highway through the Nations* (Chicago: Columbian Guide Company, 1893).

¹⁹⁴ J. J. Flynn, *Official Guide to Midway Plaisance, Otherwise Known as, the Highway through the Nations* (Chicago: Columbian Guide Company, 1893).

¹⁹⁵ *A Street in Cairo* (Chicago, 1893)

international expositions.¹⁹⁶ Yet visitors to the Midway were not expected to quietly browse through museum exhibits, as were the presumably middle-class visitors to the White City. As the *Chicago Tribune* pointed-out, “Public taste on the Midway would not support an instructive display, but enjoyed and patronized a very questionable entertainment.”¹⁹⁷ This questionable entertainment included performances of belly dancing, the Turkish harem, where “odalisques” lounged, and a variety of scantily-clad representatives within the exhibits. The issue of the Midway’s “questionable entertainment” came to a head in the summer of 1893 when Anthony Comstock, in the interest of public virtue, launched a campaign with the Board of Lady Manager to stifle the popularity of the “Oriental” dances performed on the Midway.¹⁹⁸ Interestingly, the of American men toward various indiscretions offered in the various “Oriental” exhibits.¹⁹⁹ The ladies even went so far as to offer an alternative dress code, publishing their “Before” and “After” images of moral reform in a local Chicago paper (Figure 3).²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁶ Ardis Cameron, *Looking for America: The Visual Production of Nation and People* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007). “Galton’s eugenics provided a scientific basis for the arrangement of racialized ‘others’ commonly presented at international expositions.” (120)

¹⁹⁷ “Want Midway Dances Stopped,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 6, 1893.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. See also: “Midway Dancers Guilty and Fined: Police, Justices McMahon, Koch and Divver Brand the Danse Du Ventre as Sinful.” *New York Herald*, December 7, 1893. This article offers a summary of the testimony and evidence presented by Comstock in his campaign against the Midway Dancers.

¹⁹⁹ “On Midway Plaisance Street of All Nations at the World’s Fair. The Oriental Dancing Girls,” *Idaho Statesman*, August 18, 1893.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.



Fig. 3. “On Midway Plaisance Street of All Nations at the World's Fair. The Oriental Dancing Girls.” *Idaho Statesman* 18 Aug. 1893.

On the Midway, people were to be entertained, shocked, and permitted to indulge in the imagined pleasures of more exotic cultures, enjoying entertainments in a manner similar to those entertainments performed on boats on the Nile in the earlier part of the century.

The Midway Plaisance was the most popular venue at the Columbian Exposition as a result of its blending of Barnum-esque showmanship and what was deemed at the time legitimate scientific inquiry.²⁰¹ Unfortunately, Barnum-ized racial discourse and oriental titillation dominated the Midway’s exhibits, framing the ways the American public encountered and enjoyed them. The Midway is a version of “scientific racism” which lent a degree of legitimacy

²⁰¹ Thomas C. Leonard, *Illiberal Reformers: Race, Eugenics, and American Economics in the Progressive Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 109.

to the otherwise chaotic and purely for-profit structure.²⁰² Intermingled with the legitimate exhibits displaying artifacts (and people) were performances of race, gender, and sexuality that were carefully choreographed according to popular stereotypes. For the Middle Eastern and Islamic elements of the fair, the organizers relied on a simple reproduction of what had become profitable in Egypt amongst Western tourists.

The Middle Eastern exhibits were situated close to the White City, placed along a specific continuum of “whiteness” or closeness to Protestant Anglo-Saxons, the racial and social group that drove the organization of the Midway. This group included Protestant Europeans, predominantly Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic races. One may speculate that the placement of the Middle Eastern races toward the head of the Midway indicated a racial as well as religious valuation. The first group following Protestant Europeans were Arabs, Persians, and Ottoman Turks, considered racially close to Europeans and monotheism. They were near the Irish (Catholics), but still separate from them, indicating that although the Irish were European their Catholic identity relegated them to a lower ranking on the Midway. The presumption illustrated by this organizational pattern on the Midway was that all Western Europeans were Protestant (with the exception of the Irish) and all Middle Easterners were Muslim. Furthermore, there is no record of any Christian Arabs participating in the exhibits, nor the Protestant Irish. The Midway’s exhibits were thus intrinsically linked to beliefs that conflated race and religion.

The Street in Cairo required an admission fee of twenty-five cents. For this fee, fairgoers could have their name written in Arabic script, ride camels, and see the infamous *Hootchy-*

²⁰² James W. Cook, *The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001),150.

Kootchy, one of the various labels by which belly dancing was advertised on the Midway.²⁰³ At the zenith of the fair's popularity, 180-400 people were estimated to have made the Street in Cairo their temporary home.²⁰⁴ In his book, *Types of the Midway*, Harvard University professor and anthropologist, Professor F.W. Putnam describes the Street in Cairo

This brief little byway was the most sought-for resort in the great territory of the Exposition. The good and the wicked—men and women, and children—sought it as delightful relief from other sightseeing. Women in grief, seigniors of divinity, men of melancholy visages, as well as merry people, came to it as a panacea for mental ills. The curative powers of the place were miraculous. The varieties of life were given an Oriental flavor and fascination in this happy imitation of an ancient and despised city.²⁰⁵

Over the duration of the fair, nearly 2.5 million visitors traversed the Street in Cairo, visiting and indulging in the various sights and sounds proffered there.²⁰⁶

The Street in Cairo represented a fictive collective identity of the “Mohammedan” peoples of the fair. The organizers conflated national and religious identity into one area of the fair and added the Persian and Moorish Palaces to the array of entertainments adjacent to the Street in Cairo. The Moorish Palace, according to Donna Carlton, was “Oriental in name only. It was mainly a museum in the tradition of Woodward’s Gardens and P.T. Barnum’s.”²⁰⁷ A souvenir booklet from the Moorish Palace describes various exhibits, a kind of hodgepodge of historical artifacts and wax figures depicting historical personalities like Marie Antoinette. In

²⁰³ “Damascus at the World’s Fair.” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 5, 1891, Vol. 124, Issue 5, 2 The Street in Cairo was originally not a stand-alone exhibit, but intended to complement early plans for a Damascene street which early plans describe as having its own “mosque, praying Mohammedans, cafes bazaars [sic], and native Arabs.” “Midway Plaisance; Shows and Shops of All Nations at the World’s Fair; a Panorama of the Human Race,” *The Baltimore Sun*, June 23, 1893, Vol. CXIII, Issue 33, 1, Baltimore, MD.

A.J. Dockarty, *The Experience of an Innocent Boy from Vermont in the Famous Midway* (Chicago: Chicago World Book Company, 1893)

²⁰⁴ Carlton, *Little Egypt*, 39.

²⁰⁵ Putnam, *The Magic City*.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Carlton, *Little Egypt*, 20.

addition, the Moorish Palace “housed galleries of Oriental-style items and furniture and a wax works including figures of harem women posed in bizarre costumes lacking yardage or authenticity.”²⁰⁸ The harem scene was real, if not *realistic* in its licentiousness; the booklet paradoxically confirms the authenticity. Both the costumes of the *ghawâzi* (dancers imported by entrepreneurs) and of the Middle Eastern Muslim women like the Bedouins who roamed the Street in Cairo resembled their counterparts in Egypt.²⁰⁹ Paradoxically, the women in these costumes labeled as “The Sultan’s Favorites,” as of a harem, were situated lounging around a wax depiction of an imaginary sultan, guarded by yet another wax figure depicting an African eunuch.²¹⁰ This particular exhibit soundly rejected the images and strides toward European modernity being promoted by the Ottoman government and wholly embraced the Orientalism of such painters as Jean-Leon Gérôme, Giovanni Costa, and Richard Parkes Bonington.²¹¹ Americans embraced such writing and images of their European counterparts abroad, by making the performers living exhibits of both Middle Eastern and Islamic culture in an Orientalist guise.

At the Columbian Exposition the *Ghawâzi*’s dance was performed in more than one of the exhibits purporting to represent an Islamic country. Entrepreneur Sol Bloom, who is credited with introducing the American public to belly dancing, recognized the potential for profit through exploiting the exoticism of the Eastern and the Islamic. Bloom alludes to this process of creating a false culture as he recalls observing the Algerian Village at the Paris Exposition, writing, “I doubt very much whether anything resembling it (the Algerian Village) was ever seen in Algeria, but I was not at the time concerned with trifles. The Algerians themselves were

²⁰⁸ Ibid, 20 and *The Moorish Palace and its Startling Wonders* (Chicago: Metcalf Stationery Company, 1893).

²⁰⁹ Carlton, *Little Egypt*, 22.

²¹⁰ “Midway Plaisance; Shows and Shops of All Nations at the World’s Fair; A Panorama of the Human Race,” *The Baltimore Sun*, June 23, 1893, Vol. CXIII, Issue 33, 1.

²¹¹ For an array of examples of Orientalist art, see: Genevieve Lacambre, *The Orient in Western Art* (Paris: Konemann, 2001).

genuine beyond questions, and what was really important was that they presented a varied entertainment that increased in excitement in proportion to my familiarity with it.”²¹² The purpose of the Midway was, after all, to bring the world to the average American. In this way the Midway proved curiously egalitarian for Americans, if not for the human attractions and performers, because visitors of all classes were able to “travel” abroad and share the experience of the “Islamic” world. All classes found the most exciting and popular exhibits to be those that featured belly dancing. The Turkish Village, the Street in Cairo, the Algerian Village, and the Persian Palace all had women performing variations on belly dancing with enticing labels such as: “Houri’s Dance,” “Moorish Dance,” “Nautch Dance,” and in an attempt to lend some sophistication to the dances, the “*Danse du Ventre*.”²¹³ ²¹⁴ The names are taken from European and American literature on the Muslim majority countries from the period. The word “*hourī*” is the word for “virgin” in the Qur’an, while “Moorish” signaled North African or Maghreb origins; “Nautch” implied not an Arabo-Islamic dance, but rather one that originated in the context of Mughal arts.²¹⁵ At the most superficial level, the organizers assigned both Muslim womanhood and Islamic identity to the dance that both exoticized the performance and made it palatable for a white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant audience. The majority of sources that describe the dance, included those published in contemporary periodicals of the time, label it as the “Hootchy Kootchy,” borrowing the term from contemporary descriptions of the provocative, jerky movements observed in the dances of African slaves, especially those in Creole communities.²¹⁶

²¹² Bloom, *Autobiography*, 107.

²¹³ “How to See the Fair it is Well to be Systematic About it Follow Paths Indicated,” *The Chicago Daily Inter-Ocean*, May 3, 1893.

²¹⁴ Carlton, *Little Egypt*, 23.

²¹⁵ “Sepoys Entranced by Dancers. Courteousness of Indian Troops While Amusing Themselves,” *The State*, August 6, 1892

²¹⁶ J.S. Neil, “Muscle Dancing. It Originated in Darkest Africa,” *Tacoma Daily News*, September 5, 1894.

Race, performance, and religion overlapped in multiple contexts in the United States in this commoditized form.

The dancers performing in various exhibits along the Midway were “described in one fair history as ‘stars in their professions.’”²¹⁷ Meanwhile, in the *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, a reporter describes belly dancing, calling it the *danse du ventre* because “it might fracture Anglo-Saxon susceptibilities even to name it in English... The *dans du ventre* is quite a strain on American sensibilities, but many want to see it as one of the Oriental curiosities of the fair.”²¹⁸ One newspaper wrote, “it is not dancing. It is walking about the stage to alleged music with peculiar and swaying and jerking of the body, such as tends to excite passion...From [the dance’s] association with the negro, American people are apt to conclude that all dark-skinned people are dull.”²¹⁹ Indeed, writers struggled to describe, identify, and categorize the dance and the performers, turning to existing examples of African-American dance styles, as we have seen. They ascribed the supposed characteristics of Southern Creole and Caribbean communities and to the racial traits of the Middle Eastern dancers themselves.²²⁰ One cynical observer concluded that the dancers were not at all Arab but rather native Chicagoans described as “dark and muddy brunettes” that make “good imitation *Algeriennes*.”²²¹ Another visitor scorned

Their kinky hair, dirty-butter complexions, bad features, stained teeth, and tendency to *enbonpoint* are dreadfully disillusioning, and their voices are a timbre that would drive an American cat in disgrace from any well-regulated neighborhood.²²²

²¹⁷ Carlton, *Little Egypt*, 29.

²¹⁸ “Poetry in Motion Exhibition of Dancing in the Midway Plaisance,” *The Chicago Daily Inter-Ocean*, June 4, 1893.

²¹⁹ Carlton, *Little Egypt*, 37.

²²⁰ J.S. Neil, “Muscle Dancing.”

²²¹ J.B. Parke, “On Midway Plaisance, Street of All Nations at the World’s Fair. The Oriental Dancing Girls’ Alleged Wickedness Which is Not Bad at All Upon Investigation,” *Idaho Daily Statesman*, August 18, 1893.

²²² Carlton, *Little Egypt*, 38.

The female performers themselves “had to keep obscured their identities as working women and migrants so as to portray the fantasy of an entertaining retreat into a Middle Eastern café or even the clichéd harem.”²²³ This obscuring of identity speaks to the performance of race, religion and gender on the Midway. The dancers had to bargain as their own agents with the entrepreneurs that controlled them, striking a balance between empowerment and exploitation.

Visitors to the Midway watched as the performances shifted from scandalous to deliciously provocative. In some instances, dancing pushed against existing social and sexual boundaries, especially for women. Robert Rydell argued the Midway affirmed Americans’ beliefs about Eastern, non-Christian populations while simultaneously challenging their own sexual morality: “with its half-naked savages and Hootchy-Kootchy dancers...Americans [were provided with] a grand opportunity for a subliminal journey into the recesses of their own repressed desires.”²²⁴ Women and men witnessed performances intentionally and simultaneously both secret and public displays of sexuality, manifested through the bodies of Muslim women dancers. The dance offered entry into a means of understanding sex, a different world, and a different religion. For women visiting the Midway, the dancing and its overt suggestion of eroticism provided them with a venue for exploring their own sexuality and sexual agency. Julia Ward Howe, abolitionist and suffragist, found the entire spectacle both disgusting and scandalizing: “The Cairo dance was simply horrid, no touch of grace about it, only the most deforming movement of the whole abdominal and lumbar region. We thought it indecent.”²²⁵

²²³ Susan Nance, *How the Arabian Nights Inspired the American Dream, 1790-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 173. Nance introduces the first substantive debate about racial code switching amongst Middle Eastern/Muslim women on the Midway, arguing that the performers were not only working women from abroad, but also women from Chicago, a fact articulated in one editorial piece written contemporaneously to the fair in Chicago that observes that the accents of one of the dancers is distinctly Midwestern.

²²⁴ Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair*, 37.

²²⁵ Anthony Shay, *Ethno Identity Dance for Sex, Fun, and Profit: Staging Popular Dances Around the World* (London: Palgrave, 2016), 65.

Until the fair, the use of Muslim women and belly dancing channeled sexual desires and fantasies of men, but on the Midway, white women were also participants in this voyeurism. Belly dancing's introduction to the United States was perhaps more complex for women than for men.

The contrasting observations and engagement of men and women with the performers, reflected how the fair resonated with and was constructed and marketed for each sex. As Gail Bederman argues, the White City embodied their role as “the agents who lifted their race toward the millennial perfection God and evolution intended for them.”²²⁶ Specifically, white men “lifted their race” toward a racial and social perfectionism articulated in part by millennial Protestantism, not Islam. They therefore created and reinforced a hegemonic rule and masculinity over both the feminized Muslim majority countries and their white American female counterparts. The feminization of the Muslim majority countries, along with other cultures deemed inferior, was critical to the assertion of white Protestant masculinities.²²⁷ The feminization of other cultures and nations justified conquest, and was easily reconciled with American imperialism. At the Columbian Exposition, as Bederman explains, “the Midway provided an implicit comparison between the White City’s self-controlled civilized manliness and the inferior manhood of dark-skinned primitive men who solicited customers for belly dancers or wore skirts and danced like women.”²²⁸ The men who participated as viewer or *voyeurs* of belly dancing on the Midway asserted their white, Protestant masculinities in their enjoyment and “conquest” of the women inside.

²²⁶ Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 40.

²²⁷ Kristen Hoganson, *Consumers' Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

²²⁸ Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 40.

Images of Muslim women at the fair appeared in two texts published at the fair's conclusion. F.W. Putnam, a Harvard-trained anthropologist, offered a large souvenir album, *Portrait Types of the Midway Plaisance*. Putnam embarks on a cursory ethnographic study of the populations of the Midway, highlighting various idiosyncrasies and signifiers of racial and religious identity, with notations about "Mohammedanism" and "Moslem," but making no substantive analysis that would be useful to Americans' understanding of the sociology of Islam.²²⁹ The text largely comprised photographs and small captions that offer a snapshot of the model's origin but no further information that gives any of the portraits three-dimensionality. By contrast, the second volume, J.W. Buel's *The Magic City*, featured discussions about the exposition's architecture rather than its human exhibits. Buel places significantly more emphasis upon the Algerian and Egyptian ethnographic areas than the Anglo-Celtic-Teutonic populations. Additionally, Buel's text almost entirely deploys Orientalist rhetoric, which lends itself neatly to the inclusion of a vast store of Orientalist images. Together, the two volumes represent a small sample of the ethnographic media to commemorate the fair.

Fair images formed part of a broader production of other photographic images produced of Muslim women. In Algeria, still a French colony, entrepreneurs produced images of Algerian women (primarily Ouled-Naïl women) for tourists.²³⁰ The lounging odalisque popularized by Orientalist painters became incarnate in the Algerian postcard. Malek Alloula makes the observation that these mass-produced images of Muslim women "provides (colonialism) with a custom-made iconography, replete with pious and worthy intentions. *It is an illustrated breviary.*"²³¹ The Algerian photographs produced by the French differed from those of the

²²⁹ Putnam, *Portrait Types*.

²³⁰ Alloula, *Colonial Harem*, 25.

²³¹ Alloula, *Colonial Harem*, 44.

Exposition; they featured stage bare breasted women and women shown behind bars in a form of captivity. The subjugation made an explicit link between colonial and sexual exploitation. As Alloula notes, the Algerian postcards operate along a continuum of so-called “wish fulfillment”²³² which allowed a predominantly male audience to consume women and allows the general population an inexpensive mode of both escapism and voyeurism.

These photographs enhanced escapism and voyeurism by showing the women immodest and unveiled. Both in Algeria and Egypt, veiling was customary. In photographs of such elite as a Circassian women their faces are covered in gauzy veils while Bedouin women are always heavily veiled.²³³ Egyptians were themselves debating whether women should or must veil themselves, a controversy that reached its zenith through the 1899 publication of Qasim Amin’s essay “The Liberation of Women.”²³⁴ In the essay, Amin defends the use of the veil but argues that its use in Egyptian society has “gone to extremes in veiling our women and prohibiting them from appearing unveiled before men, to such an extent that we turn women into objects or goods we own.”²³⁵ In the Middle East, the veil was still very much an intrinsic element of maintaining social order; unveiling was a sign of immodesty and subsequently the degeneration of society into *fitna* or social disorder.²³⁶ Seclusion amongst the more established elite was a sign of wealth.

²³² Ibid., 49.

²³³ Based upon observations done by the author using her own personal collection of French postcards from the Maghreb.

²³⁴ Qasim Amin, *The Liberation of Women and The New Woman* Trans. Samiha Sidhom Peterson. (Cairo: The American University of Cairo Press, 2000). The essay was originally published in Arabic as a book entitled *Tahrir al mara’a* (“The Liberation of Women”) in 1899, followed by *Al mara’a al jadida* (“The New Woman”). Amin was especially critical of religious authority and believed that Islam was in a state of decadence. He called for the end of *pardah* (seclusion) and that European and American models of women’s education and social agency were compatible with Islamic ideals.

²³⁵ Monsoor Moaddel and Kamran Talattof, *Contemporary Debates in Islam: An Anthology of Modernist and Fundamentalist Thought* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 173.

²³⁶ *Fitna* is translated both as “social disorder” or “social chaos” and as “civil war.” It is believed that the Prophet’s favorite wife, A’isha bint Abu Bakr, was the instigator of the first *fitna*, in this historical context meaning “civil war,” in the early Muslim community. Traditionally this blame set upon A’isha is used to rationalize why women are excluded from active participation in public life because of their potential to cause division and strife amongst all Muslims (i.e. within the *umma*).

Veiling in public, with the exception of the Bedouin class, was indicative of a woman's social status. Unveiled women were associated with the *Ghawâzî*, prostitutes, and the women who performed for tourists. In both Egypt and Algeria, that unveiled status left them on the fringes of society and thus easily exploited by tourists and entrepreneurs. In the late 19th century, the elites of these two countries, especially those with experience abroad, began to push for more relaxed standards of modesty. Although they were not ready to abolish the veil altogether, there was a general sentiment amongst men in Amin's class that the veil's utility was archaic, inhibiting women's social and intellectual agency. Amin argues that a woman's chastity should not be linked to the veil, going so far as to write that, "those familiar with American society believe that, in spite of this open interaction, American women, more than any other, guard their honor and have moral standards."²³⁷ He stops short of calling for Muslims to emulate the West, but he deploys the West as an example of the possibility of industrialization and social progress while retaining certain moral standards that do not require keeping women in *purdah*.

However, Westerners knew or cared little of these debates: they were interested in the exoticism of Eastern women, whether veiled or not. Veiled women represented a world that was only inhabitable by those with the cultural, racial, and religious currency to access it; unveiled women depicted in images of harem and scenes of Turkish baths, were accessible to the voyeur. Performers and postcard printers alike capitalized on this notion of *unveiling* as signaling an accessibility and readiness: an unveiled woman meant that a man had access to the woman's body. By unveiling herself she was giving permission to be seen and enjoyed. In contrast, by being unveiled by an outside force, such as the French colonial photographer or one of the photographers at the Columbian Exposition, permission is given on her behalf and she is both

²³⁷ Amin, *Liberation of Women*, 51.

conquered and exploited, her agency is curtailed and she becomes not only a colonial possession of France or the United States but the possession of the voyeur.

Unveiled women on the Midway thus were living dolls, forced to temporarily relinquish their identities as Muslim women and relegate themselves to the parameters of erotic fetishes and human curiosities. The unveiling of Muslim women permitted the photographer, concessionaires, and the viewing public the ability to assert authority over them and to relegate them firmly in the position of the “other.” Unveiling also barred any association to be made between iconic Christian figures like the Virgin Mary, the cadre of saints, or nuns. Rather, the unveiled Egyptian women stood in contrast to those clothed in the proper social dress of the contemporary United States where bonnets and Sunday hats significantly marked women’s social status as higher than those without them. Immodesty, heads uncovered, and hands clasped, marked Muslim women on the Midway and in images as captive. Yet one can read Egyptian women’s participation in the dancing and exhibitions of the Midway as an art and a means to economic agency. Nance writes of the troubling push-pull of women’s agency and captivity that, “the trouble for the historian is sorting out how much of the reported agency and action of actual women performers was truly theirs, how much a product of the reporter seeking to cross these women over to the listener or reader comprehensibly as a wily harem girl.”²³⁸ As a result, the archive that was produced of these women is limited to the texts put together by casual observers of the fair like Buel and anthropologists like Putnam. The experiences these women who participated in the fair is difficult to document and thus to understand because they left no written record. We must piece together their stories from clues embedded in their dress and mannerisms and decode the prudish descriptions of their performances.

²³⁸ Nance, *Arabian Nights and the American Dream*, 174.

The strictly souvenir, commemorative volume by Buel evinces a different purpose than Putnam's work. In addition, the two volumes were published for vastly different purposes. Buel's imagery was meant to entertain while Putnam's was meant to educate. Yet both volumes' staged authenticity and casual disdain in the captioning demonstrates that these were not serious anthropological studies but rather flimsy accumulation of images compiled to entertain, not to educate. While the two endeavors are distinct, they shared a common purpose: to direct racial typographies and the bodily spectacle to promote imperial discourse and the supremacy of the Anglo-American, makes their achievement, if not their intent, quite similar. They are remarkably insidious for such a seemingly benign set of photographs, but when the images are examined and "read," the images become part of the narrative white, Anglo-Saxon, and imperial narrative of the White City.

Buel includes a photograph of a woman simply identified as "An Algerian Girl (Figure 4)." She is standing akimbo, looking away from the camera, and against a carefully constructed back drop of the *pyramids* which were in Egypt. The background alone establishes that the national or tribal origins of the subjects was of secondary concern or given that these were taken in Chicago, was not merely displaced.



Fig. 4. *Algerian Girl* from J.W. Buel's "The Magic City" (1893).²³⁹

The only way to vaguely validate Buel's claims of the girl's ethnicity is to compare photographs of her to other anonymous *Algeriennes* from contemporary postcards printed in Algeria (Figure 5).

²³⁹ Buel, *The Magic City*.



Fig. 5. Postcard of Algerian woman performing.²⁴⁰

Buel observes that the Algerian girls on the Midway were much more modestly dressed in comparison to such dancers as those from Egypt. In fact the bulk of the existing images of Algerian women taken by French contemporaries depicted Algerian women topless and provocatively postured, while Egyptian postcards relied heavily on Bedouin costume and veiling. This may reflect the artistic, albeit stereotypical, sensibilities of the colonizers, with the French choosing to exploit the female form and explore the nuances of the *Algerienne*'s body while the British in Egypt preferred a more modest imagining of the East. However, Buel acknowledged however that "Algerian Girl" was still "bedizened with gewgaws which North Africans and Orientals lavishly affect" which is a true statement of images of Algerian women of the time and may denote a stand-in for what would normally be a more explicit rendering of her identity.²⁴¹ Essentialism defines the outward appearance of Muslim women. Buel approves of "An Algerian

²⁴⁰ Alloula, *Colonial Harem*, 10.

²⁴¹ Buel, *The Magic City*. A *gewgaw* is defined as a "decorative bauble or trinket."

Girl” because of her modesty, but still does not afford her a position amongst the higher-ranked populations of the Midway Plaisance.

The essentialist claim made about North Africa itself and the Middle East by juxtaposing “An Algerian Girl” against the pyramids confirms that the identities of Middle Eastern-Muslim women were cobbled together without any real concern for accuracy. Why situate her against the pyramids when she is not identified as Egyptian? Undoubtedly the pyramids served as a kind of marker to identify her general location in the Middle East. As well as the photograph acknowledges cultural and consumer craze for all things derived from ancient Egypt, a fad that was promoted by British archaeologists and anthropologists then diligently pillaging and exporting from the Valley of the Kings.²⁴² The work of the British metropole impacted the landscape of the fair by including cultural signifiers, like the pyramids, that resonated with the public and reduced Egyptians from citizens to laborers, and then reduced all subjects to generic Middle Easterners.

The pyramids and the woman’s ethnic and racial identity merge in this portrait to evoke a monolithic notion of the East. She is further reduced by Buel’s comment that “Algerian Girl” was taken from the Midway Plaisance’s “side-show.”²⁴³ Even on the hierarchical scale that was the Midway, Muslim women were subjugated further and their identities subsumed to enable empire and imperial ambition to be highlighted in their individual portraiture.

A second portrait of a young woman in Buel’s collection, who does not look much older than a teenager, is identified as being “An Odalisque Straight from the Seraglio (Figure 6).”²⁴⁴

²⁴² Richard H. Wilkinson, *Egyptology Today*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

²⁴³ Ibid, 22.

²⁴⁴ Ibid, 22.



Fig.6. “An Odalisque Straight from the Seraglio.”²⁴⁵

This photograph is of a better quality, its close proximity of the photographer to the subject is suggests that the photographer himself took a deep interest in his subject, perhaps himself believing that she was an authentic, living artifact of the Sultan’s harem. He seems to know instinctively that staging this girl as an “Odalisque” will garner both and his subject more attention and more consumability. The subject is fetishized in her performance of an “Odalisque” according to the artistic whims of the photographer. Presumably influenced by other existing imperial visions of Muslim womanhood in Orientalist art, the scene is carefully constructed and the body of the “Odalisque” is used to affirm the presumptions underlying ethnic, racial, and religious hegemonies. She is dressed and perhaps even *over* dressed with trinkets and baubles and items appropriate for a performance of on the Midway or even on a Nile boat in Upper Egypt, but certainly not characteristic of women who inhabited a harem. In contrast, Egyptian women’s actual clothing was both practical and, as demonstrated by portraits of elite women

²⁴⁵ Buel, *The Magic City*.

from Egypt and Turkey, also surprisingly Western. Ottoman women in particular, with their proximity to Europe coupled with the Tanzimat reforms, meant to encourage the modernization of the empire, embraced and cultivated the popularity of European fashion at court.²⁴⁶

Translucent “harem pants” and shoes with curled toes were a fiction of Orientalist artists, and seldom if ever worn.²⁴⁷

The camera controls her and guides her gaze away from the imperial instrument. The “Odalisque’s” hands are clasped together and her head is turned to the side; like the other subjects, she is also not looking directly at the camera. This is perhaps the most distressing aspect of her pose: the tilt of her head and her vacant expression are more of sadness than seduction. She is truly an empty vessel into which the observers may project their own story. Her posture is an attempt to appear charming, innocent, and most importantly, naïve. Her age, in this juxtaposition of innocence and eroticism lend an entirely new dimension to her objectification, making her almost the subject of a more pedophilic fantasy than one of an ethnographic or a more sophisticated erotic undertaking. Her clasped hands also do not give her any indication of physical agency and add to her vulnerability in front of the lens. The photograph becomes one of the series of homogenized images of Muslim womanhood in American popular culture.

Deployed as a way to articulate conquest and imperial endeavors, the “Odalisque” becomes a sexual object through which generations of re-imaginings and re-stagings of her religious, ethnic, racial, and sexual identity remain a part of the American popular consciousness.

Buel’s also featured a portrait of a dancer on stage in the Egyptian Theatre. This portrait is different from the portraits of the “Algerian Girl” and the “Odalisque.” The photograph is of *both* men and women, but at center stage is a single dancer (Figure 7).

²⁴⁶ Alev Croutier, *Harem: The World Behind the Veil* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1994), 71.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 75.



Fig.7. A dancer photographed on the stage of the Egyptian Theatre on the Midway Plaisance. In the background are other dancers and musicians.²⁴⁸

She is standing with her arms down, either preparing to be photographed or to dance. The performers accompanying her are in the background, watching and waiting for the scene to unfold in front of them. Their posturing is almost a caricature of the harem and the various poses that populate harem imagery, languid and salacious at the same time. The photograph in its posturing alone embodies this vision of the harem and the stereotype of the East as a region of idle bodies and idle entertainment. However, the young woman at the center is standing and looking out toward an empty theatre and slouched forward. She looks as if she may be mentally impaired, cast in her starring role because she is marginally exotic, but also because she fulfills the racial typing of an inferior intellect necessary for participation in the Midway's entertainments. This picture provokes discomfort; it really does appear to manifest the qualities that Buel articulates when he describes the Egyptian Theatre as a "side show." The scene that is set inside the frame of this photograph is one of a Barnum-esque performance, where "artful

²⁴⁸ Buel, *The Magic City*.

deception”²⁴⁹ is certainly evident. This particular image illustrates the body and costume of the dancer and enables further speculation about what she will do when allowed to commence her performance. In reality, however, it is really more of a commentary on the Western assumptions about Eastern culture and perhaps on the mental acumen of the “Mohammedan race.”

In Buel’s collection, amongst the portraits of single women, there is a rather classic Victorian portrait of two young girls and an older man whose appearance seems very much that of early portraits of Santa Claus (Figure 8).



Fig. 8. “Algerian Chief and Girls.”²⁵⁰

The two girls, who look more like they belong in a Pear’s Soap advertisement than in an album from the Columbian Exposition, are staged looking intently over the shoulder of an older man whom Clement C. Moore would no doubt declare a perfect foil for his description of Saint Nicholas (Fig. 9).

²⁴⁹ Cook, *The Arts of Deception*, 23.

²⁵⁰ Buel, *The Magic City*.



Fig. 9. A series of advertisements from Pear’s Soap published around 1895. The series is entitled, “Flowers of the East” and painted by William Stephen Coleman. The advertisement to the far left indicates that Pear’s Soap is available at “any international exhibition in the world.”²⁵¹

Buel identifies the subjects in the photograph as “Algerian Chief and Girls.” What is seemingly a benign portrait of an aging man and two young, cherubic-faced girls is perhaps not entirely what it seems. First glance sees the portrait as charmingly paternal between father and daughters or grandfather and granddaughters. The girls appear to be quite young and obviously doting on the aged “Chief” and they are attending to some detail on his person. However, in the context of the other photographs in this album, this image more likely affirms the “Chief’s” virility. These girls could be his granddaughters or his wives. There was, in newspaper accounts of the time, a

²⁵¹ Series of advertisements published by the Pear’s Soap Company around 1895. The exact provenance of these lithographs is unknown, but the Pear’s Soap Company published a series of “domestic” scenes from around the world from the harem (pictured here) to caricatures of the American South and depictions of African-Americans attempting to whiten their skin through the use of Pear’s Soap. See: Ana Popovic, “Late Victorian Scientific Racism and British Civilizing Mission in Pears’ Soap Ads,” *Pulse: The Journal of Science and Culture* no. 3 (2015): 99-112 and Marilyn Maness Mehaffy, “Advertising Race/Racing Advertising: The Feminine Consumer(-Nation), 1897-1900,” *Signs* no. 1, vol. 23 (1997): 131-174.

fascination with the concept of polygamy.²⁵² Perhaps this photograph is meant to satiate or indulge some of that curiosity, as it painstakingly assembles a scene in which both male fantasy and paternal instinct are both satisfied. Like the other photographs in the albumen, there are more sinister overtones than are initially appreciated. After all, “to analyze it is to dissolve its charm.”²⁵³

F.W. Putnam’s book *Types of the Midway Plaisance*, compiles images of the various races, cultures, and ethnicities on the Midway. His commentary is loosely couched in ethnography. Putnam’s examination of Middle Eastern women also includes Jewish women. I maintain that Jewish women were assigned their identities because their relationship to monotheism was marginally more tolerable than that of Muslims. Additionally, the Jewish dancers are described by Putnam as being much more elegant and graceful in their dancing and movements, elevating them further above the Muslim belly dancers. Eastern Christians are not identified in any of the texts, further confirming the notion that the Eastern “Other” did not include any manifestations of Christianity or Christian women.²⁵⁴

Although Putnam presents a large collection of portraits from the Muslim majority countries, he places less emphasis on the performance of race and Muslim womanhood than Buel; thus his portraits lend less to the collective American perception of Muslim women. However, one portrait in particular stands out. Amongst the hodgepodge of various belly dancers, Bedouins, and “Odaliques” there is a portrait of a toddler. The toddler is identified as “Colona” and labeled as a “Soudanese Baby Dancer (Figure 10).”

²⁵² “Mohammadan Women,” *The New York Times*, July 30, 1876. See also: “A Living Oriental Exhibit: Syrians, Arabs, and Turks to Illustrate the Life of Desert Tribes,” *The New York Times*, April 26, 1893.

²⁵³ Holly Edwards, “A Million and One Nights: Orientalism in America, 1870-1930,” in *Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures: Orientalism in America, 1870-1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 34

²⁵⁴ Putnam, *Types of the Midway*.



Fig. 10. “Colona, the Sudanese Baby Dancer.” According to Putnam, the baby, when asked her name, would answer, “Mary Anderson.”²⁵⁵

According to Putnam the toddler was capable of “dancing” a rather uninspiring little dance and then passing her cap around for a gratuity. In her portrait she distressingly does not even appear to be capable of sitting-up, let alone being able to perform on-behalf of her mother. She is lying down and looking at the camera with a grimace on her face. Her costume is nothing except an untidy sack with some seashells for ornamentation. In Putnam’s description of Calona, he claims that when asked her name, the child would answer, “Mary Anderson.” This, he claims brought about “the desired shower of small coin.”²⁵⁶ In this circumstance, we note Calona not as a Muslim baby girl, but a child able to code switch in a country where African-Americans, women, and non-Christians were denied full citizenship rights. The novelty of a Sudanese Muslim toddler claiming (or rather being assigned) a white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant identity was simultaneously comic and tragic. Baby Colona is given a common, but still Christian name, the first step in

²⁵⁵ Putnam, *Types of the Midway*.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

moving her toward salvation through this unofficial “baptism” through a camera and immersed under the Protestant gaze. Readers might have seen the image as a sad failure of Putnam’s study, but they could also see the child as a prism of how America viewed itself.

One peculiar instance that not simply illustrates the fluidity of race and the ease of racial code switching occurring on the Midway, but almost entirely to Americans’ seeming disinterest in authenticity occurs in a photograph that appears in both Buel and Putnam’s albums. There are photographs of the same pair of women, separately featured and identified in Buel’s volume as “Romanian Dancers” (Figure 9) and in Putnam’s as “Moorish Dancers” (Figure 10).



Figs. 11 and 12. (L) “Romanian Dancers” from Buel’s *The Magic City*. The same women are identified as **(R)** “Moorish Dancers” in Putnam’s *Types of the Midway Plaisance*.²⁵⁷

These sisters proved capable of racial code switching, giving credence to the observation by some fairgoers that all was not quite what it seemed on the Midway. In Buel’s text, the sisters

²⁵⁷ Buel, *The Magic City*; Putnam, *Types of the Midway*. The appearance of the women in different volumes with different identities suggests that they themselves may have done further codeswitching as required. Perhaps the the Middle Eastern exhibits were more lucrative than the Romanian or perhaps in Putnam’s editing of his volume he made the decision to codeswitch on-behalf of the women. This is the only instance that I could find where this took place in the photography documenting the Midway.

dance with tambourines in what could be considered a kind of Eastern dance with their hips pushed to one side and their fingertips elongated upon their instruments. They appear to be performing some kind of ritual of Arab-Muslim womanhood with a certain degree of skill. The sisters undermine the racial and ethnic project of the Midway because in separate texts they are alternatively identified as two different performative entities. If this is true in the major texts documenting the Exposition, then what can be said of the entirety of the Midway Plaisance and the performance of Muslim womanhood there?

Collectively, Buel's portraits form the more innocuous versions of Muslim womanhood because they are constructed purely for entertainment purposes with no pretense of science. Yet Buel's framework is set against Orientalist descriptors from his introduction invoking Aladdin and the genie of the lamp to his overwhelming favoring of the "Eastern" elements of the fair, both architecturally and performatively. In sum, as Alloula so eloquently described it, "the saturation of the image sought by the photographer has no other aim than to lead the eye astray, to set glittering traps for it, and to direct it entirely to that which is offered to view."²⁵⁸ Both albums "set glittering traps" as well as documented traps set along the Midway through the exploitation of the Muslim majority countries and Muslim women's sexuality. The White City itself and its Babel ghetto was a "glittering trap" for the Americans who visited, consumed, and enabled the imperial gaze to fix upon Muslim women and upon the Muslim world through the Columbian Exposition.

²⁵⁸ Alloula, *The Colonial Harem*, 52.

The Ottoman Counternarrative

The Midway Plaisance and its ethnographic bacchanalia dominated how Americans saw and experienced Muslim womanhood. In contrast to the manipulated images of Muslim women crafted by Bloom, Buel, and Putnam, Ottomans were promoting their modernization and soliciting a different type of interest from the West. At the time of the Exposition, the Ottoman Empire was in enacting a series of reforms called the Tanzimat reforms, which sought to modernize the empire and restructure monarchical and social power in the empire.²⁵⁹ The Ottomans were keen to restructure their image as a modern empire and cultivate their relations with the West. In an effort to promote the empire's project of Europeanization and modernization, Sultan AbdulHamid II sent a series of albums to be displayed at the fair. The purpose of the albums was to show the West, in particular the United States, that the Ottomans, although "Eastern," were also "Western." The intention of the album was to deconstruct inauthentic versions of the empire while simultaneously promoting a newly authentic version of the same empire. AbdulHamid II's intention was to portray his empire as still capable of keeping pace with the West. Unfortunately, the albums, which consisted largely of Ottoman architectural achievements within what is now modern Turkey and not in the greater empire, failed to subvert the enormous volume of work already produced to fetishize and fictionalize the empire. Any effort that AbdulHamid II put forth toward rendering a more Western image of Ottoman womanhood was quashed by the proliferation of material of his own subjects from Egypt, Algeria, and Syria. The sultan was waging a battle against a rapidly changing social, political, and religious landscape.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁹ Halil Inalcik, *Application of the Tanzimat and its Social Effects* (Lisse: Peter de Ridder Press, 1976).

²⁶⁰ The submission of albums for display at the fair was a conscious attempt by the Ottoman leadership to set themselves apart from the rest of the Muslim majority countries and the Muslim Middle East. The empire published

In the Sultan’s albums, there are a prolific number of photographs taken of young girls at various schools throughout Turkey (Figure 13).



Fig. 13. Photograph by Ottoman Court Photographer, Abdullah Frères, of girl students posing with diplomas at the *Mekteb-i Edeb-i* in Istanbul.²⁶¹

the albums at the end of the Tanzimat Reforms as part to demonstrate the effectiveness of the reforms and as part of what in 2021 might be called a “rebranding” campaign.

²⁶¹ Abdullah Frères, *Students, Mekteb-i Edeb-i* (Washington, D.C.: *Sultan Abdul Hamid II Albumen Collection*, Library of Congress, 1890).

Mostly in urban areas, the girls are photographed as classes and their schools are photographed separately. The number of photographs of various girls' schools in the album outnumbers the photographs of the actual students themselves. Whether this is intentional or not, or just a matter of pieces of the archive that are lost to time, is unknown. The albums place an obvious emphasis on female education. However, the question is more than the nature of girls' education in late nineteenth century Turkey: AbdulHamid II wanted to counter rhetoric about primitive Islam and women, to blunt any critique of Turkey's progress toward modernization, then why use schoolgirls? Likely, AbdulHamid II or rather his advisers were closely attuned to the ongoing debates about the utility of girls' education that would culminate in 1899 with the publication of Qasim Amin's essay, "The Liberation of Women," in Egypt. The sultan recognized the growth of women's education in the West and its importance to the West as a means of gauging the civility of a nation. The photographs are to represent a counter-discourse to the "Odalisque" and offer an alternative, modern conception of Muslim womanhood. Although the children have no agency of their own and are simply pawns in an imperial chess game, their utility to the government was priceless.

Practically speaking, schoolgirls were easy to photograph and although their use amounted to probably little more than tokenism, they were representative of the contemporary debates on women's education as well as of the future of the empire that was both modern *and* Muslim, something that modern Turkey continues to struggle with as it straddles both Western and Eastern ideals. The albums are curiously absent of photographs of grown Turkish women with the exception of one photograph of the tuberculosis ward at Hasköy Hospital for Women in Istanbul (Figure 12). The patients, are attended to by veiled women but their agency is clear through their employment outside of the home. A shift from the stereotypical and beloved

languid odalisque will require more than a single grainy photograph of female nurses. Further, the single frame remained a novelty as the only articulation of a female professional class in Turkey at the time. It is easy to fetishize the portrait of the nurses and patients in the ward because of their apparent agency.



Fig. 14. Nurses attend female tuberculosis patients at the Hasköy Hospital for Women in Istanbul.²⁶²

However, without any other indicator of Turkish women's agency, with the exception of a collection of untranslated publications in the Women's Building, the public is not able to find an accurate, self-constructed Muslim identity for women in the pages of the album, the souvenir portfolio, or any of the ethnographic guides. It is this gap in the counter-performance of Muslim women's identity that led to the popular imagining of Muslim women covered in silver coinage,

²⁶² Abdullah Frères, *Tuberculosis ward of the Hasköy Hospital for Women* (Washington, D.C.: Sultan Abdul Hamid II Albumen Collection, Library of Congress, 1890).

ornately embroidered vests, and curly toed shoes. The Ottoman attempt to refute Western exoticism of the East and to rebrand itself as a diplomatic and industrial partner to Europe and the United States ultimately failed. The albums were buried in an exhibition hall, and sex and exoticism dominated the discourse on Middle Eastern as well as Muslim identities.

Conclusion

Colonization of the Middle East during the 19th century gave Europeans and Americans the power to craft a narrative of Islam as the unsophisticated, reluctant kin of Christianity and Muslim women as existing simply as a means of sexual gratification and reproduction. However, what colonial powers did not realize nor anticipate were the social changes already beginning to take form, where especially among the educated and upper classes. A greater interest in girls' education, women's agency, including travel, veiling, and political participation, was emerging. Colonial rule may have expedited these changes through infrastructure and enforcement of European standards of living, but they were not the only driver of change. Within half-a-century, independence movements in Morocco (1956), Egypt (1956), Syria (1956), and Algeria (1962) fought protracted battles with their colonizers for independence. The result was the loss of European power and influence in the region that was quickly replaced by the United States and Russia during the Cold War. Newly independent states such as Iran navigated cultural and political identities and the nationalization of resources like Egypt. Oil wealth in the Gulf further changed the power dynamic between the Middle East and the West as the Gulf region in the 1970s. Oil was a commodity necessary for the functioning of the industrialized West and it was shrewdly leveraged by Saudi Arabia and smaller Gulf States to prevent *too much* Western power

and influence in the region.²⁶³ These formerly non-aligned states of the post-colonial era had become powers in their own right.

The rapid changes in the Middle East precipitated by independence and revolution are still not widely accepted in the West. The perception of the Middle East as a conglomerate, unified by a monolithic interpretation of Islam that has remained static for centuries, still informs the ways Western media portray Muslim women in advertising, news media, or political cartoons. As Sarah Graham-Brown illustrates, in the years following the decades of independence movements, Western media still perpetuated the claim that Muslim women's systemic oppression was a direct product of Islamic governance at every level of society. She uses the example of a Saudi woman walking down a street in *niqaab* (full, black, opaque face veil) to make generalizations about Saudi women. Continuing this narrative of perpetual victimhood, Graham-Brown cites images of Lebanese women mourning during the Lebanese Civil War, situating women as victims of grotesque, state-sanctioned violence.²⁶⁴ As relations between the United States and the region became more complex, magazines like *Hustler* simply defaulted to pornographic cartoons of Muslim women and plump sheikhs, eliminating any kind of inference at captivity and oppression, and simply illustrating rape and sexual assault.²⁶⁵ The response to the region asserting its autonomy was for Western media to double-down on the presentation of an uncivilized part of the world to retain control of the narrative.²⁶⁶ In a region

²⁶³ Bruce Riedel, *Kings and Presidents: Saudi Arabia and the United States since FDR* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute Press, 2019), 58.

²⁶⁴ Graham-Brown, *Images of Women: The Portrayal of Women in Photography of the Middle East, 1860-1950* (London: Quartet Books, 1988), 249.

²⁶⁵ Faegheh Shirazi, *The Veil Unveiled: The Hijab in Modern Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 58-59. *Hustler's* relationship with the Muslim world, in particular Muslim women, is more fraught and more explicit than that of *Playboy*. *Hustler's* latest critique of Islam that leverages both the veil and the bodies of Muslim women is discussed later in this dissertation.

²⁶⁶ Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East Since 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 305.

largely governed by dictatorships and dynasties, the free press was a useful method for controlling information and perception of emerging societies in the Middle East.²⁶⁷

In the century following the Midway's performances, Buel's portraiture, and the start of postcolonial rule (1948), Muslim women's public agency expanded, their visibility increasing in the aftermath of 9/11 and the introduction of social media.²⁶⁸ The Midway is now Ground Zero, the metaphorical space where Muslim women must continue to subvert the gaze of a new colonizer in the throes of globalization. The transfer of people, information, and images means that the veiled Muslim women must sacrifice anonymity for action and transform the performance of Muslim-ness into political and social action in Euro-America. The days of the glittering traps are gone, replaced with ever increasingly violent rhetoric, a new form of Orientalism that cannot be subverted through the *hootchy-kootchy*.

²⁶⁷ McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 305.

²⁶⁸ Postcolonial rule in the Middle East is sometimes dated from 1918 and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, or, more correctly, from the end of British Rule in Palestine which galvanized Arab countries surrounding the new state of Israel to assert their autonomy.

CHAPTER II: SCHEHERAZADE’S CLOSET: *HIJAB, ACTIVISM, & “GENERATION M”*

Introduction: Cloth to Mosque: The Dynamic Meaning of *Hijab* in Post-9/11 America

Hijab, niqaab, burqa, all Arabic words denoting the piece of cloth that denotes modesty and which many Muslim women wear either by choice, familial pressure, or law, is a ubiquitous part of Western discourse on Islam: *hijab* is a cultural *and* a religious marker. In the post-colonial Muslim World, the *hijab* is layered with further meanings of resistance, agency, subversion, nationalism, and, in some cases, a resurgence of a more socially conservative interpretation of Islam. At the forefront of this ever-increasing public-facing form of Muslim identity is “Generation M,” the generation of American and Western European Muslims who came of age post-9/11 and spent the 2000s and 2010s developing both Muslim and female identities and harnessing consumer power.²⁶⁹ This chapter explores their use of *hijab* to craft an identity and to engage in social and political protest after 9/11 America and through the Trump Administration. The increasingly public-facing *hijab* has become a deliberate aesthetic counter-narrative to the Orientalist tropes that still flourish, despite opposition from Muslim activists and scholars. As did the seismic changes brought by September 11, 2001, the November 2016 presidential elections and the subsequent protests of January 2017 also changed how *hijab* has been portrayed, leveraged, and worn, but in recent years women have used *hijab* more assertively than ever before in American religious and political life. Finally, this chapter explores the less frequently observed meaning of *hijab*, and that is the sacred space created by women within the home, or, in the case of the United States, the Women’s Mosque of America. A form of *hijab* that crosses boundaries of *hijab* to construct a physical location of gendered space for

²⁶⁹ “Generation M” is term coined by Shelina Janmohamed of Ogilvy Noor in 2016. The term refers to the demographic of Millennial Muslims who came of age during the post-9/11 decades.

women of faith to gather and explore their collective heritage and belief in a manner that is also faithful to *Surah 24*, the often-cited verse of the Qur'an that enjoins women (and men) to dress modestly, including covering their heads.²⁷⁰ *Hijab* denotes individuals' faith and in the Women's Mosque, claims a collective place for women.

Meaning Making with *Hijab*

The concept of head covering in religious communities did not originate with Islam and its current cultural connotations are so diverse as they transcend the secular and religious, sacred and profane. In the pre-Muslim majority countries, "Assyrian, Greco-Roman, and Byzantine empires...veiling and seclusion were marks of prestige and symbols of status. Only wealthy families could afford to seclude their women. The veil was a sign of respectability but also of a lifestyle that did not require the performance of manual labor."²⁷¹ In these communities, "the use of head covering as a marker of women's status was partially due to its contextually interactive role, in which covering transcended religion and added a spatial dimension to its function by enforcing gender separation and thereby governing 'who can interact with whom... and the nature of those interactions.'"²⁷² The meaning of *hijab* expanded in the 7th century with the revelation of Islam as a means to protect Muslims from harassment, and to create a similar system of social hierarchy where Muslims were separate as monotheists from their polytheistic

²⁷⁰ "And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their chastity, and not to reveal their adornments' except what normally appears: Let them draw their veils over their chests, and not reveal their 'hidden' adornments' except to their husbands, their fathers, their fathers-in-law, their sons, their stepsons, their brothers, their brothers' sons or sisters' sons, their fellow women, those 'bondwomen' in their possession, male attendants with no desire, or children who are still unaware of women's nakedness. Let them not stomp their feet, drawing attention to their hidden adornments. Turn to Allah in repentance all together, O believers, so that you may be successful." (*Qur'an* 24:30)

²⁷¹ Faegheh Shirazi, *Unveiled: The Hijab in Modern Culture* (Jacksonville: The University Press of Florida, 2001), 4.

²⁷² Bozena C. Welborn, Aubrey Westfall, Özge Çelik Russell, and Sarah A. Tobin, *The Politics of the Headscarf in the United States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 18. Reina Lewis, "Veils and Sales: Muslims and the Spaces of Postcolonial Fashion Retail," *Fashion Theory* II, no. 4: 428.

neighbors. Some contemporary arguments in favor of veiling often refer back to this distinction, elevating Islam and Muslims above others, connections mostly emanating from postcolonial actors such as revolutionary governments, asserting their own cultural and religious autonomy. As veiling migrated through the centuries of dynasties and ever more rapid transnational and political exchanges, its meaning also changed and adapted. For example, during Morocco's War of Independence (1952-56), the veil became a sign of anti-French, anti-colonial resistance, as well as a vehicle through which women were able to be active agents in the resistance by carrying weapons and bombs. In Iran during the 1979 Revolution, veiling empowered women who protested the Shah's increasingly stringent program of secularization.²⁷³ Moroccan and Iranian women changed the veil to serve a specific purpose: to contest political action that was detrimental to the cultural identity of the nation. It also asserted the religious identity of a Muslim-majority nation. This same dynamic occurs to this day among the Muslims living outside of Muslim-majority countries: using the veil to contest the encroachment of secular society and to protest anti-Muslim violence is a regular occurrence. In the last twenty years, two moments where the veil was used with particular effectiveness took place was immediately following September 11^a and the 2016 Presidential Elections.

The American public's perception of veiling, (as described in Chapter One), was largely limited to the exotic, the profane, burlesque shows and belly dance camps, rather than Muslim assertiveness or even militancy. Despite images of thousands of veiled women in *chador* (Iranian-style of veiling) being projected throughout 1979, Americans' primary source of fear

²⁷³ Haleh Esfandiari, *Reconstructed Lives: Women and Iran's Islamic Revolution* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); see also: Shahrokni, Nazanin. *Women in Place: The Politics of Gender Segregation in Iran* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019). (Moroccan Women) Alison Baker, *Voices of Resistance: Oral Histories of Moroccan Women* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998); Leila Abouzeid, *Year of the Elephant* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990).

and anger was the Ayatollah Khomeini, portrayed as a diabolical anti-Western Aladdin who would finally let the genie of self-rule out of the bottle.²⁷⁴ As Iran became a closed society and Saudi Arabia an ally during the 1980s, the American understanding of veiling remained unchanged and vague. The occasional article about the Taliban in Afghanistan in the mid-1990s or the publication of such books like *Princess* (1993) or *The Price of Honor* (1995) jostled the American perception of veiling toward conflating it with violence, *jihad*, and male hegemony. Americans still did not assign an overwhelmingly negative value to veiling.²⁷⁵ Only after September 11th, when the U.S. endured catastrophic violence orchestrated in the name of Islam, and a much broader, more sinister world emerged within **one** Muslim-majority country that used veiling for power and control, that American non-Muslim meanings of veiling undergo a rapid, overwhelming, sometimes violent cultural shift.

After September 11th, scholars observing patterns in immigration and assimilation anticipated that the children of Muslim immigrants “would shed their parents’ religious and cultural markings and become more Americanized, and, if a reassertion of a cultural identity occurred...it would not take place until the third generation.”²⁷⁶ This aesthetic component of identity was hindered by the implications that wearers of *hijab* were inherently sympathetic to the September 11th hijackers, and which somehow included a compulsory allegiance to violence. Despite this, *hijab* in the 2000s, especially among second and third generation immigrant women had something of a renaissance. Eschewing conservatism and violence, *hijab*’s assertion of

²⁷⁴ *Chador* is a uniquely Persian/Iranian form of cover that consists of a large, black cloak worn over the body. Unlike *nikaab*, the face is not obscured.

²⁷⁵ The mid-late 1990s saw a surge in the number of memoirs and “tell-all’s” published about Muslim women/women’s lives in the Muslim majority countries. See: Jean Sasson, *Princess* (New York: Avon Books, 1993); Jan Goodwin, *Price of Honor: Muslim Women Lift Veil of Silence on the Muslim majority countries* (New York: Plume, 1995); and Geraldine Brooks, *Nine Parts of Desire: The Hidden World of Islamic Women* (New York: Anchor Books, 1995).

²⁷⁶ Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, “The Post-9/11 ‘Hijab’ as Icon,” *Sociology of Religion*, Vol. 68, No. 3 (Fall 2007): 253

identity made it a cultural, political, and consumerist phenomenon. Islamization, best described as an overt undertaking of signifiers of Islam and Muslim identity like wearing *hijab*, dressing in a more modest fashion, and becoming more involved in religious life became more prevalent. Sociologist Yvonne Haddad writes that Islamization “accelerated, as an increasing number of adolescents and young adults (daughters of immigrant Muslims) [assumed] a public identity by wearing *hijab*.”²⁷⁷ Either as the first time or as a return to it, second generation Muslim women began wearing *hijab* following September 11th to actively defy stereotypes about Islam. Haddad goes on to say that, “many Americans began to identify the *hijab* as the standard of the enemy. No more a marker of piety and obedience to God, it came to be seen as an affront and the flaunting of an identity associated with those who have declared war on the United States.”²⁷⁸ *Hijab* was, of course, an easy signifier of Muslim identity as Americans grappled with the idea of the nebulous, fluid state-within-a-state of *al-Qaeda*, and they found a soft target in veiled Muslim women.

These tensions around what it means not only to be Muslim but also American *and* a woman, did not result in Muslim retreat into the background, reshuffling their identities and aesthetics, but in stronger assertions of identity, both in the American Muslim community and on the national political stage. The 2010s saw the opening of the Women’s Mosque of America in Los Angeles and two Muslim women, with distinct aesthetics, gaining traction in both the national political and commercial scenes with the election of Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib in 2018. The very public presence of Muslim women in the foreground of American life was made evident as major retailers such as the GAP and Macy’s included Muslim women in their advertising and magazines like *Allure* featured Somali-American and Muslim supermodel,

²⁷⁷ Haddad, “The Post-9/11 *Hijab*,” 253.

²⁷⁸ Haddad, “The Post-9/11 *Hijab*,” 263.

Halima Aden in July 2017. Throughout the 2000s and 2010s, Muslim women became a “normal” element of the cultural landscape rather than one to be fetishized. A brief regression, around the time of the 2016 presidential election, with the use of Muslim women in star spangled *hijabs* to protest the Trump Administration’s xenophobic administration did nothing to limit the production of cultural and political capital by Muslim women themselves. Although not firmly out of the hands of non-Muslim feminists, the narrative and actions are increasingly at the direction of Muslim-American women, especially those members of “Generation M,” the generation of Muslim youth who came of age in the decade after 9/11. This chapter traces the initial widespread “reintroduction” of *hijab* into American Muslim communities and through the ways Millennial Muslims brought *hijab* further into the mainstream through engaging non-Muslims in wearing *hijab*, influencer and consumer culture, and participating in political commentary.

World Hijab Day: Navigating Post-9/11 “Veiled” Activism and Meaning-Making

In response to the hate crimes and the rise of gendered Islamophobia following September 11^a, activists staged solidarity events arose to provide public support for Muslim women.²⁷⁹ Interestingly, these events focused on the *hijab* as the most effective means of demonstrating solidarity and sisterly protection of Muslim women, not only in the United States, but globally. The first such events of this kind came from white feminist activism and not grassroots initiatives within the American Muslim community. Two took place through the

²⁷⁹ Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)/U.S. Department of Justice, “2001: Annual Hate Crimes Report.” (<https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2001/hatecrime01.pdf>), 2002. See also: Bryan D. Byers and James A. Jones, “The Impact of the Terrorist Attacks of 9/11 on Anti-Islamic Hate Crime,” *Journal of Ethnicity in Criminal Justice* 5, no. 1 (2007): 43-56; Ilir Disha, James C. Cavendish, and Ryan D. King, “Historical Events and Spaces of Hate: Hate Crimes against Arabs and Muslims in Post-9/11 America,” *Social Problems* 58, no. 1 (2011): 21-46.

Feminist Majority Foundation (FMF) and the Art Department at the University of Connecticut. The popularity of such events ebbed and flowed over the last fifteen years, resurging when white feminists felt a political and social need to reassert protection and solidarity with Muslim women, reaching so far as to initiate a “Pink *Hijab* Day” for breast cancer awareness. Even anti-hate crime work was pink washed!²⁸⁰ Most important, events rose around the 2016 Presidential Elections, where xenophobic rhetoric targeted and where the presence of Ghazala Khan at her husband’s side at the 2016 Democratic National Convention, stirred anti-Muslim sentiment and a return to Orientalist tropes about obedient, silent, Muslim women.²⁸¹

The Feminist Majority Foundation (FMF) announced an event (or “call to action”) for December 16-18, 2001 called, “Scarves for Solidarity.”²⁸² The FMF issued a statement saying, “All women, regardless of faith, are wearing scarves covering their hair during Eid, Muslim celebratory days... This simple gesture of solidarity is to communicate love and peace for women who wish to dress in a modest fashion. Our global days of solidarity speak volumes to those who have been afraid to wear traditional *hijab* since the horrific tragedy of September 11th.”²⁸³ It was an event that lacked nuance, especially for an organization that devoted itself to advocating on-behalf of Afghan women.²⁸⁴ The Feminist Majority, pre-September 11th 2001, sold 1” x 1” squares

²⁸⁰ Pinkwashing refers to the production and sale of consumer items in shades of pink usually during the month of October (Breast Cancer Awareness Month). Cynically, it is a marketing ploy for women consumers who believe by buying, wearing, gifting, etc. “pinkwashed” items, they are contributing to Breast Cancer Research, activism, etc.) Critics of “pinkwashing” say that there is little to not transparency about the percentage of proceeds given to breast cancer researchers or organizations and that the very products that are touting support for a cure contain toxic materials linked to breast cancer. See: Samantha King, *Pink Ribbons, Inc.* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008) and Amy Lubitow and Mia Davis, “Pastel Injustice: The Corporate Use of Pinkwashing for Profit,” *Environmental Justice* 4, no. 2 (2011): 139-144.

²⁸¹ Hinda Mandell, “Ghazala Khan and the Power of Silence,” *WBUR*, 1 Aug. 2016. wbur.org/cognoscenti/2016/08/01/ghazala-khizr-humayun-khan-donald-trump-hinda-mandell Accessed August 10, 2016.

²⁸² Leila Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil’s Resurgence from the Middle East to America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 206.

²⁸³ “Scarves for Solidarity Press Statement,” Feminist Majority Foundation, December 2001.

²⁸⁴ As an undergraduate at Dickinson College, I experienced a now buried campaign by the FMF to encourage women to wear pieces of the screening from shredded *burqas* in solidarity with Afghan women in “post-liberation”

made from the netting used to obscure the eyes in the iconic blue Afghan-style *burqas* to raise awareness of the social situation of Afghan women. The overthrow of the Taliban in October 2001 and the “liberation” of Afghanistan permitted the U.S. government (in the form of First Lady Laura Bush) and women-focused non-profits to pivot away easily from the use of the *burqa* to oppose suppression of Muslim women’s agency in Afghanistan to advocating for *all* women to veil in solidarity with Muslim experiencing gendered Islamophobia during a prescribed period.²⁸⁵ The Feminist Majority, a Western, feminist, women’s organization, merely rebranded the narrative by encouraging non-Muslim women to wear the veil in solidarity.

In the years since September 11^a, a number of earnest “solidarity events” sprung-up at college campuses across the country in an effort to respond to the dramatic rise in hate crimes against Muslims, in particular Muslim women. At the University of Connecticut, an event called “Scarves for Solidarity” was organized by the Art Department and led by Professor Jennifer Schock.²⁸⁶ Similar events followed at colleges around the country and the globe. Some of the events were organized by Women’s Centers or emerged as an informal response to specific incidents of anti-Muslim violence. At SUNY Stonybrook, the Muslim Students’ Association (MSA), hosts an annual event called, “Scarves for Solidarity,” during “Islam Awareness Week.” The event is described as, “one of our most iconic Islam Awareness Week events. It stands for unity and representation of millions of women around the world who choose to cover themselves with the *hijab*. Wear the scarf for a day and show your allyship and support for Muslim women.

Afghanistan. A board member of the Zatae Longsdorff Center for Women brought these tokens back from her internship with the foundation during the summer of 2002. Frustratingly, I have not been able to find any reference to the original campaigns by the FMF of which this item was a part.

²⁸⁵ Laura Bush, “Taliban Oppression of Women,” Transcript of Radio Address, November 17, 2001. (https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/laurabushtext_111701.html). Accessed 3/5/21. See also: Kim Berry, “The Symbolic Use of Afghan Women in the War on Terror,” *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* 27, no. 2 (2003): 140.

²⁸⁶ Courtney Hickson, “Women Show Solidarity Wearing Hijab.” *Daily Campus*, University of Connecticut, October 2, 2001. Accessed February 4, 2020.

Afterwards, people come for dinner and reflect on their experiences of what it's like to be a "hijabi."²⁸⁷ These campus events were eventually consolidated and codified into an international movement in 2013 with the founding of World *Hijab* Day.²⁸⁸

The founding of World *Hijab* Day is attributed to Nazma Khan, a native of Bangladesh who immigrated at age 11 with her family to the Bronx a few years prior to the September 11th attacks. In an interview with *Narratively*, she describes how in middle school, her classmates would call her "ninja" or "Batman" and put gum in her *hijab*.²⁸⁹ Khan experimented, like her sister, with not wearing the *hijab*, but ultimately returned to wearing it and after graduating from City College, she launched her own business called Stunning Hijab. The business's motto, "Concealed. Content. Confident," spoke to a new generation of Muslim women and offered a sense of contemporary style and empowerment grounded in Islam. It was through the market place that she created that she began to receive messages from women wearing *hijab*. The true catalyst for the founding of World Hijab Day, however was in the wake of a 2010 incident involving a Hollister clothing store in California. Hollister employee Hani Khan was fired from her position at the store because her *hijab* violated the company's "Look Policy."²⁹⁰ The Council on American and Islamic Relations (CAIR) filed a complaint with the Equal Opportunity

²⁸⁷ "Scarves for Solidarity," *Stonybrook University*, November 9, 2019. stonybrook.campuslabs.com/engage/event/3251267. Accessed February 4, 2020. Details for an upcoming, annual event held at Stonybrook University each February/March to celebrate World Hijab Day.

²⁸⁸ World Hijab Day Homepage (<https://worldhijabday.com/>). Accessed February 25, 2020.

²⁸⁹ Melissa Berman, "That's My Hijab," *Narratively*, January 14, 2014. narratively.com/thats-my-hijab/. Accessed November 10, 2019. Berman interviews the founder of World Hijab Day and adopts the *hijab* for a day.

²⁹⁰ Laura Northrup, "Muslim Hollister Employee Fired Because Of Headscarf," *Consumerist*, February 25, 2010. <http://consumerist.com/2010/02/25/muslim-hollister-employee-fired-because-of-headscarf/>. Accessed February 2, 2020. Chain stores catering to the teenage/adolescent market have been slow to adopt to the changing consumer landscape of the United States in particular, the consumer power of American Muslim teenagers. Abercrombie and Fitch, as well as Hollister, have both been in the judicial spotlight due to claims of bias and discrimination against *hijab*-wearing employees. The argument from corporate leadership is that the *hijab* is not on-brand, nor, it is assumed, does it represent (yet) a wide-enough swath of the market to be integrated into the branding. Other companies like Target and Macy's have begun to include *hijab* in their marketing efforts and in their product ranges.

Employment Commission on Khan's behalf.²⁹¹ In 2013 a federal judge ruled that Abercrombie & Fitch, Hollister's parent company, violated Khan's civil rights.²⁹² However, before the case restitutions Khan decided to create and promote an official day for wearing *hijab* that would include women who already wear *hijab* and women who do not wear *hijab*, including non-Muslims. In establishing World Hijab Day, Khan was able to not only begin a mission to increase awareness for *hijab*; the event also cleverly operates as a kind of *dawah*, introducing non-Muslims to Islam through a positive, affirming, and community-oriented event.²⁹³

The first World Hijab Day took place February 1, 2013 and now, entering its eighth year in 2021, takes place in an estimated 190 countries worldwide. Khan has since closed her *hijab* business to focus on full-time advocacy work for *hijab*-wearing women and leading the World Hijab Day organization.²⁹⁴ The theme of World Hijab Day was "Unity in Diversity," announced on December 6, 2019:

²⁹¹ Henry Lee, "Muslim goes to Feds over headscarf firing," *SF Gate*, February 10, 2010, <https://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Muslim-goes-to-feds-over-head-scarf-firing-3198425.php> Accessed September 26, 2020.

²⁹² Eyder Peralta, "Judge: Abercrombie & Fitch Was Wrong To Fire Woman Over Headscarf," *NPR*, September 9, 2013, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2013/09/09/220822451/abercrombie-fitch-was-wrong-to-fire-woman-over-headscarf>. Accessed September 26, 2020.

²⁹³ Kathryn Kattalia, "World Hijab Day Takes to Social Media as Part of Global Effort to Encourage Tolerance and Understanding." *Bustle*, February 1, 2015, www.bustle.com/articles/61771-world-hijab-day-takes-to-social-media-as-part-of-global-effort-to-encourage-tolerance. Accessed February 4, 2020.

²⁹⁴ "About Us." *World Hijab Day Organization*, worldhijabday.com/about-us/.



Fig. 15. Advertising for the 8th Annual World Hijab Day on February 1, 2020. Designed by idotdoodle (instagram.com/idotdoodle).²⁹⁵

The branding for the 8th Annual World Hijab Day is a cozy graphic representing the diversity of women who wear *hijab* (and *niqab*) designed by Zayneb H, a Sri Lankan graphic designer living in the United Kingdom. Zayneb’s designs are cute, non-threatening, and include, among her advocacy for veiling, verses from the Qur’an and “Hijabis Wearing Masks” for the Covid-19 Pandemic.²⁹⁶ The graphic, like most of Zayneb’s work, is full of pastels, a feminine aesthetic, and to be social. The graphic is infantilizing in its cute aesthetic, which is part of why it seems non-threatening, but it is meant to evoke the complementary identity of women in Islam and signal distinct gender roles. It is also a welcoming, safe image, and thus perfect for *dawah*, an added

²⁹⁵ Zayneb H. (@idotdoodle), “World Hijab Day 2020 Logo,” Instagram post, January 31, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/B7_Ylwjnk3S/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link. Accessed February 4, 2020.

²⁹⁶ Zayneb H. (@idotdoodle), “Types of Masked Hijabis,” Instagram post, September 16, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/B7_Ylwjnk3S/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link. Accessed September 26, 2020.

benefit of World *Hijab Day*.²⁹⁷ The image is a translation of the common images of Muslim women from exotic, restrained, and unapproachable to feminine, soft, and social.

Following the arch of inclusivity by inviting and encouraging non-Muslims to participate, the event is a now much-documented occasion globally, especially on social media, with non-Muslim women posting their events, selfies in *hijab*, meme's, and what they learned through wearing the *hijab* publicly for a day. Unsurprisingly, the majority of events take place on college campuses and include professors, students, and staff. Many of the participants stated that participation in the event also elevated awareness around *hijab* and deepened their outside knowledge of Islam. The majority of women interviewed for World Hijab Day news pieces cite the desire to understand what it is like to wear *hijab* and an curiosity about Islam, in particular the stereotypes about Muslim women. At Manhattan College, a Catholic institution in the Bronx, student Darby Zelaskowski said, "I just want to learn about other people's cultures and practices," she said. "I think it's really cool that we get to do this, even though we are a Catholic campus, which is really important."²⁹⁸ Another woman, Katrisha Milligan wrote, "Major life lesson. My eyes are opened to subtleties of racism. In my mind, racism is big hate-filled gestures. I saw today that those incidents are rare. It takes the form of passive actions. It's opening my own door a lot more than normal. It is someone's eyes to the floor in the elevator. It's the lady behind me at Kroger stepping back and white knuckling her cart when I turned around and

²⁹⁷ Oxford Islamic Studies Online, "Dawah," <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e511>, Accessed September 29, 2020. *Dawah* means to call others to convert to Islam. Historically, dawah was practiced through conquest and empire-building. Contemporary Muslim communities' practice *dawah* through good deeds, inviting non-Muslims to events at local mosques for community building, and events like "World Hijab Day" and "Meet a Muslim."

²⁹⁸ Aaron Mayorga, "A simple scarf is an effective tool for campus cultural communication." *Riverdale Press*. February 9, 2018., riverdalepress.com/stories/a-simple-scarf-is-an-effective-tool-for-campus-cultural-communion.64654.

smiled.”²⁹⁹ Finally, Megan Baase told the organizers of World Hijab Day that it was their event that eventually resulted in her conversion to Islam in 2015: “I’ve always been interested in Islam but until I heard about World Hijab Day, I didn’t know much. After reading what Islam is about and why women wear hijab, I decided to convert. I still have a lot to learn but I believe I made the right decision. I would’ve never learned about Islam if it weren’t for World Hijab Day.”³⁰⁰ Women are also encouraged to submit photos for World Hijab Day via the website or through the organization’s Facebook page:

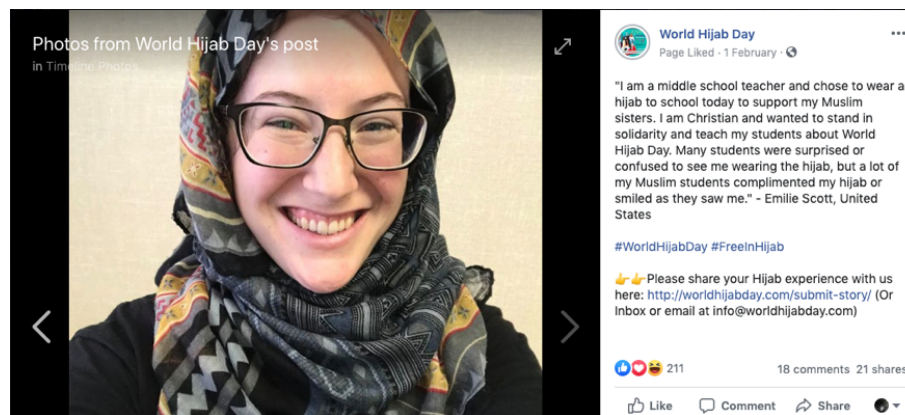


Fig 16. Facebook posts featuring non-Muslim women in the United States experiencing and describing World Hijab Day: “I am a middle school teacher and chose to wear a *hijab* to school today to support my Muslim sisters. I am Christian and wanted to stand in solidarity and teach my students about World Hijab Day. Many students were surprised or confused to see me wearing the *hijab*, but a lot of my Muslim students complimented my *hijab* or smiled as they saw me.” (Emilie Scott).³⁰¹

²⁹⁹ Katrisha Mulligan, “Major Life Lesson-My Eyes Are Opened to Subtleties of Racism,” Facebook, March 6, 2017, worldhijabday.com/major-life-lesson-eyes-opened-subtleties-racism/. Accessed February 2, 2020. There are an abundance of first-person narratives relating to the experience of wearing *hijab* as part of World Hijab Day and the transformative power of the hijab: women discuss the reactions of peers, being introduced to subtle (and overt) racism; and for some, the experience ultimately leads to embracing Islam.

³⁰⁰ Megan Baase, “I Would’ve Never Learned About Islam if it Weren’t for World Hijab Day,” Facebook, February 1, 2016. worldhijabday.com/2836-2/. Accessed February 2, 2020.

³⁰¹ “World Hijab Day,” Facebook, February 1, 2015. Accessed February 2, 2020.

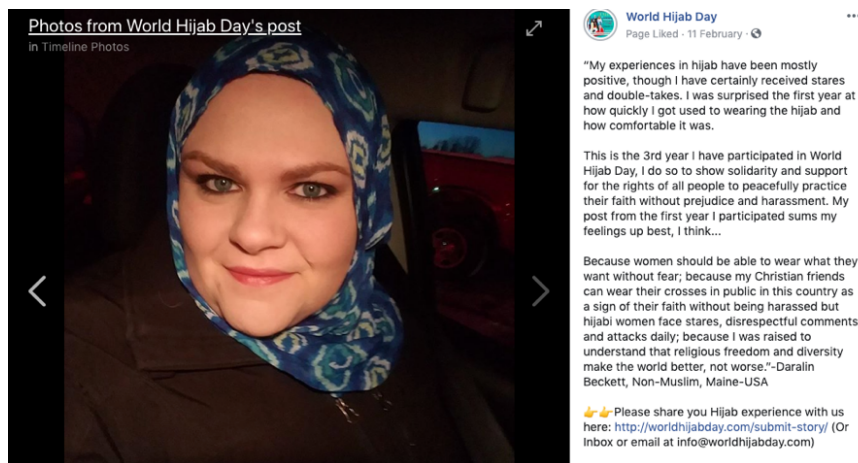


Fig. 17. “My experiences in *hijab* have been mostly positive. I have certainly received stares and double-takes. I was surprised the first year at how quickly I got used to wearing the *hijab* and how comfortable it was. This is the 3rd year I have participated in World Hijab Day. I do so to show solidarity and support for the rights of all people to peacefully practice their faith without prejudice and harassment. My post from the first year I participated sums my feelings up best, I think... Because women should be able to wear what they want without fear; because my Christian friends can wear their crosses in public in this country as a sign of their faith without being harassed but *hijabi* women face stares, disrespectful comments, and attacks daily; because I was raised to understand that religious freedom and diversity make the world better, not worse.” (Danalin Beckett)³⁰²

Critics of World Hijab Day and other *hijab*-required solidarity events refer to the temporary donning of *hijab* as “*hijab* tourism,” and “sweet, but uninspired.”³⁰³ For Muslim women critiquing the event, it is merely an exercise in colonialism in a supposedly postcolonial world.³⁰⁴ Critics contend that although meaningful, World Hijab Day is largely devoid of any

³⁰² “World Hijab Day,” Facebook, February 11, 2015. Accessed February 2, 2020.

³⁰³ Christina Cauter, “A Christian Professor Wore a Hijab to Protest Islamophobia. What do Hijabi Women Think?” *Slate*, December 16, 2015, <http://slate.com/human-interest/2015/12/a-christian-professor-wore-a-hijab-to-protest-islamophobia-what-do-hijabi-women-think.html>. Accessed December 30, 2019.

³⁰⁴ Russel Contreras, “University of New Mexico students join ‘World Hijab Day’,” *The Washington Times*, February 1, 2017, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/feb/1/university-of-new-mexico-students-to-join-world-hi/> Accessed December 30, 2019. Contreras quotes Mouna Mana, Director of Arabic Language and Culture at the Qatar Foundation, saying that the event is, “sweet, but uninspired.” She later goes on to call it a kind of hyped-up symbolism.

kind of meaningful change or a deterrent to gendered Islamophobia. The overarching theme in the various critiques of these events is that they promote a shallow understanding of *hijab*, when for the better part of the 20th century it was a tool of anti-colonial movements, especially in Egypt, Algeria, and Syria; also a tool for elite women in Syria and Egypt to make radical statements about women's agency; and a bold symbol of antipathy against the Shah and Western interference in Iran.³⁰⁵ *Hijab* is the subject of much of the earliest writing on women and Islam in the late 20th century, as scholars and critics continue to unpack its meanings, origins, and evolution. An understanding of *hijab* and its roles in opposing Western influence and interference in Islam should be a prerequisite for non-Muslim women using *hijab* as an expression of solidarity.³⁰⁶ Simply wearing *hijab* for a protest or to cultivate a feeling of personal power in sisterhood hollows out the distinct spiritual, emotional, and political experiences of Muslim women and puts non-Muslim women in leadership roles where they do not belong. Blogger "Ms. Muslamic" writes, "Even though the day is ostensibly about Muslim women and their experiences, the spotlight is firmly on the experiences of non-Muslim women who are merely tourists in the world of *hijab*. As such, it privileges the experience of non-Muslim women

³⁰⁵ Writing on this subject by women is best illustrated through memoirs and literature. In Egypt, Hoda Shaarawi's memoirs, *Harem Years* (1924); in Algeria, Assia Djebar's, *Women of Algiers in their Apartment* (1980); and in Syria, Ulfat Idilbi's, "Sabriya: Damascus Bittersweet," originally published as "دمشق يا بسمة الحزن" ("Damascus, the Smile of Sadness") in 1989. Further exploration of the subject, especially in Iran, is undertaken by Ziba Mir-Hosseini in *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran* (1999). Mir-Hosseini's work is also interesting because it was published shortly before the election of a reformist government led by President Muhammad Khatami.

³⁰⁶ Qasim Amin, *The Liberation of Women*, trans. Samiha Sidhom Peterson (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2000). The essay was originally published in 1899 in Egypt. Amin believed that the "liberation" of women was the first step to making Egypt into a modern society. He is often credited with inspiring the Egyptian Women's Movement. Amin linked the practice of *purdah* (harem life) and veiling with Egyptian vulnerability to colonial (British) rule. He argued that women should have rights to education, in particular, to elevate Egyptian society thereby lessening the influence and power of colonial governments. His fellow countryman, Sayyid Qutb, would make a similar argument under Nasser in the 1950s which would lead to his execution. The difference between the two men being Amin's position among the Egyptian bourgeoisie and a secular lawyer as opposed to Qutb's affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood and a radical shift from secular to Islamic rule in the wake of British departure from Egypt.

over and above the stories and narratives of actual Muslim women who wear *hijab* every day.”³⁰⁷ “Solidarity through cultural appropriation is extremely problematic because the consequences for non-Muslims wearing *hijab* are never as severe as they are for Muslims.”³⁰⁸ Non-Muslim women do not have to commit to *hijab* or navigate the codeswitching dynamics of a hostile society nor do they have to participate in a Muslim-majority community or society where *hijab* is obligatory and where authorities do not acknowledge one’s personal *ijtihad* (interpretation of the law) as valid.

The critical response to World Hijab Day by Muslims and others to solidarity events represent a cross-section of public intellectuals who, through various overlapping critiques, made strange bedfellows. Robert Spencer of the anti-Islam website “JihadWatch,” found his complaints about wearing *hijab* outside of the sphere of conservative Muslim-majority societies in sync with those of Muslim activists like Asra Nomani and Dilshad Ali. Spencer wrote, “Who is standing in solidarity with them (women in Muslim-majority countries where *hijab* is mandatory)? Those who taunt or brutalize *hijab*-wearing women are louts and creeps, and should be prosecuted if they commit any acts of violence. At the same time, the women who don’t wear *hijab* in Muslim countries are far more likely to be victims of violence than *hijabis* in the West. Who speaks for them?”³⁰⁹ Nomani is also critic of *hijab* and often aligns herself against progressive Muslims who wear *hijab* or more strictly adhere to the faith-based/cultural accoutrements of practicing Islam. She is the founder of the “Muslim Women’s Freedom Tour,”

³⁰⁷ Ms. Muslamic, “Hijab Tourism Redux: World Hijab Day Edition,” *Ms. Muslamic Blog*, February 1, 2014, msmuslamic.wordpress.com/2014/02/01/hijab-tourism-redux-world-hijab-day-edition/#more-101. Accessed December 30, 2019.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Robert Spencer, “World Hijab Day encourages non-Muslims to don hijabs in solidarity with Muslims, ignores victims of forced veiling,” *Jihad Watch*, December 29, 2018, <http://www.jihadwatch.org/2018/12/world-hijab-day-encourages-non-muslims-to-don-hijabs-in-solidarity-with-muslims-ignores-victims-of-forced-veiling> Accessed December 30, 2019.

the earliest attempt at not only integrating mosques but more importantly desegregating them along gender lines. Her book, *Standing Alone in Mecca* (2005), is one of the more well-known and provocative memoirs to come from the American Muslim community.³¹⁰ Nomani pleads with her readers to, “Please do this instead: Do not wear a headscarf in ‘solidarity’ with the ideology that most silences us, equating our bodies with ‘honor.’ Stand with us instead with moral courage against the ideology of Islamism that demands we cover our hair.”³¹¹ Finally, Ali argues, “they are not exploring Islam, but rather the ideology of political Islam as practiced by the mullahs, or clerics, of Iran and Saudi Arabia, the Taliban in Afghanistan, and the Islamic State.”³¹² Nomani and Ali cite the interpretation of Islamist thought (like that of the *Salafi*) that segregates the sexes, enforces *purdah*, and uses violence as a means to an end. Islamism does not require violence; it is simply a means of governance fully situated within Islamic precepts and rejects secular rule.³¹³

For critics like Nomani and Ali, World Hijab Day is above all an exercise in privilege. Placing such emphasis on *hijab* oversimplifies the variety of ways in which veiling can be used as a tool to limit women’s agency and to obscure the multiple reasons why women may or may not wear *hijab*. Hosting a day where women are allowed to wear *hijab*, to put it on and then to take it off, with no obligation to or acknowledgment of faith or government mandate is

³¹⁰ Asra Nomani, *Standing Alone in Mecca: An American Woman’s Struggle for the Soul of Islam* (New York: HarperOne, 2006).

³¹¹ Asra Nomani and Hala Arafa, “As Muslim women, we actually ask you not to wear the hijab in the name of interfaith solidarity,” *The Washington Post*, December 21, 2015, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/12/21/as-muslim-women-we-actually-ask-you-not-to-wear-the-hijab-in-the-name-of-interfaith-solidarity/>. Accessed December 30, 2019. Nomani is a long-time critic of *hijab* and often aligns herself against “progressive” Muslims who wear *hijab* or more strictly adhere to the faith-based/cultural accoutrements of practicing Islam. She is the founder of the “Muslim Women’s Freedom Tour,” the earliest attempt at not only integrating mosques but more importantly desegregating them along gender lines. Her book, *Standing Alone in Mecca*, is one of the more well-known and provocative memoirs to come from the American Muslim community.

³¹² Dilshad Ali, “Please Do (If You Want) Wear the Headscarf in the Name of Interfaith Solidarity,” *Patheos*, December 21, 2015, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/muslimahnextdoor/2015/12/please-do-if-you-want-wear-the-headscarf-in-the-name-of-interfaith-solidarity/> Accessed February 2, 2020.

³¹³ Nomani and Arafa, “As Muslim women, we ask that you do not wear the hijab.”

problematic and represents a privileged positioning. Temporarily wearing *hijab* diminishes the religious obligation to wear *hijab* that many Muslim women acknowledge and encompasses a deeply held set of beliefs central to women's identity in Islam.³¹⁴ The privilege of removing the *hijab* to return to life in a secular society with expansive agency for women erases entire communities of Muslim women where removing *hijab* or flexibility in how *hijab* is interpreted is impossible, due to enforced modesty through family, community, and government.

The well-intentioned, but shallow efforts of mostly Western and non-Muslim feminists to express solidarity through appropriating *hijab* is problematic, yet it continues to be an annual tradition, one very visible in the aftermath of the 2016 U.S. Presidential elections there a now iconic image of a Muslim woman draped in an American flag *hijab* was part of a triptych of images representing American women, pluralism, and protest against the incoming Trump administration. The overarching critique is fair, arguing that, “the headscarf means different things to different women, and those nuances are not always captured in a day-long experiment,” but in defense of Khan's vision, it was never meant to be an all-encompassing experience of Muslim identity but a form of *dawah*, learning, and strengthening bonds between women and their communities.³¹⁵ Unfortunately, the event evokes more privilege than *dawah* because at the

³¹⁴ “ReOrienting the Veil,” Center for European Studies, University of North Carolina, <https://veil.unc.edu/religions/islam/quran/>. Accessed September 29, 2020. The Qur'an enjoins *modesty* rather than offering a specific prescription for women's dress. The *surah* (verse) most often quoted as a rationale/justification/inspiration for veiling is Surah 24: 30-31: “[Prophet], tell believing men to lower their glances and guard their private parts: that is purer for them. God is well aware of everything they do. And tell believing women that they should lower their glances, guard their private parts, and **not display their charms beyond what [it is acceptable] to reveal**; they should **let their headscarves fall to cover their necklines and not reveal their charms** except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their womenfolk, their slaves, such men as attend them who have no sexual desire, or children who are not yet aware of women's nakedness; they should not stamp their feet so as to **draw attention to any hidden charms**. Believers, all of you, turn to God so that you may prosper.” [emphasis mine]

³¹⁵ Ibid.,

conclusion of the event, white, non-Muslim women are able to return to their insular, privileged worlds and do not have to consider the implications of wearing *hijab* in society.

An additional event, which is important to briefly recognize, and which was unfortunately subsumed by the more general events surround *hijab*, was “Global Pink Hijab Day,” founded in 2004 by high school student Hend El-Buri in Columbia, Missouri. The intention of the event was twofold: to increase awareness about Islam and to promote Breast Cancer awareness among Muslim communities, where the subject can be taboo.³¹⁶ The event garnered international attention and appeal including a partnership with the Susan G. Komen Foundation and the Canadian Islamic Congress.³¹⁷ In October 2007, U.S. First Lady Laura Bush attended an event in Riyadh to support the de-stigmatizing of breast cancer among women in the Arab world and the Muslim-majority Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.³¹⁸ Unfortunately, the annual event never gained the same cohesion or traction that World Hijab Day enjoys, but various iterations of the event take place globally each year. As of 2017, in the United States, the event was organized and hosted by Muslim Southern Bell Charities.³¹⁹ As of 2020, the event still

³¹⁶ Anne Stein, “Faith-Based Messaging Leads to More Mammograms for Muslim Women.” *University of Chicago Medicine*, May 29, 2018, <http://www.uchicagomedicine.org/forefront/cancer-articles/faith-based-messaging-leads-to-more-mammograms-for-muslim-women>. Accessed February 2, 2020. The University of Chicago launched a faith-based initiative in 2018 for Muslim women at mosques in the Chicago area: “Religiously tailored messages were used to motivate behavior change and address the religious concerns women had about mammography. For example, the barrier belief “breast cancer screening is not important because God will decide who will get cancer” was addressed by discussing the idea that “although God controls disease and illness, it is my religious responsibility to take care of my body and get cancer screening.”

³¹⁷ Katie Lewis, “Hijabs go pink for breast cancer.” *The Toronto Star*, October 15, 2017.

www.thestar.com/news/2007/10/15/hijabs_go_pink_for_breast_cancer.html. Accessed November 10, 2019.

³¹⁸ Donna Abu-Nasr, “Laura Bus helps Arab women battle Breast Cancer stigma.” *Houston Chronicle*. October 28, 2007, www.chron.com/news/nation-world/article/Laura-Bush-helps-Arab-women-battle-breast-cancer-1794737.php. Accessed November 10, 2019. First Lady Laura Bush returned to the region in 2009 to continue her breast cancer advocacy work and support in the Gulf States. The former first lady’s support of breast cancer initiatives represent a shift from her work to enable her husband’s administration to go to war with Afghanistan, through her advocacy and support for Afghan women living under the Taliban. A great deal of cynicism could be applied to an analysis of her work in the Gulf States with women and breast cancer, but her advocacy is not heavily covered outside of Texas, so it remains somewhat discreet.

³¹⁹ Muslim Southern Belle Charities, Inc. *Facebook Page*, www.facebook.com/Muslim-Southern-Belle-Charities-Incorporated-1964946513532401/. Accessed November 10, 2019.

continues but as standalone events without a cohesive central organization like World Hijab Day to manage and organize the event globally.



PINK HIJAB DAY

Fig. 18. The logo for “Global Pink Hijab Day,” founded in 2007.³²⁰

Like World Hijab Day’s logo, the logo for Pink Hijab Day is meant to be non-threatening and to appeal to both Muslim women and non-Muslim women. The smiley face at the center of the pink ribbon doubling as *hijab* is to allow Muslim women to join the tribes of Breast Cancer “warriors” and “fighters.”³²¹ The imperfect, slightly goofy, slightly infantilized smile of the pink washed *hijab* is non-threatening, needing the support of other women, other warriors, because her community does not have the same robust support mechanisms, lack of strong cultural taboos, or commercialism, that the secular world around her has in abundance. If Pink Hijab Day were to adopt the same aggressive language as the wider Breast Cancer Awareness movement like “fighter” and “warrior,” they would not receive the same attention because these words are already part of the Islamophobic narrative and the belief that Islam and Muslims are inherently

³²⁰ “Pink Hijab Day Logo,” *Pink Hijab Day*, <http://www.pinkhijabday.org/>. Accessed February 2, 2020.

³²¹ Samantha King, *Pink Ribbons, Inc.: Breast Cancer and the Politics of Philanthropy* (St. Paul: University of Minnesota Press, 2006). King coined the term, “Pink-washing” to describe the manufacturing of everything in “pink” during October for Breast Cancer Awareness. Beyond the standard pink ribbon appropriated by the Estee Lauder Company, the most mundane items are “pink-washed” and sold with the promise that consumers would be supporting breast cancer research through the purchase of the item.

violent. This language is no longer accessible, so they must default to modest, infantilized, and unthreatening images to garner attention and support. The public face of any initiative supporting Muslim women has to be nonthreatening.

Hijab in the Age of Trump: Women, Protest, and Piety

In the Trump presidency, World *Hijab* Day took on a new significance. Just days after taking office, on February 1, 2017, U.S. President Donald Trump signed Executive Order 13769, colloquially known as the “Muslim Ban,” because of its inclusion of mostly Muslim-majority countries.³²² The bill was a predictable culmination of Americans’ fears reaching their fevered pitch over the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and the influence of its vast network of allies globally. It was also yet another installment of the Republican Party’s long-term Middle East strategy dating back to the First Gulf War in 1990. The Boston Marathon Bombing in April 2013; the massacre at the Bataclan nightclub in Paris in November 2015; the murders of 14 people in San Bernardino in December 2015; and the murders of 14 the Pulse Nightclub shooting in June 2016 all brought to public attention violence driven by Muslims after a decade of relative calm and security outside of the theatres of conflict in Afghanistan and Iraq. The increase in domestic terror attacks helped to steer the 2016 U.S. Presidential Elections and the introduction of the “Muslim Ban.” In at least one incident, the San Bernardino shooting, a woman served as an accomplice and co-conspirator, complicating Americans’ perceptions of Muslim women as passive and repressed. That association as well made them easy targets for anti-Muslim abuse and Islamophobia. Muslim women in turn experienced widespread frustration. As Laila Alawa, a

³²² Subha Varadarajan, “Understanding the Muslim Ban and How We’ll Keep Fighting It,” *National Immigration Law Center*, June 2019, <http://www.nilc.org/issues/immigration-enforcement/understanding-muslim-ban-one-year-after-ruling/>. Accessed December 30, 2019.

millennial Muslim woman and entrepreneur who grew-up in the post-9/11 world contended like other American Muslim women, she was tired of apologizing: “I don’t believe in apologizing [for] or condemning the actions of people who are, frankly, pieces of shit who happen to call themselves Muslim. I think that coming out and publishing an apology recognizes that we’re not a part of the American diaspora and instead tells America that we’re still not part of it (America).”³²³ For Alawa and others, the question then became: how would Muslim women and their allies navigate hate of the Trump Era?

Between January 21-February 1, 2017, American women made public protests to express their anger at Donald Trump’s election and his campaign promises to limit Muslim migration and also mitigate social and economic advances for women. Both the Women’s March, on January 21, 2017 in cities around the United States and Europe, and World *Hijab* Day on February 1, 2017, with particular significance for Muslims in New York City, where the event was combined with an anti-Trump rally. At the helm of this event were three women, one of them was Linda Sarsour, an American-Palestinian-Muslim from Brooklyn, New York. Sarsour is an experienced activist in social justice issues, Arab-American and Muslim advocacy, and a leader within the American Muslim community.³²⁴ She spoke to the gathered crowd on the Mall at the 2017 Women’s March: “Many of our communities – including my community, the

³²³ Emma Green, “The Objectification of Muslims in America,” *The Atlantic*, November 22, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/11/paris-attacks-muslims-america-trump/417069/> Accessed December 30, 2019. Interview with activist Laila Alawa and the Muslim Millennial attempt to reconfigure the narrative of Muslims in America post-Paris massacre. Alawa is the co-founder of a project for young Muslims and people of colour called, “Coming of Faith.” The blog (and the project) was active until September 2019, covering a number of projects and issues from fatphobia to feminist support of psychics.

³²⁴ Women’s March: Board Member Linda Sarsour Biography: <https://womensmarch.com/national-team/linda-sarsour>. Accessed February 2, 2020. Sarsour was removed from the Women’s March Board following accusations of antisemitism and support for Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam. Sarsour has always been widely critical of Israel, but her association with Farrakhan and the apparent support for the NOI via the Women’s March ended her relationship with the organization. This, compounded with condemnation regarding a Tweet about the way white women voted in the 2016 Presidential Elections led to a new board being instated in September 2019.

Muslim community – has been suffering in silence for the past 15 years under the Bush administration and under the Obama administration. The very things that you are outraged by during this election season – the Muslim registry program, the banning of the Muslims, the dehumanization of the community that I come from – that has been our reality for the past 15 years.”³²⁵ Her message was powerful and spoke to the election of Trump in 2016 as the culmination of American anxieties about Islam and Muslims.³²⁶

Sarsour’s presence in the leadership of the Women’s March was just one part of the higher profile Muslim women assumed at the event. In the weeks leading up to the event, promotion of the Women’s March was heavily supported and marketed by artists and designers, including Shepard Fairey, the creator of the now famous “HOPE” portrait of Barack Obama for his 2008 Presidential Campaign.³²⁷ Collaborating with Amplifier’s “We the People are Greater than Fear” campaign, Fairey created a triptych of portraits of women who represented a multicultural, multiethnic, and complex portrait of contemporary America. One of the portraits

³²⁵ Linda Sarsour, “Speech at the Women’s March on Washington, January 17, 2017, <https://awpc.cattcenter.iastate.edu/2018/09/27/speech-at-the-womens-march-on-washington-jan-21-2017/>. Accessed January 12, 2020.

³²⁶ Sarsour is alluding to a few high-profile incidents around the Muslim community, two of which were in New York City. The first incident involved American Muslim activist Debbie Almontaser’s founding of the Khalil Gibran School, a public school in Brooklyn centered around Arabic language and culture. Almontaser was photographed wearing a t-shirt that said, “Intifada NYC,” sold by a community group that trained women in life skills. Almontaser was photographed wearing the t-shirt and conservative activists were able to use the implications of the word “intifada” to push the argument that the Arabic school would be a school for encouraging Islamist and anti-American propaganda, as well as stirring more Muslim-driven violence in New York City. (Andrea Elliott, “Critics Cost Muslim Educator her Dream School,” *The New York Times*, April 28, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/28/nyregion/28school.html>. Accessed September 27, 2020.) The second was Park51 (formerly Cordoba House), colloquially known as the “Ground Zero Mosque” because of its location two blocks from the site of Ground Zero. The project was announced in 2011. There was widespread opposition to the project led by Muslim leader and interfaith advocate, Daisy Khan. The original plan was for a 15-story building which included a mosque, Islamic school, and interfaith center. As of 2020, no progress was being made on the original plan for the site. (Ronda Kaysen, “Condo Tower to Rise Where Muslim Community Center Was Proposed,” *The New York Times*, May 12, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/12/realestate/muslim-museum-world-trade-center.html>. Accessed September 27, 2020).

³²⁷ Christina Cauterucci, “A Q-and-A with Muslim Woman Whose Face Has Become a Symbol of Trump Resistance,” *Slate*, February 25, 2017, <http://www.slate.com/human-interest/2017/01/a-q-and-a-with-the-muslim-woman-whose-face-has-become-a-symbol-of-trump-resistance.html>. Accessed February 2, 2020.

was of a Muslim woman wearing an American flag *hijab*.³²⁸ As part of Amplifier’s strategy that tied in grassroots foundations, the images were made available for download from their website and also through Kickstarter, as a fundraising effort.³²⁹ The image was also disseminated through newspapers so that protesters would have immediate access to poster-sized images before the event.



Fig. 19. The image produced by Shepard Fairey for the Women’s March on Washington.

³²⁸ Shepard Fairey, “We the People are Greater Than Fear,” *Amplifier*, January 2017, <http://www.amplifier.org/campaigns/we-the-people/>. Accessed December 30, 2019.

³²⁹ “We the People: public art for the inauguration and beyond.” *Amplifier; Kickstarter*. Dec. 2016. www.kickstarter.com/projects/amplifierfoundation/we-the-people-public-art-for-the-inauguration-and



Fig. 20. Women attend the Women’s March on Washington on January 20, 2016 carrying the image of the Muslim woman produced by Shepherd Fairey on-behalf of Amplifier. The women are carrying the images as printed in newspapers for the event.³³⁰

Hundreds of women carried homemade signs and adapted the image of the “American *Hijabi*” artfully portrayed and echoing in style and substance the previous administration, a fact that no doubt enhanced the images gain popularity and traction with protestors. The image is unintentionally ironic; organizer Linda Sarsour reminded the crowds that the Obama administration had betrayed American Muslims through an ongoing war with Afghanistan, Iraq, and support for Saudi intervention in Yemen, and yet Fairey’s image is one of the most memorable and prolific artifacts from that day.

The image that Fairey used for his design originated in a photograph of Munira Ahmed, a 32-year-old freelance writer who does not actually wear *hijab*. The photo of Ahmed is titled, “I am America,” and was taken by Ridwan Adhami in 2007, nearly a decade before it became iconic, for the now out-of-print Muslim lifestyle magazine *Illume*.³³¹ The image was staged to

³³⁰ Image is a screenshot taken from the campaign homepage for “We the People.” Amplifier.org. <https://amplifier.org/campaigns/we-the-people/>. Accessed January 17, 2020.

³³¹ Cauterucci, “Symbol of Trump Resistance.”

commemorate the anniversary of September 11th.³³² Adhami said of the photograph, “I wanted to make a power statement. I wanted to create something that we as a community could be proud of. I wasn’t apologizing for anything, I wasn’t asking to be accepted, I was merely stating that I too was an American. Wholly and completely and nothing anybody would say could take that away.”³³³ However, it was not the male Adhami who was the recipient of much of the criticism about the image, but his subject Ahmed, who responded to her critics after the image gained notoriety through Fairey’s reinterpretation. Ahmed wrote, “The *hijab* is not a prop or a costume to me, just like the traditional *sari* and *shalwar kameez* sets that I wear to Bengali functions...(they are) a big part of me and my cultural identity, even though I don’t wear them daily. All that to say, I know in my heart I’m just as unapologetically Muslim as anyone else; vices and all.”³³⁴ She rejected the claims of critics that Muslim women who oppose the image “worry that this is a project designed for the *white gaze*. Some people have said the poster somehow promotes the idea that Muslims need to succumb to bigots to prove they are American.”³³⁵ In an interview with *The Guardian* UK, she related her encounter with a US Congresswoman who recognized her from Fairey’s image and “one group of girls asked me when I stopped covering, and I told them I never did.”³³⁶ Ahmed has always been transparent

³³² A Google search for “American Flag Hijab” garners 3.2 million hits and countless images of women donning American flag *hijabs* even before the now famous image of Munira Ahmed on Fairey’s poster for Amplifier. There are an additional 132 images available on stock photo site Alamy for use by periodicals as of September 2020.

³³³ Nadja Sayej, “Muslim Women Respond to Shepard Fairey’s American Flag Hijab Poster,” *ArtSlant*, February 2, 2017, <http://www.artslant.com/ew/articles/show/47290-muslim-women-respond-to-shepard-faireys-american-flag-hijab-poster>. Accessed January 10, 2020.

³³⁴ Munira Ahmed. “The Face of the Movement Addresses Her Critiques on Her Famous Photo.” *The Islamic Monthly*, April 7, 2017, <http://www.theislamicmonthly.com/face-of-movement-addresses-critiques/>. Accessed January 10, 2020.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*,

³³⁶ Edward Helmore, “Munira Ahmed: the woman who became the face of Trump resistance,” *The Guardian*, 23 Jan. 2017, www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jan/23/womens-march-poster-munira-ahmed-shepard-fairey-interview. Accessed January 10, 2020. It should be noted that much was *made* of Munira Ahmed’s face amongst the triptych of images created by Fairey for Amplifier and public distribution. Her face was overwhelmingly the most popular, likely because of the pervasive Islamophobia that dogged the 2016 US Presidential Election. In addition, for the sake of argument, the popularity of the image likely also plays into the desire, to borrow from Spivak, to save brown

about the fact that she has never worn *hijab*, but her posing in *hijab*, an American flag *hijab* no less, adds yet another layer to how problematic the image is in the context of widely consumable political activism and anti-Trump resistance. She was cast as an iconic image of Islam, feminism, piety, and patriotism, four loaded words and concepts in post-9/11 America and concurrent with the election of an administration whose slogan was simply, “Make America Great Again.”³³⁷

Adhami’s image is not the original iteration of a Muslim woman wearing the American flag as a *hijab*. Boushra Almutawakel, a Yemeni artist, was the first to capture the image of a woman wearing the American flag as *hijab* in a photographic series in 2001.³³⁸ According to Almutawakel, she took the photograph immediately following 9/11. In a 2017 interview, when asked which portrait of her *Hijab Series* is her favorite, she answered: “Woman with U.S. flag. I did it right after September 11, and unfortunately or fortunately, it’s still very relevant.”³³⁹ Almutawakel’s commentary on veiling in Western countries was also captured in photographs of a woman wearing the French flag as *hijab* and another wearing the German flag as a *hijab*.³⁴⁰ Credit for this original image was never publicly given to Almutawakel and Adhami’s interpretation of the same subject is now the iconic image. In 2018, an exhibition at the DeYoung Museum showcasing the diversity of Muslim fashion opened in San Francisco with both Almutawakel and Fairey’s work exhibited, but without an acknowledgement of the origins

women from brown *and* white men. There can be no greater symbol of gendered global oppression than that of a veiled Muslim woman. The other images featuring a Latina and African-American woman lack the same cultural cache (despite the latter’s dreadlocks). White women are likely to be more comfortable carrying the banner of someone who looks like them and who they cannot say they have actively oppressed or undermined, especially true in light of the fact that the majority of white women voted for Trump in 2016.

³³⁷ Karen Tumulty, “How Donald Trump Came Up with ‘Make America Great Again,’” *The Washington Post*, January 18, 2017, http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/how-donald-trump-came-up-with-make-america-great-again/2017/01/17/fb6acf5e-dbf7-11e6-ad42-f3375f271c9c_story.html. Accessed November 10, 2019.

³³⁸ Emily Haight, “She Who Tells a Story: Boushra Almutawakel,” *National Museum of Women in the Arts*, April 19, 2016, <https://nmwa.org/blog/she-who-tells-a-story-boushra-almutawakel/>. Accessed September 27, 2020.

³³⁹ Rayna Sims, “Islamic Dress Debate Provides Fodder for Artists,” *Global Journalist*, September 28, 2017, <https://globaljournalist.org/2017/09/islamic-dress-debate-provides-fodder-for-artists/>. Accessed September 27, 2020.

³⁴⁰ Yazeed Kamaldien, “Discovering fashion and identity in Yemen,” *Yemen Times*, December 16, 2010. <https://tabsir.net/?p=1322>. Accessed September 27, 2020.

or inspiration for Fairey's interpretation of Almutawakel's art.³⁴¹ Almutawakel's art was plagiarized by not one, but two male American artists and made into a centerpiece of the Women's March in 2017.



Fig. 21. From left to right: Boushra Almutawakel's portrait of a woman wearing an American flag as *hijab* (2001); Ridwan Adhami's portrait of Munira Ahmed (2007); and Sheard Fairey's interpretation of Adhami's portrait created for the first Women's March (2017).

Resistance to the image came from both *hijabi* and non-*hijabi* Muslim women themselves, both *hijabi* and non-*hijabi*. For those living in the Muslim diaspora, coming-of-age in a post-9/11 world and in the wake of the Arab Spring and the rise of the Islamic State (IS/ISIS), all in the aftermath of upending American cultural and military incursions into Muslim states, the image proved problematic at best. Finally, criticism from Muslims focused on the fact that the artist was a white man reinterpreting an image of a Muslim woman for a national protest that was overwhelmingly attended by white, non-Muslim women.³⁴² The image itself was an embodiment of the imperial gaze, a case yet again another non-Muslim, white, male man

³⁴¹ Gabriella Angeleti, "San Francisco show celebrates diversity of Muslim fashion," *The Art Newspaper*, September 19, 2018, <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/preview/unveiled-san-francisco-celebrates-diversity-of-muslim-fashion-today>. Accessed September 27, 2020.

³⁴² Nadja Sayej, "Muslim Women Respond to Shepard Fairey's American Flag Hijab Poster," *ArtSlant*, February 2, 2017, <https://www.artslant.com/ew/articles/show/47290-muslim-women-respond-to-shepard-faireys-american-flag-hijab-poster>. Accessed February 2, 2020.

controlling how Muslim women present themselves to Americans and globally. On this subject, Muslim-American-Iranian blogger Hoda Katebi wrote,

It was created by a white man, Shepard Fairey, artist and founder of the clothing brand OBEY, created this image from a photograph taken by Muslim-American photographer Ridwan Adhami. Were we unable to uplift the work of Muslim women instead? Are our images only able to be consumed when they are white-washed and sanitized?...Know that the hijab—for me at least—represents a rejection of materialism, of capitalism, of euro-centric beauty standards (among other significance) and draping an American flag over it erases almost everything the hijab means to me...Know that Muslims are tired of having to ‘prove’ they are American, but also, know that one does not need to be American to deserve respect, humanity, dignity, equality, rights and freedom from hate and bigotry. An over-emphasis on being American as a prerequisite of deserving respect is harmful for immigrants and refugees.”³⁴³

The old idiom, “wrap oneself in the flag,” was played-out literally for a national audience and for an underrepresented religious and cultural group who were the primary victims, domestically and abroad, of violence committed under the guise of patriotism. The *hijab* in this context was co-opted once-again into a distinctly American vision of Islam, aggressively used in a shallow narrative of unity, diversity, and, perhaps most dangerous of all, freedom. The tensions that exist between non-Muslim women and Muslim women, white women and non-white women; women in *hijab* and women who do not wear *hijab* are all embodied in this image. It should be noted that much was *made* of Munira Ahmed’s face amongst the triptych of images created by Fairey for Amplifier and public distribution. Her face was overwhelmingly the most popular: exotic, playing into decades of white women being called-upon to intervene on-behalf of Muslim women from the earliest publications by missionaries to Muslim lands (Zwemer,

³⁴³ Hoda Katebi. “Please Keep Your American Flags Off My Hijab.” *JooJoo Azad*, January 23, 2017, <http://www.joojooazad.com/2017/01/keep-your-american-flags-off-my-hijab.html> Accessed December 30, 2019.

1903) to the Feminist Majority's campaign for Afghan women (1995-present).³⁴⁴ For the majority of white women present, it was a comfortable continuation of the narrative of the "oppressed Muslim woman." Such images allowed white women to avoid unpacking the uncomfortable systemic racism experienced by Black and Latinx women, images of whom were also produced by Fairey.³⁴⁵

Interestingly, although Fairey's iconic image is still for sale as a piece of art work in the Women's March storefront, images of Muslim women have not been leveraged for subsequent annual events sponsored by the Women's March organization. The absence of Fairey's image likely resulted not only from its power in the wake of a deeply unsettled electorate and the Muslim ban, but also charges of anti-Semitism brought against the original board members. Sarsour, the only Muslim on the board, stepped down from her position in September 2019 after several months of criticism from affiliated groups and a long piece in *Tablet Magazine*, outlining the disintegration of the leadership. At issue in particular was antagonistic relationship of the board members to Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam.³⁴⁶ Additionally, Vanessa Ruble, an early member of the Women's March leadership charged the "Unity Principles" of the March excluded Jewish women: "We must create a society in which women, in particular women—in particular Black women, Native women, poor women, immigrant women, Muslim women, and queer and trans women—are free and able to care for and nurture their families, however they are formed, in safe and healthy environments free from structural impediments."³⁴⁷ It was not until 2018 that Sarsour, when questioned, responded to criticism of the exclusion of Jewish

³⁴⁴ Ann Russo, "The Feminist Majority's Campaign to Stop Gender Apartheid: The Intersections of Feminism and Imperialism in the United States," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 8, no. 4 (2006): 260.

³⁴⁵ Moira Donegan, "Half of white women continue to vote Republican. What's wrong with them?" *The Guardian*, November 9, 2018, [theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/nov/09/white-women-vote-republican-why](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/nov/09/white-women-vote-republican-why)

³⁴⁶ Leah McSweeney and Jacob Siegel, "Is the Women's March Melting Down?" *Tablet*, December 10, 2018. <https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/276694/is-the-womens-march-melting-down>

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.* <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/23/us/womens-march-anti-semitism.html>

women from the “United Principles,” saying: “It’s not because there was some deliberate omission. The unity principles were written as a visceral response to the groups that were directly targeted by Trump during his campaign. ... They were really written for the people who during campaign seemed to be the first on the list for this Administration. There was no deliberate omission of our Jewish sisters. In fact, you know, one of the groups that is one of the most directly impacted since in America are Sikh Americans, those are people who wear turbans and unfortunately, they are the largest group that are impacted by violent Islamophobic attacks. Even though they’re not Muslim, people think they’re Muslim.”³⁴⁸ Sarsour deflected criticism of the board’s composition, but the leadership of the Women’s March was eventually replaced in September 2019 and now included two Muslim women and a Jewish woman in attempt to more fully represent the challenges of women nationally and of faith.³⁴⁹

Amidst the ongoing discussions and unpacking of *hijab* online by liberal-leaning Muslim women activists, conservative outlets also drew attention to Fairey’s image. Surprisingly, what *could have* and perhaps *should have* been the most inflammatory and press-worthy lampooning of the image was on the cover of the June 2017 issue of *Hustler*. The “Anniversary Edition” of the magazine features a woman wearing an American flag *hijab* with the veil pulled far enough up around her features to be more of a *niqab* than *hijab*, but the point remains the same. The magazine’s editor and Trump supporter, Larry Flynt, was determined to see how far the new rules of patriotism could be extended six months into the new administration.³⁵⁰ Perhaps unsurprisingly, the cover did not generate the same kind of outrage, interest, or analysis as

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ *The Women’s March*, The Women’s March, <https://womensmarch.com/>. Accessed December 30, 2019.

³⁵⁰ Gillian Fuller, “Hustler Magazine’s New Cover Features a Topless Woman Wearing an American Flag Hijab,” *Allure*, June 2, 2017, www.allure.com/story/hustler-hijab-cover. Accessed December 30, 2019.

Fairey's image. *Hustler* belongs to a niche market of mostly men and no one was holding the cover aloft on the Washington Mall.

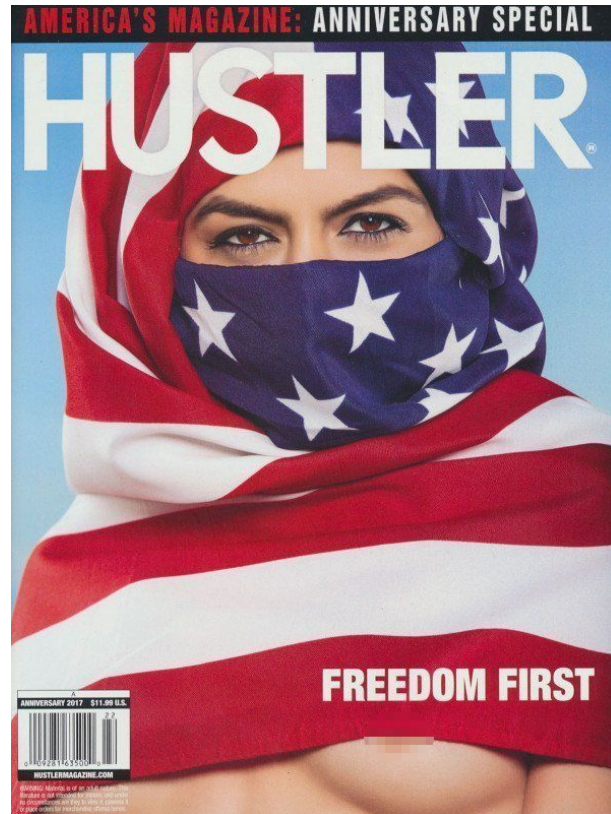


Fig.22. Cover of *Hustler* magazine, published June 2017.³⁵¹

The cover did receive some press from Yahoo! Style whose headline drew attention exclusively to the fact that the model is showing “underboob” while then briefly examining the viral (and sometimes violent) images created in the first quarter of the Trump presidency.³⁵² The piece concluded with the shallow and well-trod observation, “Though the image of the American flag-as-hijab appears on a porn mag cover, don’t discount the platform. Much of sex is politics, after

³⁵¹ *Hustler* Magazine, June 2017.

³⁵² Alexandra Mondalek, “Model Wearing American Flag as Hijab on Magazine Cover Shows Underboob,” *Yahoo! Lifestyle*, June 1, 2017, <https://www.yahoo.com/lifestyle/model-wearing-american-flag-hijab-magazine-cover-shows-underboob-162900883.html> Accessed September 30, 2019.

all. Or maybe it's the other way around."³⁵³ Or, in the case of Muslim women living under the gaze of the American press, it is a conflation of both sex and politics.

2.6 “Generation M” and the “Hijabae’s” Marketing to Millennial Muslim Women

A 2018 study of the Millennial Muslim market entitled, “Unapologetically Muslim,” conducted by strategist and writer, Nayantara Dutta, examines all of the characteristics and motivations of a diverse generation.³⁵⁴ Since approximately 2010, members of “Generation M” have leveraged their coming-of-age experiences into a major market segment not just for politics, but for consumer goods. Dutta explains, “This generation is all too familiar with Islamophobia, but this fluency in explaining their identity to skeptics has strengthened their faith and determination to succeed despite boundaries. A lifetime of debating has lent itself to internal questioning which has strengthened their beliefs, helped them know their worth, and made them refuse to accept any less than they deserve. In reaction to the interrogation they have encountered, Muslim millennials don’t hesitate to challenge brands’ values and motives. The Muslim middle class is aware of their consumer power and wary of brands who exploit, tokenize, or shallowly engage with them for capital gain.”³⁵⁵ Generation M is conceptualizing and creating a global brand for the entirety of the *umma* and one that will have longevity as debates about citizenship and what it means to be Muslim, especially a Muslim woman in the West, continue.

The term, “pious fashion,” was coined by Elizabeth Bucar in her work, *Pious Fashion: How Muslim Women Dress*, a work that contributes to the ongoing political, social, and cultural

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Nayantara Dutta, “Unapologetically Muslim,” Report, March 2018.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 4.

discussions of the *meanings* of Muslim women, particularly the various “dress codes” sanctioned by religion, state, culture, and community. Bucar defines “pious fashion,” as “not entirely empowering for Muslim women since it relies on traditional gender ideologies and structured injustices. However, pious fashion is a form of meaning-making that can succeed as political critique, rework the ethical meanings of clothing, and shift the visual culture of public religion.”³⁵⁶ The fluid meanings of *hijab* are central to women in diverse Muslim communities who negotiate their hybrid identities through citizenship and aesthetics. In the United States, “second generation American women are more focused on reinterpreting the headscarf as a mechanism for negotiating a unique, non-immigrant identity than were their immigrant mothers who primarily saw it through the lens of religious obligation.”³⁵⁷ Magazines and merchandisers alike capitalized on the new market of “Modest Fashion” and signaling the inclusion of Muslim women through their advertising and product development.

Pious fashion existed within American culture prior to the Muslim fashion “boom” of the post-2016 elections, mostly in corners of the internet where “modest” fashion was marketed and sold to conservative Christian communities, evangelicals, and members of the Quiverfull movement, in particular.³⁵⁸ Over the last decade, designers have slowly begun to create Muslim-friendly fashion, mostly catering to clients in oil-rich states like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates. The coming of age of millennials and the rise of influencer culture means that there is both a greater demand for modest fashion and platforms through which major luxury

³⁵⁶ Elizabeth Bucar, *Pious Fashion: How Muslim Women Dress*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017).

³⁵⁷ Ahmed, *Veiled Revolution*, 29.

³⁵⁸ Modest fashion sites abound on the internet. Interestingly, there is overlap in the markets among evangelical, conservative Christian consumers, Orthodox Jewish, and Muslim consumers. The market is multipronged and the models seem to represent these three groups with their styling and presentation. Sites like ModLi are increasingly popular providing access to affordable, modest clothing through the internet. Clothing ranges from the stylish and tailored to the oversized and all-enveloping.

and mall brands can advertise to Muslim consumers.³⁵⁹ It is estimated that by 2021, Muslim consumer spending on fashion alone will reach \$368 billion worldwide.³⁶⁰ In an interview with *Business of Fashion*, Reina Lewis, an expert on the Muslim fashion economy said, “For a long time, Muslims felt disregarded by the fashion industry. That is, until many Muslim designers and fashion bloggers, who love fashion but want to honor their spiritual practices, started to speak up,” says Lewis. “Women, in particular, aren't afraid to express their desire for modesty while recognizing their admiration for beauty.”³⁶¹ As the primary consumers and drivers of modest fashion, “Generation M” is a generation savvy about their visibility and potential for political and social capital.

The challenge for designers and advertisers, however, was reminiscent of the challenge faced by the organizers of World Hijab Day and the Women’s March: how to design and market modest fashion without replicating traditional tropes of Muslim woman as subjugated by male authority or reinforcing the idea that *hijab* is a necessary component of religious practice and belief. As Lewis points out, “brands have to take the time to understand the religion before it can market to its followers.”³⁶² For a world used to the aesthetic of Muslim women being *hijab* and not gradations of modest dress, it is easy to default to simply believing that a reconstituted *hijab* is sufficient or lengthening of sleeves or skirts. Blogger Hoda Katebi of *JooJoo Azad* writes, “We need to make sure that we are not going back to surface-level inclusion. We should stay critical of the capitalization or commodification of a symbol that is very spiritual and intimate

³⁵⁹ Banu Gökariksel and Ellen McLarney, “Muslim Women, Consumer Capitalism, and the Islamic Culture Industry,” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 6, no. 3 (Fall 2010): 4.

³⁶⁰ Nathaniel S. Palmer, “The Muslim Fashion Market is Not a Monolith,” *Business of Fashion*, February 3, 2018, <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/opinion/op-ed-the-muslim-fashion-market-is-not-a-monolith> Accessed December 30, 2019.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² Ibid.

and has a lot of personal significance for the people who choose to wear it.”³⁶³ The emphasis on *hijab* as an essential component of Muslim fashion risks alienating women who dress modestly but do not wear *hijab*.

According to *Wired Magazine*’s “Guide to Influencers”: “True influencerdom presupposes a particular type of relationship between content creator and viewer, at scale, one that hinges on the willingness of the viewer to be influenced. Users consider influencers more akin to a close friend than an advertiser or paid endorser, as the stream of content they produce—and the more casual way in which it is shared with the public—imbues influencers with an air of authenticity that is rarely seen in semicommercial spaces.”³⁶⁴ In 2018, *Harper’s Bazaar* Singapore edition featured twelve Muslim influencers from “Generation M” to feature. The women represented a global cross-section of Muslim women globally, demonstrating that as a consumer force Muslim women have power and, simultaneously, their participation in influencer culture means that they are able to control, at least in part, the narrative around their appearance and position in the greater Muslim majority countries, but also outside of it.³⁶⁵ The rise of Influencer culture has also impacted “Generation M” and their consumption choices with the hashtags *#hijaBAE*, a combination of the words “hijab” and the slang, “bae,” and *#hipsterhijabi* to attract and capture followers interested in both Islamic fashion and looking good. On Instagram, there are 4, 851 posts tagged *#hijbae*, the majority pertaining to modest fashion.³⁶⁶

³⁶³ Dutta, “Unapologetically Muslim,” 29.

³⁶⁴ Paris Martineau, “The WIRED Guide to Influencers,” *Wired*, December 6, 2019, <https://www.wired.com/story/what-is-an-influencer/>. Accessed September 27, 2020.

³⁶⁵ Harper’s Bazaar Staff, “12 Modest Wear Fashion Influencers to Follow on Instagram,” *Harper’s Bazaar* Singapore, June 13, 2018. https://www.harpersbazaar.com.sg/fashion/muslim-modest-wear-influencers-follow-instagram/?slide=0_ Accessed December 30, 2019.

³⁶⁶ Instagram hashtag search, “#hijbae.”

Influencers are an easy source of cost-effective marketing for brands from aspirational brands like Bulgari to more accessible brands like J. Crew and GAP.³⁶⁷

Melanie Elturk, arguably the first of the Muslim influencers established her company HauteHijab 2010 and focused on catering to the American Muslim marketplace. Up to this point, Muslim women filled the gap in the American market by either ordering abroad, sewing their own *hijabs*, or adapting scarves made as accessories. In an interview looking back at the first decade of her company, Elturk says that she was nervous about not only founding her own company but also openly using the terms “Muslim” and “fashion” together.³⁶⁸ After experimenting with a fashion line, she switched exclusively to producing *hijabs* in 2017 when the firm realized that 70% of its revenue came from sales of *hijabs*. Globally Muslim women on average own approximately 100 *hijabs*.³⁶⁹ That number alone is astonishing and disrupts the idea that Muslim women are neither allowed to be fashionable or have similar aesthetic goals as non-Muslim women. The *hijabs* produced by HauteHijab appeared in *Elle* Magazine and at New York Fashion Week, marking their official entry into fashion’s mainstream. By February 2019, HauteHijab had secured \$2.9 million in funding from investors to accelerate growth.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁷ Martineau, “WIRED Guide to Influencers.”

³⁶⁸ Dilshad Ali, “Looking Back with Melanie at Ten Years of Haute Hijab!” *HauteHijab Blog*, December 26, 2019, https://www.hautehijab.com/blogs/hijab-fashion/looking-back-with-melanie-at-ten-years-of-haute-hijab_ Accessed December 30, 2019.

³⁶⁹ Anne Stych, “Fashion company HauteHijab secures \$2.3 million in funding,” *BizWomen*, February 15, 2019, https://www.bizjournals.com/bizwomen/news/latest-news/2019/02/fashion-company-haute-hijab-secures-2-3-million-in.html?page=all_ Accessed November 10, 2019.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

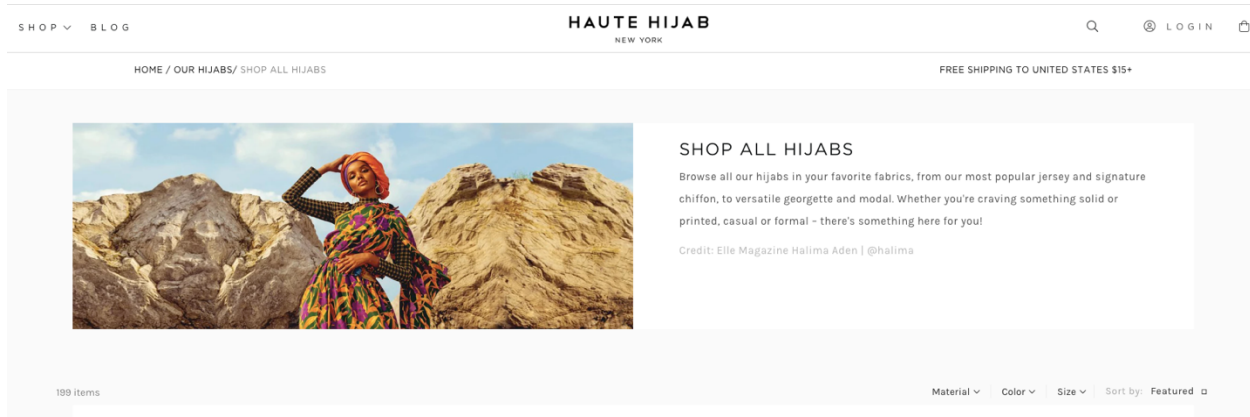


Fig. 23. The HauteHijab shop homepage featuring Muslim supermodel Halima Aden in a *hijab* from HauteHijab, styled by *Elle Magazine*.³⁷¹

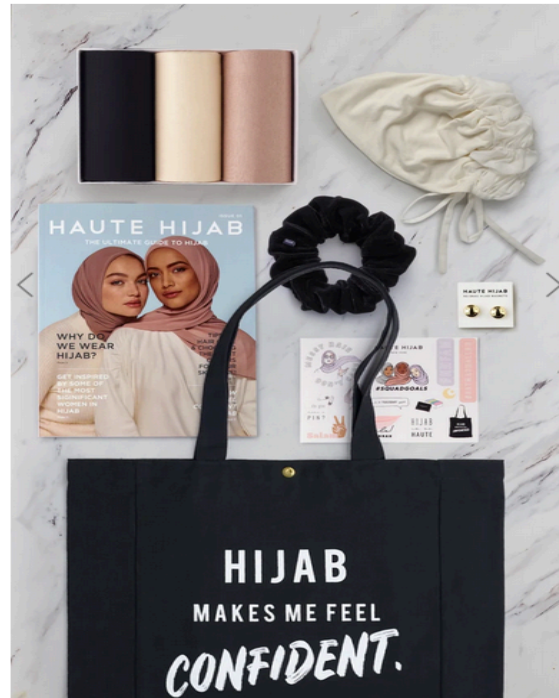
Central to Elturk’s business is also its HauteHijab blog, which is an inspired resource for Muslim women, including those who do not wear *hijab*. The blog addresses topics from styling *hijab*, challenges about Muslim marriage and parenting, and relationships with non-Muslims. This blog is a luxurious space for consumption but also community. For some Muslim women, the blog community is more cognizant of their specific needs and questions that cannot be answered within their non-virtual communities. In this respect, *hijab* is embodied in both the aesthetic and the spiritual and that is, perhaps, what makes HauteHijab a successful, savvy, and rapidly expanding company servicing the Muslim marketplace. Prior to HauteHijab Muslim women’s fashion was limited to scarves procured from traditional retailers or from retailers abroad in Indonesia, Saudia Arabia, and Egypt.³⁷² HauteHijab also represents the American Muslim market with designs and trends that may be distinct from those in Muslim-majority countries.

HauteHijab tapped into Millennial desire to move away from sourcing modest dress from traditional sources of modest clothing abroad, while also retaining an accessible price point of

³⁷¹ HauteHijab.com

³⁷² Imene Ajala, “From Islamic Dress and Islamic Fashion to Cool Islam: An Exploration of Muslim Youth Hybrid Identities in the West,” *The Internaional Journal of Interdisciplinary Cultural Studies* 12, no. 3 (2017): 3.

under \$50.00. Most of the *hijabs* featured on the site are approximately \$20.00. Among the various styles of *hijab* for sale, there is also a “New Hijabi Starter Kit,” to help new wearers of *hijab* in styling and building confidence in their decision to cover.³⁷³



New Hijabi Starter Kit
\$150

Fig. 24. The “New Hijabi Starter Kit” marketed by HauteHijab includes everything that a new *hijabi* would need to begin to wear *hijab*. It also includes a guide written by Elturk with styling tips and encouragement.³⁷⁴

Their latest marketing features a “Fall Edit,” including a feature on “Sweater Weather” and *hijab*. Capitalizing on the recent American consumer interest in all things autumnal and cozy, HauteHijab seamlessly integrates a new staple of American identity with Islamic practice.³⁷⁵

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.



SWEATER WEATHER

There's nothing like that time of year where the air gets crisp, the leaves begin to change and *maghreb* comes a little sooner every day. Let these soft fabrics and fall-ready hues help put you in that cozy state of mind.

Fig. 25. The HauteHijab edit, “Sweater Weather.” The marketing integrates the change of seasons, the recent American consumer interest in all objects related to autumn, and references *maghreb*, the evening prayer at sundown.

By the late 2010s, major brands began to cater to Muslim consumers outside of Muslim-majority countries. In July 2017, mall staple American Eagle, making what could be considered one of the boldest moves in the merging of American and Muslim aesthetics, sold out of its denim *hijab* in just two weeks winning praise from influencers and members of “Generation M.” The introduction of the denim *hijab* was lauded for its inclusivity and also made a quiet statement about the inclusion of Muslims in America during the summer following the “Muslim Ban.”³⁷⁶ The garment does not appear to be a staple of American Eagle’s regular line, but it set a powerful precedent in its inherent “American-ness.” The brand’s first (and only) *hijab* is made of denim, a staple of the American wardrobe and worn in thousands of iterations from jeggings to overalls. There is something inherently *cool*, youthful, and unmistakably mainstream *American* about denim and American Eagle chose to convert it into a *hijab*. Denim is one of the few materials that is a great unifier, worn across cultures and classes, in varying degrees of quality and purpose.³⁷⁷ It is one of the few universally recognized and worn items of clothing. It is also

³⁷⁶ Avery Matera, “American Eagle Debuts Denim Hijabs,” *Teen Vogue*, July 21, 2017, <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/american-eagle-denim-hijabs>. Accessed September 30, 2020.

³⁷⁷ David Little, *Denim: An American Story* (New York: Schiffer Press, 2007); Amy Leverton, *Denim: Street Style, Vintage, Obsession* (London: Rozzoli, 2018); and Jenny Balfour-Paul, *Indigo: Egyptian Mummies to Blue Jeans* (London: The British Museum, 2011).

inherently *American* in its composition. By using denim to create a *hijab*, American Eagle accessed one of the most prolific cultural products of the United States: blue jeans. Denim is worn in some form or fashion by nearly all Americans from jeans to jackets to overalls. The manufacturing of a denim *hijab* by American Eagle expands the denim's American identity to include Muslim women.



Fig. 26. American Eagle's denim *hijab* released to wide-acclaim, selling-out in just under two weeks during July 2017.³⁷⁸

Another powerful precedent was set in December 2017 when Nike introduced the “Nike Pro *Hijab*” to a global market.³⁷⁹ In their press release, Nike describes working with Muslim women athletes, in particular U.S. Olympic Fencer, Ibtihaj Muhammad, who illustrates not only the need in the global market for athletic apparel for Muslim women beyond the “burqini” but also the challenges of wearing *hijab* in a non-Muslim culture and in the microcosm of sports: “When I

³⁷⁸ Matera, “Denim Hijabs.”

³⁷⁹ “The Nike Pro Hijab Goes Global,” *Nike News*, December 1, 2017, <https://news.nike.com/news/nike-pro-hijab>. Accessed November 10, 2019.

was in school, I always had to have a letter from a local imam that said that it was safe for me to wear my religious covering during sport. My coaches had to have that with them at all times."³⁸⁰ Muhammad made Olympic history when she wore her *hijab* in fencing competition in 2016 and set an Olympic-level precedent for wearing *hijab* in competition.³⁸¹ A side effect of Nike's mainstreaming of the *hijab* led to what American toy companies, prior to this point had resisted: making the first *hijab*-wearing doll, in this case a Barbie, honoring Ibtihaj Muhammad. Skeptics claimed that the move was to appeal to millennial parents, but the demand for a mainstream Islamic doll exists.³⁸² Mattel used Muhammad as the vehicle to test the market. Still others argued that its introduction was predictably, and obviously, a way to profit from a heightened interest in diversity and intersectionality rather than corporate interest in inclusivity.³⁸³

³⁸⁰ Ibid.,

³⁸¹ Ibtihaj Muhammad, *Homepage*, <https://www.ibtihajmuhammad.com/>; smaller controversies about wearing hijab in sporting events. Accessed November 10, 2019.

³⁸² Rondi Adamson, "Can Fulla save Muslim girls from Barbie?," *The Christian Science Monitor*, November 25, 2005, <https://www.csmonitor.com/2005/1125/p08s02-coop.html> Accessed March 9, 2021. For more recent coverage of Barbie in the Arab World (including Ibtihaj Muhammad's doll) see: Rawan Radwani and Hala Tashkandi, "Barbie at 60, and how she made her mark on the Arab world," January 5, 2019, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1430566/lifestyle>.

³⁸³ Katherine Zoepf, "This Doll Has an Accessory Barbies Lacks: A Prayer Mat," *The New York Times*, September 22, 2005, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/22/world/this-doll-has-an-accessory-barbie-lacks-a-prayer-mat.html> Accessed November 10, 2019. A previous and popular iteration of a Barbie-like doll for Muslim girls was "Fulla" produced by Syrian toy company NewBoy Design Studio. In 2005, the company introduced an alternative to Barbie in the Middle East and it quickly became the popular replacement for Barbie. Until Fulla's introduction, doll clothes that were suitable for play in conservative Muslim societies had to be made from scratch. Barbie-sized *hijabs* and modest ensembles are available for sale on Etsy to fill the fashion gap. Despite the existence of a Muslim Barbie in the iteration of Ibtihaj Muhammad, there are limitations with her presentation in fencing garb and not street clothes.



Fig. 27. Ibtihaj Muhammad Barbie released in 2018.³⁸⁴

Hijab as Space: The Women’s Mosque of America

The concept of *hijab*, is both an aesthetic and an idea: it functions both as a piece of cloth, a portable curtain behind which women (and men) are protected and boundaries enforced. It can also be iterated as space, such as in the Prophet Muhammad’s time when *hijab* was not only a feminine garment, but also a spatial concept. The first appearance of the *hijab* occurs in Surah 33, Verse 53:

³⁸⁴ Shenila Kholja-Mooji, “Don’t be quick to celebrate the hijab-wearing Barbie,” *Al Jazeera*, November 26, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/dont-quick-celebrate-hijab-wearing-barbie-171126114202958.html> Accessed November 10, 2019.

O ye who believe! Enter not the dwellings of the Prophet for a meal without waiting for the proper time, unless permission be granted you. But if ye are invited, enter, and, when your meal is ended, then disperse. Linger not for conversation. Lo! That would cause annoyance to the Prophet, and he would be shy of (asking) you (to go); but Allah is not shy of the truth. *And when ye ask them (the wives of the Prophet) anything, ask it of them from behind a curtain. That is purer for your hearts and their hearts.* (Emphasis mine.)³⁸⁵

Fatima Mernissi's *The Veil and the Male Elite* expertly unpacks the Quranic interpretation of *hijab* as not being solely a garment, but a means of separating oneself from the outside either for pleasure or company. Mernissi writes, "reducing or assimilating this concept to a scrap of cloth that men have imposed on women to veil them when they go into the street is truly to impoverish this term."³⁸⁶ This spirit of *hijab* as a woman-centric geographical entity informed the establishment of the Women's Mosque of America in Los Angeles in 2015. Although mosques are not new to the American landscape, the concept of an exclusive, strictly gendered place of worship, learning, and gathering for Muslim women was new.

The first U.S. mosques were established at the turn of the 20th century to serve the ethnic Muslim communities in their areas.³⁸⁷ They lacked adequate space for women to worship and build community. The first purpose-built mosque was built in 1921 in Iowa to accommodate mostly men. New immigrant communities relied on existing models they imported from their countries of origin in building their new mosques. Depending on their society of origin, women may not have gone to the mosque at all, centering their religious life at home. While today mosques in the United States function more like synagogues and churches, with family-centric activities and weekend religious schooling, the earliest mosques planted a stake in the American

³⁸⁵ *Qur'an* translation via ReCentering the Veil.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 95.

³⁸⁷ Juliane Hamer, *American Muslim Women, Religious Authority, and Activism*, Austin: University of Austin Press, 2012, 126.

religious landscape.³⁸⁸ Despite the social evolution of the American mosque, there remains a distinct divide between the genders that goes beyond the separation of the sexes during prayer, but into the actual *living* of Islam.

In a study conducted by the Islamic Society of North America in 2014, researchers found that only 14% of mosques do a “great job” of including and welcoming women.³⁸⁹ A statement issued the same year by ISNA and written by women scholars states:

We, the undersigned Muslim scholars, leaders, organizations and concerned Muslims, voice our strong commitment to uphold and realize the Prophetic ideal of masjids being open and inclusive of women. Striving to realize the Prophetic model, we call upon all masjids to ensure that (1) women are welcomed as an integral part of masjids and encouraged to attend, (2) women have a prayer space in the main *musallah* which is behind the lines of men but not behind a full barrier that disconnects women from the main *musalla* and prevents them from seeing the imam; and (3) women actively participate in the decision-making process of the masjid, best realized by having women on the governing bodies of masjids.³⁹⁰

The statement published by the ISNA Taskforce for Women-Friendly Masjids was published a year after the official opening of the Women’s Mosque of America in Los Angeles, reflecting the same commitment to inclusion that underlay the mosque’s first year serving Muslim women. Hind Makki, the founder of Side Entrance, a project to document the disparity in access to worship spaces for women in mosques, told *Al Jazeera*, “They [many women] just had no idea that this was somewhat typical of women’s experiences at a mosque, that you go to a mosque and you don’t see a dome; you don’t see the imam, certainly; you don’t see the architecture. You

³⁸⁸ Ibid., 126.

³⁸⁹ Melissa Block and Audie Cornish, “Muslim women Challenge American Mosques: ‘Now is the Time,’” *NPR*, Interview Transcript, January 15, 2014. <https://www.npr.org/2014/01/15/262408057/muslim-women-challenge-american-mosques-now-is-the-time>. Accessed November 10, 2019.

³⁹⁰ ISNA’s Taskforce for Women-Friendly Masjids, “ISNA Statement on the Inclusion of Women in Masjids.” 4 Sept. 2015 <http://www.isna.net/isna-statement/>. Accessed November 10, 2019.

see a big wall in front of you.”³⁹¹ Describing the climate among many American mosques, Sarah Usmen added, “Mosques in America are generally very Old World. You go there to pray, maybe there’s a lecture about not wearing a headscarf, and that’s the range.”³⁹² Women attended Friday prayers, but found that the mosque leadership, their Imam, was generally inaccessible due to being segregated with men following prayer and so their questions and concerns were indefinitely delayed and sometimes never addressed in an effective, spiritually nourishing manner.³⁹³

The Women’s Mosque of America was founded by M. Hasna Maznavi, a writer, comedian, and a millennial woman whose experience with Islam from childhood on made her interested in reviving women’s role in the *umma*. Drawing upon the existing precedent not only for the transmitting Islamic knowledge through women but also the existence of women-only mosques, the Women’s Mosque of America is the first space in the United States to be dedicated to Islamic scholarly knowledge, community, and inclusivity among the myriad degrees of faith. Maznavi described for *Muslim Girl* how as a child, her dream was to build a mosque. Her adolescent experiences with mosque culture made her acutely aware of gender disparities. She concluded there was something inherently missing from the that women’s experience in the Muslim community, especially inside the mosque. Maznavi’s intention is to revive the legacy of women scholars of Islam and to restore women’s place in the community as transmitters of Islamic knowledge: “I... learned about the vast history of female Muslim religious authorities and scholars. Thousands of them during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH (*peace be*

³⁹¹ Nick Street, “First all-female mosque opens in Los Angeles,” *Al-Jazeera*, February 3, 2015, <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/2/3/first-all-female-mosque-opens-in-los-angeles.html>. Accessed September 17, 2019.

³⁹² *Ibid.*,

³⁹³ Yasmine Hafiz, “Women’s Prayer Spaces Featured in ‘Side Entrance’ Blog: A Call for Improved Conditions in Mosques,” *HuffPost*, July 20, 2013, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/women-prayer-spaces-mosques_n_3624084. Accessed September 17, 2019.

upon Him) and up until a few hundred years after his death were female Muslim scholars, and they were chosen to memorize hadith (sayings of the Prophet) and pass them on. They chose women because the translators wanted as short a train of narrations as possible, and women had a longer life span and sharper memories. They picked them as young girls and had them sit with scholars, at three or four years old, learning and memorizing hadith, and then passing them on until the end of their lives.”³⁹⁴ Maznavi elaborated her vision for a community of women scholars in the FAQ’s section of the Women’s Mosque of America

We are inspired by our legacy of female Muslim scholarship and leadership in the earliest years of Islam, and we hope to work toward sparking a revival in women’s involvement in the Ummah (community) today through our efforts. We firmly believe that a major part of uplifting the Muslim community is to harness the potential of the whole Ummah, including Muslim women, who make up more than half of our community. We believe that The Women’s Mosque of America, which provides a platform for Muslim women to speak and be heard in a religious capacity, will play an important role in strengthening the Ummah by increasing women’s access to Islamic knowledge, encouraging female participation in mosques, and fostering female leaders and scholars for the benefit of the entire Ummah.³⁹⁵

The Women’s Mosque of America maintains an archive and profiles of all the women *khateebahs* (women who give sermons) on its website along with their sermons. This is a major component of the mosque’s mission as women scholars produce and transmit knowledge through the Friday prayers. Maznavi’s dream of a mosque, the Women’s Mosque of America, opened its

³⁹⁴ Salma Elkhaoudi, “Women’s Mosque of America: In the Founder’s Own Words,” 2014, *MuslimGirl*. <http://muslimgirl.com/10157/womens-mosque-america-interview-m-hasna-maznavi/3/>. Accessed September 17, 2019. Traditionally, whenever the Prophet Muhammad is mentioned the acronym PBUH or “Peace be upon Him” is written or uttered, depending on the circumstances, as an acknowledgement of his status.

³⁹⁵ FAQs Women’s Mosque of America, <https://womensmosque.com/faq/> Accessed September 17, 2019.

doors on Friday, January 30th, 2015 in Los Angeles, with its first Friday prayers and *khutbah* (sermon) given by Edina Lekovic.³⁹⁶

The mosque received some pushback from detractors who perceived the mosque to be too radical a step that seemed to circumvent more comfortable reforms, despite it having a precedent in some of the most conservative Muslim-majority societies like Yemen.³⁹⁷ Women's Mosque of America attendee, Ruqayya Khan, said, "There's nothing really radical about having an all-female space where people praying are all women, being led by a woman, and the sermon is given by a woman."³⁹⁸ It is true that there is nothing particularly radical about it historically: the Women's Mosque of America can trace its history to the early community in Mecca and Medina. As far as American flag *hijabs* go, it is perhaps the Women's Mosque of America that is the truest to *hijab* with its sense of knowledge, community, and intersectionality.

Conclusion

Hijab encompasses an infinite number of meanings and actions: cover, modesty, seclusion, activism, space, mosque, knowledge, etc. As a concept, it is extraordinarily complicated as it is deployed in different spaces and times and with laden simultaneously with different meanings depending on what its wearer, merchandiser, or oppressor wants it to convey. In the United States, the *hijab* for millennial women, members of "Generation M" and subsequent Generations Y and Z, is no longer something their immigrant or second generation parents wanted to discard, but something that is inherently powerful for reinterpreting Islam either in aesthetics (such as HauteHijab), politics (World Hijab Day), or space (the Women's

³⁹⁶ Women's Mosque of America. <https://womensmosque.com/videos/> Accessed September 17, 2019.

³⁹⁷ Jacqueline H. Fewkes, *Locating Maldivian Women's Mosques in Global Discourses* (London: Palgrave Books, 2019).

³⁹⁸ Street, "First All-Female Mosque," 2015.

Mosque of America). The newer, rooted generations of U.S. Muslim women are forging identities and continuously contesting and expanding the meaning of *hijab* to extend beyond the Western construct of *hijab* and Muslim womanhood.

“Generation M” is politically savvy and active, but also understands the necessity of integrating *dawah* into their charitable and economic ventures. World Hijab Day, despite being problematic for many Muslim women (“Hijab Tourism”) is a space through which non-Muslim women can, even if superficially, experience the feeling of *hijab*, even if through simple textures and not through the lived-experience. World Hijab Day and its participants do their small, if altruistic, part to normalize *hijab* and as a global phenomenon, it has encouraging prospects in the future as it continues to grow and leverage its influence. For commercial enterprises like HauteHijab and the proliferation of Muslim influencers on Instagram and blogs, there is balance between the commodification of practice and the idea that this is a more “correct” form of dress and alienation of Muslim women who do not observe *hijab*. To their credit, “Generation M” and their corner of the influencer market has balanced this well, acknowledging and emphasizing the diversity and plurality of the *umma*, and in doing so, functions as a unifying force for American Muslims.

In the Trump Era, “Generation M,” its influencers, and its allies, must negotiate how to leverage their social, economic, and political power. At stake is their ability to protect their citizenship and their communities at home and abroad. The leveraging of *hijab* was not a collective decision by American Muslim women for the 2017 Women’s March, although tacitly approved of by the organizers and appropriated by white, non-Muslim women. The fetishized, loaded image of a Muslim woman (who herself does not wear *hijab*) remains a major part of the visual and artistic record of the Women’s March, but the space it occupied has been reclaimed by

new, inclusive, collaborative, and intersectional iterations of women. Muslim women's political power is growing and in the wake of the 2016 elections, they are increasingly bold and public-facing, demonstrated by the 2017 election of Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib to the US House of Representatives. Gratefully, their faces replaced that of the Muslim woman superimposed on an imperial banner.

Finally, the Women's Mosque of America, a space where *hijab* becomes not simply a garment, but a geographical, spiritual, and educational space. The establishment of the Women's Mosque of America is a revolutionary moment for America, not the *umma*, because at its core are women gathering to harness religious knowledge, freedom, and all of the attributes of a utopian America that conservative pundits gleefully expound upon whenever they critique Islam and Muslim-majority societies. The collective intellectual and social power of this mosque, coupled with the national and global reach of a generation of savvy consumers, politicians, activists, and influencers will ensure that *hijab* in the United States is as Islamic as it is American.

CHAPTER III:

SCHEHERAZADE'S CIRCLE OF KNOWLEDGE:

Young Women, ISIS, and the Stories they Tell

*My name is Baghdad / Disfigured princess /
Scheherazade has forgotten me / My tales of a thousand and one nights /
No longer interest anyone / They destroyed everything*
-Tina Arena, "Je m'appelle Bagdad."³⁹⁹

3.1 Introduction

Scheherazade's story is often romanticized by poets, artists, and dancers simply as the story of a beguiling woman whose storytelling wins her the love and trust of her husband, Shahryar. However, Scheherazade's rise from the daughter of the Grand Vizier to the Sultana is rooted in violence. Shahryar's Sultana was executed for adultery and an unknown number of young brides, living only one night as Shahryar's Sultana, met the same fate after their wedding night. Scheherazade volunteers herself as Shahryar's next bride, telling her father, "I am aware of the danger I run, my father, but it does not deter me from my purpose. If I die, my death will be glorious; if I succeed, I shall render my country an important service."⁴⁰⁰ In Scheherazade's words to her father, there are parallels to the words and motivations of the young women who joined the Islamic State: "My death will be glorious" means, "I will die a martyr." The second phrase, "if I succeed, I shall render my country an important service" means that "My *jihad* will enact some revenge on-behalf of the *umma*." The women of the Islamic State are part of this first chapter of the *1001 Nights* because their motivations and actions originated in state-sanctioned violence that directly effected their communities. They are inserting themselves into the narrative in an effort to

³⁹⁹ Tina Arena, "Je m'appelle Bagdad (Clip officiel)," YouTube, November 24, 2009, video, 4:15, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1q4F3g5mC1U>. Accessed April 21, 2021.

⁴⁰⁰ *The Arabian Nights*, trans. Malcolm C. Lyons (New York: Penguin Books, 2010).

mitigate the violence and oppression against Muslims particularly by Western governments. Young women growing-up in the aughts experienced a dramatic rise in hate crimes following September 11th, 2001 and the effects of two conflicts in Muslim-majority countries, Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) launched by the United States and its Western allies.⁴⁰¹ Radicalization through violence abroad in a distant Muslim land is not a new phenomenon: Al-Qaeda and the contemporary *mujahideen* are a direct result of Osama bin Laden's radicalization while fighting the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s.⁴⁰² Al-Qaeda's organizational successors, Al-Qaeda in Iraq and then the Islamic State, also prioritized the security of the *umma* over nationalism.⁴⁰³

In the wake of 9/11 and two ongoing conflicts, Muslim children of Muslim immigrants must navigate multiple communities: (1) their country of residence; (2) their own ethnic enclave or neighborhood; (3) their community of origin abroad (even if they have never visited or been involved in that community); and (4) their place within the global *umma*. They are constantly switching between narratives related to their identities as Muslims from the media, peers, community, and family:

Youth embody and perform the very economic, and we would add cultural, conflicts that constitute global politics. Adolescence is precisely the moment in which international, national, social, and personal 'crises' erupt most publicly and spontaneously, and, unfortunately, they are more often than not misread as simply personal, hormonal, disciplinary or developmental "problems." Growing up in the midst of ... Islamophobia, [Muslim] youth offer us a lens into the developmental challenges that confront teens who live on the intimate fault lines of global conflict; teens who carry international crises in their back-packs.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰¹ Lori Peek, *Behind the Backlash: Muslim Americans After 9/11* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011).

⁴⁰² Lester W. Grau and Michael A. Gress, *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2002). See also: Steve Coll, *The Bin Ladens: An Arabian Family in the American Century* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008).

⁴⁰³ Haroro J. Ingram, Craig Whiteside, and Charlie Winter, *The ISIS Reader: Milestone Texts of the Islamic State Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

⁴⁰⁴ Cynthia White Tindongan, "Negotiating Muslim Youth Identity in a Post-9/11 World," *The High School Journal* 95, no. 1 (Fall 2011), 78.

In most cases, as illustrated in Chapter 2, the “international, national, social, and personal ‘crises’” were channeled into youth activism like World *Hijab* Day, media platforms like *Muslim Girl*, and political protests to translate Muslim stories and identities for a Western audience.⁴⁰⁵ However, some young women (Aqsa Mahmood, Hoda Muthana) whose early concerns centered on the state of the global *umma* (primarily Muslims involved in the civil war in Syria) became enmeshed in a much more complex and dangerous form of activism whose stories prioritized the *umma* over nationalism and security through the manipulation of original Islamic texts that lead them to embrace and endorse violence in the Islamic State.⁴⁰⁶ Their involvement in the Islamic State began with storytelling in a localized context (i.e. Circles of Knowledge) or in digital forms through the internet, in particular Twitter, Tumblr, or message boards. The content of the stories was deeply rooted in early Islamic practice and thought, which enabled them to leave their communities and validated their decisions.⁴⁰⁷

Circles of Knowledge and the Salafi Scheherazade

In discreet spaces in mosques and community centers, a Salafi Scheherazade weaves Quranic exegesis, expectations for dress and conduct, and, in some circles, a violent anti-Western rhetoric which encourages interest in extremist groups like the Islamic State (IS).⁴⁰⁸ A Circle of Knowledge is an informal gathering, segregated by sex, where men and women are taught about Islam in the context of Salafism. A women’s circle might be led by a man, but it is

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., 78.

⁴⁰⁶ Ashley Fantz, “From Scottish teen to ISIS bride and recruiter: the Aqsa Mahmood story,” *CNN*, February 24, 2015, <https://www.cnn.com/2015/02/23/world/scottish-teen-isis-recruiter/index.html>. Accessed April 20, 2021.

⁴⁰⁷ Viktoria Pues, “The Islamic State on Tumblr – Recruiting Western Women,” *International Institute for Counter-Terrorism*, February 2016, <https://www.ict.org.il/UserFiles/ICT-ISIS-on-Social-Media-Pues.pdf>. Accessed April 15, 2021.

⁴⁰⁸ Poppy Begum, “ISIS Women Unveiled,” *Real Stories Documentary*, YouTube, July 14, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZTq-AEB_3RM. Accessed June 15, 2020.

still segregated by a partition. Women are not permitted to lead a men's group.⁴⁰⁹ These gatherings are hosted frequently during the week by self-appointed scholars (Salafi Islam does not require credentials) mosques or other community spaces and they are an intensive learning and indoctrination into Salafism. In the *1001 Nights*, Scheherazade tells her stories in a private space with her husband present, an intimate Circle of Knowledge not explicitly concerning Islam, but broader questions related to life and loss. As Hanan al-Shaykh writes, "her stories at the beginning...are very brutal and dark, but they show us that adultery usually happens for a reason and that jealousy and violence typically bring misery to all concerned. With time, though, they become more about social values, adventures, they were less dark than when she started, and concern higher questions. Who are we human beings? What do we do in life? What is our aim of living? How do we become better citizens? And the answer, so often, comes through telling important stories and listening closely to what others have learned."⁴¹⁰ Scheherazade, like the women and men leading the Circles of Knowledge, converts her husband to a humanist perspective of his world, which includes his wife and kingdom. Scheherazade's storytelling is exhaustive and intensive over 1,001 consecutive nights, but she succeeds in restoring her husband's faith. Her storytelling parallels the content in Circles of Knowledge which range from violence to charity and aspects of human struggle and frailty: "How to Stop Sinning" and "The Believing Women's Reward in Paradise."⁴¹¹ The objective is a correction of belief to enable the believer to live a more faithful life.

⁴⁰⁹ Annabel Inge, *The Making of a Salafi Muslim Woman: Paths to Conversion*, (London: Oxford University Press, 2017), 102.

⁴¹⁰ Hanan al-Shaykh, "The Humanist Message Hidden Amid the Violence of *One Thousand and One Nights*," *The Atlantic*, June 25, 2013. <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/06/the-humanist-message-hidden-amid-the-violence-of-i-one-thousand-and-one-nights-i/277210/> Accessed March 27, 2021.

⁴¹¹ Inge, *The Making of a Salafi Muslim Woman*, 107. Inge shows a flyer for the Brixton Mosque programming including topics related to women, stories of conversion, and practical advice for believers.

There is no single profile of women who joined the Islamic State, their only commonality is that they have real and perceived grievances against their family, community, and/or their country of residence. In her attempt to understand the motives for the young women who join IS, author Azadeh Moaveni writes, “Every national sphere that touched Isis, each distinct society, teemed with its own grievances. It quickly became evident that there was not one story of Isis women, but many separate stories, bound together by one truth – the ease with which jihadist militancy could exploit women’s frustrated hopes and desires.”⁴¹² The Western women who joined IS range from white Midwestern women (“Alex,” Ariel Bradley) to second generation Muslims (Aqsa Mahmood, Hoda Muthana, Shamima Begum) and they came from different socioeconomic and educational backgrounds.⁴¹³ Despite the disparities in their backgrounds, they all felt an overarching need to belong to a community, a need that was not fulfilled by their local community or country of origin due to Islamophobia, racism, and/or insular education and socialization. Any one or a combination of these factors frustrated them enough to seek out and be vulnerable to joining the Islamic State.⁴¹⁴ The Islamic State was a conduit through which they could project and act upon these grievances in a way that, to them, was more meaningful and impactful than grassroots activism.⁴¹⁵ For all these women, IS seems to have offered a sense of

⁴¹² Azadeh Moaveni, “‘It could have been me’: On the trail of the British teenagers who became ‘brides of Isis,’” *The Guardian*, October 6, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/06/how-bright-successful-british-muslim-girls-were-lured-into-joining-isis>. Accessed December 28, 2019.

⁴¹³ “Alex”: Rukmini Callimachi, “ISIS and the lonely young American,” *The New York Times*, June 27, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/28/world/americas/isis-online-recruiting-american.html>. Accessed July 14, 2019; Ariel Bradley: Ellie Hall, “Gone Girl: An Interview with an American in ISIS,” *Buzzfeed News*, April 17, 2015, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/ellievhall/gone-girl-an-interview-with-an-american-in-isis#.heGXm80KZ>. Accessed July 14, 2019; Aqsa Mahmood: Hoda Muthana: Leada Gore, “Who is Hoda Muthana? Alabama woman who supported ISIS won’t be allowed in US, Trump responds,” *Advanced Local Alabama News*, February 20, 2019, <https://www.al.com/news/2019/02/who-is-hoda-muthana-alabama-woman-who-joined-isis-wants-to-come-home-with-young-son.html>. Accessed April 20, 2021; Shamima Begum: “Who is Shamima Begum and how do you lose your UK citizenship?” *BBC News*, March 2, 2021. Accessed April 20, 2021.

⁴¹⁴ Moaveni, “‘It could have been me’: On the trail of the British teenagers who became ‘brides of Isis.’”

⁴¹⁵ Narzanin Massoumi, “‘The Muslim woman activist’: Solidarity across difference in the movement against the ‘War on Terror,’” *Ethnicities* Vol. 15, No. 5 (2015): 717.

belonging in world forever altered by the ripple of violence unleashed on September 11, 2001 and, in some cases, violence from their countries of origin brought into their childhood homes as children through television, internet media, and politically active parents.⁴¹⁶ These women are now ex-patriated from not only the caliphate, but also from their home countries. They are, once again, thrust into communities and countries where they still cannot be citizens because the perceived and real risk of their citizenship is too great for their communities.

Ground Zero, for women embedded in Islamic extremism, is an inverted memorial: it memorializes the destruction and the sacrifice of nineteen *mujahideen* but also represents yet another incursion of *Dar al-Harb* (The House of War) into *Dar al-Islam* (The House of Islam).⁴¹⁷ It foreshadows another brutal assault by the West against Muslims and symbolizes the rapid securitization of the United States through war and circumscribed rights that occurred in the days and weeks following September 11th leading to a climate of permanent unease and suspicion. I argue that only a small minority of Muslims and an even smaller minority of Muslim women are involved in terror, that the essential ethos of Scheherazade is the same: surviving in a world dominated by patriarchal power structures, seeking social and political agency within that power, while also preserving and leveraging feminine ideals of piety, service, and obedience. Scheherazade's struggle also forms part of a larger struggle for transnational Muslims for citizenship in communities that are suspicious and outwardly hostile to their presence. The caliphate offers citizenship: for women, it also offers safety and inalienable rights through Islam.

⁴¹⁶ Azadeh Moaveni, *Guest House for Young Widows: Among the Women of ISIS* (New York: Random House, 2019), 117. Writing about the “Bethnal Green Girls,” the three teenage girls who left Bethnal Green Academy in East London to join IS, Moaveni describes the father of one of the girls, Amira, as a widowed, politically cynical refugee from Ethiopia. She writes, “What is clear is that he was open about his views and didn’t think his daughter was too young to learn to protest and demonstrate (117). Amira’s identity, like many first-generation British Muslims, straddled and navigated two worlds which arguably made her vulnerable to exploitation by ISIS recruiters.

⁴¹⁷ “Dar al-Harb,” Oxford Islamic Studies Online. <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e490>. Accessed September 6, 2020.

Women who join the Islamic State listen to the stories in Circles of Knowledge, both local and distant, as through and also from abroad shared via WhatsApp, Twitter, Tumblr, and TikTok.⁴¹⁸ They also listened to their parents' conversations in exile and shared their adolescent dissatisfaction with their lives in Western countries among their classmates. They spun these fragments into tales of why they had to flee London, Glasgow, Chattanooga, and Atlanta for Syria. They spun them again when the fairy tale violently, abruptly ended, and they desired to return to the safety of their rural lives and council flats. They told these stories to themselves and sometimes to each other to spur them on their mission to the Caliphate and to survive the realities of living within IS's world. For many of these young women, the fall of the caliphate means that they must now tell new stories to survive in refugee camps and to beg for governments to repatriate them. Stories of immense grief told by women with a flat affect who are barely out of childhood, told to reporters, aid workers, and lawyers in an effort to survive.⁴¹⁹ The countries where they have citizenship do not want them to return nor do their countries of origin, many of which are struggling against a political unrest driven by Islamists and young people with disparate ideas of governance. So, the women keep telling their stories in the hope that some iteration of it will allow them to return home and to live.

Researching and understanding women's motivation for joining IS from officially secular, progressive, and liberal societies in the United States and Great Britain is challenging.

⁴¹⁸ Majid Alfifi, Parisa Kaghazgaran, James Caverlee, and Fred Morstatter, "Measuring the Impact of ISIS Social Media Strategy," Stanford University, 2018. https://snap.stanford.edu/mis2/files/MIS2_paper_23.pdf. Accessed March 5, 2021. Since 2014, social media platforms have struggled with controlling content shared by the Islamic State and its sympathizers. As recently as October 2019, social media platform TikTok removed two dozen accounts with 1000+ followers. See: Georgia Wells, "Islamic State Turns to Teen-Friendly TikTok, Adorning Posts with Pink Hearts," *The Washington Post*, October 21, 2019. In October 2019 alone, TikTok removed two dozen accounts spreading IS propaganda.

⁴¹⁹ Shamima Begum, "I didn't want to be IS poster girl," interview by Terry Sommerville, *BBC*, February 19, 2019. Audio, 5:06. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TGAXm6KJTWE>. Accessed February 10, 2020. Shamima Begum is the one survivor of the so-called "Bethnal Three," a group of three girls from Bethnal Green, London who fled to the Islamic State.

American and British women were only active on social media for a brief time between 2014-15. Although we know that over 100 women (40 from the United States and 60 from Great Britain) joined IS, we only know the identities, virtual (and legal) footprints of a handful.⁴²⁰ Many of these women fall into the demographic of younger Millennials (e.g., Aqsa Mahmood) or older members of Generation Z (Sharmeena Begum, Amira Abase, “Alex”).⁴²¹ They represent a generation imprinted by constant access to technology and means of communication. While Millennials came of age when the internet reached full accessibility, Generation Z (born 1997-2010) has grown up with the internet always accessible. As well, both generations also are among the first to be inundated with information from social media. Members of Generation Z grew up without either remembering or experiencing a pre-September 11th world. For U.S. Muslims, this means a world before a dramatic rise in hate crimes, xenophobia, wars and drone strikes across the Muslim world instigated by Western governments. Technology, social media, and an endless news cycle meant that young Muslims coming-of-age post-September 11th marinated in a constant stream of anti-Muslim violence both at home and abroad. Young women resided in countries whose governments were slaughtering other members of the *umma*, the global Muslim community. Meanwhile, in their neighborhoods and local communities, both subtle and overt forms of Islamophobia influenced their social and economic agency along with their identities as Muslims, women, and Americans. It did not require a great outlay on the part of recruiters/groomers from the Islamic State to exploit the vulnerability of young women living under these circumstances trying to negotiate their identities.

⁴²⁰ Nadia Khomami, “Number of Women and Children Who Joined ISIS ‘Significantly Underestimated’,” *The Guardian*, July 23, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/23/number-of-women-and-children-joining-isis-significantly-underestimated>.

⁴²¹ Michael Dimock, “Defining Generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins,” *Pew Research*, January 17, 2019. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>. Accessed March 3, 2021.

Between 2015-2019, many of their social media accounts were removed by Twitter and Tumblr, most in late 2015, Tracking the young women of IS has become almost impossible.⁴²² They have retreated to the so-called “Dark Net” or they are silent or dead.⁴²³ Some are in a less hospitable forms of captivity, stateless, occupying refugee camps, such as Shamima Begum and Hoda Muthana, two of the so-called “ISIS Brides,” whose citizenships were revoked by the United Kingdom and the United States respectively.⁴²⁴ Even their countries of origin, Bangladesh and Yemen, refuse to repatriate the women as they not only endanger cordial relations with the United States, but their history of radicalism is liable to be leveraged by Islamist groups in these countries, further destabilizing precarious governments. Their families are reluctant to speak out because of backlash as suspected enablers and purveyors of radicalism. The brevity of their careers in the Islamic State as *muhajirat* is tantalizingly brief with tragic outcomes: widowhood, the loss of multiple children, and ultimately, the loss of family and citizenship. What confounds researchers is that the young women are different: some of the women are capricious, almost precocious victims of dysfunctional homes and prolonged adolescence who were searching for meaning and stability; some came from stable homes, were

⁴²² Danny Yadron, “Twitter deletes 125,000 Isis accounts and expands anti-terror teams,” *The Guardian*, February 5, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/feb/05/twitter-deletes-isis-accounts-terrorism-online>. Accessed March 3, 2021.

⁴²³ Laura Mowat, “‘I’m scared’ Bethnal Green schoolgirl Kadiza Sultan’s chilling call before death,” *The Express*, August 12, 2016. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/699366/Bethnal-Green-schoolgirl-Kadiza-Sultana-s-chilling-phone-call-from-Syria>. Accessed September 10, 2020. See also: Lizzie Dearden and Richard Hall, “The Britons who went to join Isis: Where are they now?” *The Independent*, February 15, 2019. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/uk-isis-recruits-syria-return-british-caliphate-terrorism-jihadis-a8781056.html>. Accessed September 10, 2020. The most prominent of the “ISIS Brides,” Aqsa Mahmood, remains unaccounted for in Syria. The last internet activity attributed to her took place in late 2015 and early 2016.

⁴²⁴ Saul Elbein, “The Un-American,” *The New Republic*, March 23, 2020. <https://newrepublic.com/article/156793/isis-american-hoda-muthana-trump-birthright-citizenship>. Accessed March 5, 2021. The Trump Administration made the decision to revoke Hoda’s citizenship after an interview with ABC News. Trump tweeted: “I have instructed Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and he fully agrees, not to allow Hoda Muthana back into the Country!” (Twitter, February 20, 2019). As of March 2021, the Biden Administration has not publicly addressed the repatriation of any ISIS women, including Hoda Muthana.

stellar students and well-liked still others developed a protective narcissism that in the wake of September 11th that became a virulent strain of extremism and ego.

Women may join IS for the same reasons that men do: religious commitment and a sense of community. Extremism “is not built on factors inherent in fundamentalism, but that individual disaffection with the West—spurred by colonialism and exclusion—finds comfort in extremism.”⁴²⁵ There is no “one size fits all” approach to the rationale given for women’s joining IS; the sample is far too small and the motivations vary, but there is commonality. The women who join IS seek some sort of stability and are motivated by feeling a sense of isolation in their community, whether that be an ethnic enclave or a town of 2000 in rural America.

Historically, women’s involvement in terror was within a supportive, rather than combative, role. Women provided material support to male fighters, instead of acting as independent, uncoerced agents.⁴²⁶ Until the mid-2000s, analysts usually explained that women engaged in terrorism as a result of social pressures mostly stemming from the concept of “honor.”⁴²⁷ In some instances, such as women suicide bombers in the Occupied Territories, honor perhaps was the primary motivator. However according to Laura Sjöberg and Caron E. Gentry, terrorist women in fact were more likely to be autonomous, independent actors, uncoerced by social or familial pressures rooted in honor. Sjöberg and Gentry argue that, “women who commit violence have been characterized as anything but regular criminals or regular soldiers or regular

⁴²⁵ Meredith Loken and Anna Zelenz, “Explaining extremism: Western women in Daesh,” *European Journal of International Security* 3, No. 1 (Feb. 2018): 9.

⁴²⁶ Laura Sjöberg and Caron E. Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women’s Violence in Global Politics* (London: Zed Books, 2007), 7.

⁴²⁷ Barbara Victor, *Army of Roses: Inside the World of Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers* (London: Constable and Robinson, 2004). The precedent for women’s violence, specifically in a contemporary Islamic context is generally cited as being either the self-immolation of Wafa Idris, a divorced, 28-year-old Palestinian woman who blew herself up on January 27, 2002. She was followed in quick succession by a series of other female bombers, leading Palestinian leader Yassir Arafat to call them his, “Army of Roses.” Later instances of female-led violence are seen among the so-called “Black Widows” of Chechnya and in in US-occupied Iraq.

terrorists; they are captured in storied fantasies which deny women's agency and reify gender stereotypes and subordination."⁴²⁸ Women in fact engage in terror for reasons similar to men. They are also identified as "women terrorists" rather than "terrorist," as applied to their male compatriots.⁴²⁹ This represents the observer's refusal, even denial, that women are capable of engaging in violence as state and non-state actors. The assumed passivity of Muslim women, so ingrained in the Western psyche through centuries of propagandizing the East in Western art and entertainment, shaped the analysis of terrorism. However, this has now been upended repeatedly by tales of female terrorists, real and aspiring, most recently by young women leaving the safety of their American and European homes to join IS. Naturally, the steady diet of both harem fantasies and systemic oppression within Muslim-majority societies led to the Western understanding of Muslim women as passive actors due to either restraints of luxury (harem life) or politics (Islamist rule). Sjöberg and Gentry emphasize the importance of recognizing motivations and "personal and political choices (as) complicated and contingent."⁴³⁰ Mia Bloom reinforces the agency of women in extremism observing that "psychopathology and personality disorder (are) no more likely among women terrorists than among non-terrorists from the same communities."⁴³¹ This in turn demands that we stop accepting as fact the contention that the average Muslim woman, especially those living in transnational communities, does not have the luxury of agency. Some Muslim women some choose to use their transnational identities to influence change within their own communities that ensures that communities thrive and acceptance of Islam through commerce, politics, or Islamic reform while a small minority reject grassroots activism in favor of extremism.

⁴²⁸ Sjöberg and Gentry, 10.

⁴²⁹ Ibid.,3.

⁴³⁰ Ibid., 3.

⁴³¹ Mia Bloom, *Bombshell: Women and Terror* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 10.

Researchers have identified three fundamental reasons for women's entry into terrorist groups: (1) terrorist attacks by women have unique propaganda value; (2) women have to fight for their right to fight, and ideological warfare gives them an opportunity to circumvent traditional gender roles in conservative countries/regions (e.g., Palestine, Chechnya); and (3) terrorist groups overcome internal cultural resistance to women's involvement when tactics require it.⁴³² As women participating in networks and as actors, their actions are considered to be *dawa*, a form of proselytizing unique to Islam.⁴³³ Women interviewed by Janny Groen and Annieke Kranenberg in the Netherlands explained that their participation in groups affiliated with violent Islamists is "good *dawa*" because "they can also spread their message and possibly make converts through the nonbelieving media. Islam says *dawa* is their sacred duty."⁴³⁴ Although terrorism initiated an exploration into Islam, conversion to Islam does not mean immersion into or affiliation with factions of Deobandi, Salafi, or Wahabi groups that promote or incite non-state violence. One can adhere to any of the aforementioned conservative interpretations without becoming engaged in violence.

Women have to fight to for their right *to fight*. This is unquestionably a component of what is called "Greater *Jihad*," and it is used by recruiters for terror organizations gives an additional layer of legitimacy to their mission. Greater *Jihad* "has the connotations of a moral struggle within one's own self, along with an armed struggle, in this case against the West. It thus carries the hermeneutics of a moral endeavor directed toward one's own improvement or self-elevation on a moral plane, which Muslim jurists of eminence have been quoted as calling *jihad al-Akbar*, or

⁴³² Alisa Stack-O'Connor, "Picked Last: Women and Terrorism." Washington, D.C.: National Defense University, Institute for National Strategic Studies, 2007.

⁴³³ Janny Groen and Annieke Kranenberg, *Women Warriors for Allah: An Islamist Network in the Netherlands* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 12. Groen and Kranenberg's work is based on interviews with women members of the *Hofstad* network in the Netherlands, the group responsible for the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo Van Gogh in November 2004.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

greater jihad.”⁴³⁵ They first must establish contact with someone within the network; this might be a “Brother,” as the men of the Islamic State are referred to, or it might be a “Sister,” a female member of IS or a sympathizer. They have to establish trust with the source, which is more than just chatting online or sending messages through WhatsApp.⁴³⁶ If possible, contact is made between the Sister and her target, commencing an extended period of establishing the religious and political credentials of the other. It is a long process of hours and months of grooming. Through contact with these anonymous sources, who often hide behind Twitter Avatars and/or eventually meet fully-veiled, fully-anonymous women for Circles of Knowledge gatherings or socialization, these Islamist and Salafi women simultaneously develop and enhance their Islamic knowledge and fight to establish their credibility as potential fighters and citizens of the Islamic State. Women who had once previously navigated their transnational identities as Muslim women living outside of Muslim-majority countries and governments, later adopted a spiritual and aesthetic identity that aligned with the needs of the Islamic State. Put simply, women who had only worn *hijab* and jeans suddenly were determined only to wear long skirts, shirts, and “Islamic” dresses.⁴³⁷ These newly radicalized women will no longer patronize establishments that represent global imperialism or have links to the United States, Canada, Great Britain, France, or Germany. Azadeh Moavani describes this transition of one of the Bethnal Green Girls, Amira: “She started peppering her English with Arabic expressions and posted photos that showed her friends in London wearing black flowing robes. ‘Our abaya game is strong. 😊🙏,’ she wrote. Amira wondered whether ‘nose

⁴³⁵ Syed Manzar Abbas Zaidi, “Eclipse of the Greater Jihad,” *Philosophy and Religious Studies Journal* 3, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 1.

⁴³⁶ Sebastian Rotella, “ISIS via WhatsApp: ‘Blow Yourself Up, O’Lion,” *ProPublica*, July 11, 2016, https://www.propublica.org/article/isis-via-whatsapp-blow-yourself-up-o-lion?utm_campaign=sprout&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter&utm_content=1468238455&fbclid=IwAR0kqZ5xyu9k5n4YDLM3DqDAF3FmzoezmrStYv_Az9OQfT9fV4VBMtsASQE. Accessed September 10, 2020.

⁴³⁷ Moavani, *Guest House for Young Widows*, 153.

piercings are Haram.”⁴³⁸ Even Amira’s emojis were modest, using one of the more innocuous ways of teenage communication, she was signaling to her audience, a mix of ISIS members and school friends, that her priorities were shifting. Amira was fighting to establish credibility and to demonstrate her commitment to serious, conservative practice of Islam, so that she could travel to Syria and engage with the *jihad* there.

Finally, terror groups overcome cultural resistance to women’s participation by assigning them social roles that are still within the parameters of Islamic female propriety. In the case of ISIS, women are non-combatants: their role is to occupy the bed and populate the house of the *mujahedeen*. Unlike in other situations where women are active agents in terror (Chechnya, Palestine), women in IS fulfill strictly defined roles of wife and mother. Some women may join the al-Khansa Brigade, a group of ISIS women whose role is to police other women. According to ISIS officials, "We have established the brigade to raise awareness of our religion among women, and to punish women who do not abide by the law...*Jihad* is not a man-only duty. Women must do their part as well.”⁴³⁹ Gender roles are not fluid but retain the Islamic belief that men and women are not created equal, but complementary, working in tandem to retain order and grow the caliphate.⁴⁴⁰ IS operated within the bounds of Islamic theology and jurisprudence (*fiqh*), which makes them savvy and possibly more dangerous than their predecessor. ISIS made women’s involvement a necessity and grounded it in theology.

The complication of geography makes the movement of young American and Canadian women into the geography of the caliphate nearly impossible. However, it did not stop a handful

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 153.

⁴³⁹ Kathy Gilsinan, “The ISIS Crackdown on Women, by Women,” *The Atlantic*, July 25, 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/07/the-women-of-isis/375047/>. Accessed September 10, 2020.

⁴⁴⁰ Natana J. DeLong-Bas, “Women, Islam, and the Twenty-First Century,” *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/Public/focus/essay1107_women.html. Accessed December 9, 2020.

of young women from becoming radicalized and offering either support or acting as independent agents in the United States. The Counter Extremism Project (2014), a non-partisan policy organization dedicated to studying extremist organizations and actors, developed a roster of American-born women involved in support of IS.⁴⁴¹ Many are under 30 and are the products of a dysfunctional and extended adolescence. Others, as mentioned previously, are the children of first-generation immigrants, raised by religiously conservative and politically disenfranchised households.⁴⁴² For the purposes of this chapter, it will be necessary to go beyond the geographical scope of the United States and include the United Kingdom where some of the most notorious female actors and subjects of terror networks such as “The White Widow,” Aqsa Mahmood, and the “Bethnal Three,” involving women emerged.⁴⁴³ As recently as August 2017, the Crown brought charges against three women accused of plotting a knife attack in Westminster.⁴⁴⁴ Indeed, this seeming surge of women willing to be agents of terror perplexes analysts trained that women are inherently non-violent state actors, and that Muslim women have limited agency, itself an assumption that I argue was not widely contemplated before September 11th. These oversights originate in discourse by Orientalists and popular culture which delegated Muslim women to the position of passive rather than active arbiters of Islamic political thought and action. The migration of women from the United States and Western Europe into IS and their subsequent punishment at the fall of Raqqa in 2018 demonstrates clearly that these women are not the passive courtesans of

⁴⁴¹ The Counter Extremism Project, <https://www.counterextremism.com/>. Accessed September 10, 2019.

⁴⁴² Ibid.

⁴⁴³ Among the most notorious cases of women radicalized and becoming agents of Al-Qaeda and the operations by the Islamic State are Samantha Lewthwaite (“The White Widow”) and schoolgirls Aqsa Mahmood, Kadiza Sultana, Amira Abase, and Shamima Begum.

⁴⁴⁴ “Three women appear in court over alleged terror plot,” *The Guardian*, May 11, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/may/11/three-women-appear-in-court-over-alleged-london-terror-plot>. Accessed September 10, 2020.

Orientalist imagination but active participants in political movements that may also include violence.⁴⁴⁵

3.2 The *Muhajirat* at Ground Zero⁴⁴⁶

September 11th threw a generation of Muslim youth from the United States and the United Kingdom into two a decades long debate on the intersections of citizenship and belonging, especially for transnational communities. Young Muslims are “positioned as inassimilable outsiders to the imagined national community and threatened by government policies and practices that compromise the civil and human rights of their communities, therefore young people from transnational Muslim communities often find neither the sense of belonging nor the political conditions for substantive inclusion into this society... As a consequence, [they] often struggle to exercise their rights and to forge pathways to citizenship.”⁴⁴⁷ These Muslims “live lives at the crossroads of several political conflicts,” all of which have shaped the way in which they develop identities and their sense of citizenship. Many young women there seek purpose, identity, and structure, having borne the most vehement racial and systemic abuse from their communities in the wake of terrorist events in their countries, including the 7/7 Bombings in London. The caliphate offers validation, shelter, identity, and empowerment. These social

⁴⁴⁵ Dave Madhur, “Hoda Muthana denied U.S. Citizenship: Other ISIS Brides from the Country,” *International Business Times*, February 21, 2019, <https://www.ibtimes.com/hoda-muthana-denied-us-citizenship-other-isis-brides-country-2766622>. Accessed September 10, 2020. The women joining IS referred to themselves as “lionesses” after IS propaganda encouraged them to join the cause and give birth to “cubs.” Women were offered \$25.00 USD of monthly support for each child they gave birth to while in the Islamic State’s territories.

⁴⁴⁶ *Muhajirat* is the Arabic feminine plural for a religious pilgrim.

⁴⁴⁷ Thea Renda Abu El-Haj and Sally Wesley Bonet, “Education, Citizenship, and the Politics of Belonging: Youth from Transnational Communities and the ‘War on Terror’,” *Review of Researching Education*, Vol. 35 (2011): 32. Rend and Wesley’s study focuses on the Palestinian experience, a particularly disruptive one because of the lack of official state ties, Palestinians in the diaspora have difficulty obtaining citizenship because they are untethered to a recognized Palestinian state. September 11th, 2001 compounded that struggle by making the United States more inhospitable. The association of Palestine with violence by non-state actors further compounds this anxiety about Palestinian citizenship in the United States post-9/11.

connections are enticing to first- and second-generation Muslims, as well as converts seeking to excise themselves from the social, cultural, and/or political baggage that they may carry as a result of their pre-conversion lives or that they may have rapidly acquired upon conversion. For example, first- and second-generation Muslims may find a deeper sense of connection to their Muslim identity that their parents may have relaxed as a strategy of settlement and assimilation into a new country and community. In the case of converts, some are seeking structure that was lacking in their childhood homes, such as “Alex,” profiled by the *The New York Times*, or rejecting a childhood limited by Christian fundamentalism, as in the case of Ariel Bradley.⁴⁴⁸ Affiliation with groups like IS gives structure, meaning, and answers to life’s questions. Additionally, women may also adopt a new name and aesthetic appearance that allows them to completely divest themselves from their previous life.⁴⁴⁹

The unique gendered Islamophobia that emerged has a greater impact on young women’s daily lives, one that Women “ may help explain their move towards extremism.”⁴⁵⁰ Muslim women in the West are natural targets of hate because many wear some form of *hijab* which identifies them as belonging to the “other” and as Muslim. Unlike their male counterparts, *muhajibah* (women who wear *hijab*) do not disguise their belief and are unwilling to compromise their belief for their safety by removing the aesthetic marker of faith. A 2016 Gallup poll found that 48% of Muslims are more likely than Americans of other major religious groups to have experienced racial or religious discrimination in the past year.⁴⁵¹ That same year, between

⁴⁴⁸ Callimachi, “ISIS and the lonely young American.”

⁴⁴⁹ Drawing Board Design, “The Debate Around Cultural Appropriation and Muslim Converts Who Wear Hijab,” Blog Post, August, 31, 2015, <https://thedrawingboardcanada.com/2015/08/31/the-debate-around-cultural-appropriation-and-muslim-converts-who-wear-hijab/>. Accessed April 19, 2021.

⁴⁵⁰ Loken and Zelenz, *Explaining Extremism*, 9 and Sabrina Alimahomed-Wilson, “Invisible Violence: Gender, Islamophobia, and the Hidden Assault on U.S. Muslim Women,” *Women, Gender, and Families of Color* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 81.

⁴⁵¹ “Islamophobia: Understanding Anti-Muslim Sentiment in the West,” *Gallup*, 2011, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/157082/islamophobia-understanding-anti-muslim-sentiment-west.aspx>. Accessed

November-December, there was a spike in incidents, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), with American Muslims being second only to Jewish Americans in religiously motivated hate crimes and African-Americans in culturally motivated hate crimes.⁴⁵² Anti-Muslim sentiment rapidly increased following September 11th. Between 2002-2014 there were 105-160 anti-Muslim hate crimes *annually* in the United States. In 2016, there were 257 hate crimes reported against Muslims, the highest since 2001 and 67% more than in 2014. This occurred simultaneously with the full saturation of media coverage of IS.⁴⁵³ The repeated broadcast of IS atrocities and ongoing assaults against women, children, Christianity, Yazidi women, and, most graphically, their recorded executions, certainly provoked the majority of these incidents. These crimes in late 2016 account for 4.4% of all *reported* hate crimes, despite Muslims being estimated as only 1.1% of the US population.⁴⁵⁴ Further complicating the struggle to define Muslim citizenship in America after 2016 were the pervasive and constant anti-Muslim sentiments offered by the emboldened President Donald Trump and his constituents, along with like-minded Brexit supporters in the U.K.⁴⁵⁵ The clearest options for Muslims living in anxiety

December 2, 2020. One of the interesting conclusions from the Gallup Poll was that in the UK and the US, Western respect for Muslims remained level between 2008-2011, despite world events. According to Muslims, however, 57% surveyed stated that they were not treated as equal citizens. In 2019, the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding concluded that it is politics that influences Islamophobia not personal interactions. (Source: <https://www.ispu.org/american-muslim-poll-2019-predicting-and-preventing-islamophobia/>).

⁴⁵² Clare Foran, "Donald Trump and the Rise of Anti-Muslim Violence," *The Atlantic*, September 22, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/09/trump-muslims-islamophobia-hate-crime/500840/>. See also: FBI Hate Crime Statistics for 2016, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), <https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2016/topic-pages/incidentsandoffenses>. Accessed April 15, 2021.

⁴⁵³ Damaris Colhoun, "Why ISIS coverage sounds familiar," *Columbia Journalism Review*, November 14, 2014, https://archives.cjr.org/behind_the_news/why_isis_coverage_sounds_famil.php. Accessed September 10, 2019.

⁴⁵⁴ Bashir Mohamed, "New estimates show U.S. Muslim population continues to grow," *Pew Research Center*, January 3, 2018, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/03/new-estimates-show-u-s-muslim-population-continues-to-grow/> Accessed July 20, 2019. A 2017 study by the Pew Research Center estimated that there are approximately 3.5 million Muslims in the United States accounting for just 1.1% of the US population. Despite the challenges of immigration bans and anti-Muslim rhetoric, the number of Americans identifying as Muslim rose from 2.35 to 3.25 million from 2007 when the first poll was conducted by Pew Research.

⁴⁵⁵ Ros Taylor and Giulia Evolvi, "#Islamexit: Islamophobia and Twitter after Brexit," Blog Post, London School of Economics, February 28, 2019, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2019/02/28/islamexit-islamophobia-and-twitter-after-brexit/>. Accessed February 28, 2021.

over the shifting boundaries of citizenship and anti-Islamic sentiments were: 1) to channel the anxiety of being Muslim in America into advocacy groups and campaigns; 2) to return to their country of origin; 3). or the most radical alternative: to become a pilgrim, a *muhajid/muhajira*, to the new caliphate in Syria.

FBI statistics show that there were only 28 reported hate crimes against Muslims in the 2000, but just a year later following September 11th, 2001, 481 took place, a 1618% increase. The average age of a woman recruited to IS was 15 at the time of the September 11th attacks, the age range at 6-20. From then until the first women left to join IS in 2014, hate crimes against Muslims averaged 139 annually in the United States, a 414% increase from 2000.⁴⁵⁶ This means that in the decade after 9/11, young American Muslims were part of a community five times as vulnerable to being a victim of a hate crime than in a decade prior.⁴⁵⁷ Children remain the most vulnerable to Islamophobic experiences even when they are experiencing them secondhand: “Exposure to this type of discrimination may leave children feeling marginalized and disempowered; this could lead to the internalization of negative stereotypes associated with Islam.”⁴⁵⁸ It is this disempowerment that recruiters from IS leveraged to attract young people to the group by demonstrating the innate power of Islam and Muslims through the caliphate. IS recruiters often used one of the pathways to radicalization called, “perceived grievances,” which for transnational Muslims (as well as those living under Muslim rule) primarily centered on the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.⁴⁵⁹ These “perceived grievances” may include: disenfranchisement or lack of opportunity within the country of residence; Western, especially

⁴⁵⁶ 2014 FBI Hate Crime Statistics, <https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2014>. Accessed February 28, 2021.

⁴⁵⁷ Siham Elkassem, Rick Cesiernik, Gina Kayssi, Yasmine Hussain, Kathryn Lambert, Pamela Bailey, and Asad Choudhary, “Growing Up Muslim: The Impact of Islamophobia on Children in a Canadian Community,” *Journal of Muslim Mental Health*, 12, no. 1 (Summer 2018), 7.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁵⁹ Jessica Trisko Darden, “Tackling Terrorists’ Exploitation of Youth,” *The American Enterprise Institute* (May 2019), 4.

U.S., aggression and violence in Muslim-majority countries like Iraq and Afghanistan; and U.S. support of Israel and lack of action to provide substantive humanitarian or political aide to Palestinians.⁴⁶⁰ These are all themes that extremist groups like al-Qaeda and the Islamic State draw upon to recruit

In 2015, anti-Muslim crime peaked; attacks on Muslims were the highest reported numbers of hate crimes in the United States. Within these crimes, Muslim women were more likely to be victims than Muslim men as a result of their visibility (i.e., veiling, modest dress).⁴⁶¹ That year, 69% of Muslim women who wore *hijab* reported being targets of some form of harassment or discrimination, while for those who did not wear *hijab* the number was 29%.⁴⁶² Muslims, especially Muslim women, had no claim to status, rights, and privileges of citizens, as seen in their assailants' attacks and the inaction or slow response of governments and law enforcement agencies.⁴⁶³ Viewed by some as traitors, their rights were nullified by the vigilante patriotism that blossomed following September 11th. As Sahar Aziz points out, "sparse attention is paid to the impact of the post-9/11 national security era on Muslim women, and specifically those who wear the headscarf. Irrespective of their place of origin or the color of their skin, the headscarf marks these women as sympathetic to the enemy, presumptively disloyal, and forever foreign."⁴⁶⁴ Some women removed their *hijab* following September 11th to mitigate some of the risk of violence.⁴⁶⁵ The same day as the attacks, footage of Palestinian women in *hijab*, was

⁴⁶⁰ Moaveni, "'It could have been me': On the trail of the British teenagers who became 'brides of Isis.'"

⁴⁶¹ Alimahomed-Wilson, 77.

⁴⁶² Rana Elmir, "Muslim women experience thinly veiled discrimination," *Chicago Tribune*, September 16, 2016, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/opinion/commentary/ct-muslim-women-discrimination-hijab-20160916-story.html>. Accessed July 24, 2020.

⁴⁶³ Elmir, "Muslim women experience thinly veiled discrimination."

⁴⁶⁴ Sahar Aziz, "From the Oppressed to the Terrorist: Muslim American Women in the Crosshairs of Intersectionality," *Hastings Race and Poverty Law Journal* 9, (2012): 192.

⁴⁶⁵ Shakira Hussein, *From Victims to Suspects: Muslim Women Since 9/11*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

broadcast to Americans as part of coverage of the attacks.⁴⁶⁶ The images from Palestine lacked historical and political context which more than likely would not have made any difference to viewers.

The new monolithic Muslim woman wore a *hijab* and reveled in the violence of 9/11.⁴⁶⁷ In the weeks that followed, Americans went from viewing veiled Muslim women as exotic, sexualized, passive, and oppressed to complicit actors in anti-American violence. Ironically, authorities suggested that Muslim women either remove the *hijab* or stay at home in self-imposed exile, fulfilling harem fantasies in the interest of national security. As Barbara Perry writes, “Muslim women’s experiences shape their sense of ease and of belonging in their environment. Such violence is intended, in fact, to encourage victims to (re)consider their place, to send the message that they are, in fact, out of place.”⁴⁶⁸ The women in this chapter chose to emigrate in response.

Only in the spring of 2014 did the world become truly aware of IS. Over a three-year period ending in 2017, there were an estimated 4,000 women identified as members of IS.⁴⁶⁹ Most of the women recruited by IS were adolescents and, contrary to the popular narrative of young women being seduced into violence by young men, many were recruited by *other* women, not by dark, almond-eyed avatars of noble *mujahidin*. As Deeyah Khan writes, “it is assumed that the ‘holy warriors’ of the Islamic State have a dangerous sexual allure, like a boy-band accessorized with

⁴⁶⁶ Robert Mackey, “The Video of Celebrations That Was Broadcast on 9/11,” *The New York Times*, November 24, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/politics/first-draft/2015/11/24/the-video-of-celebrations-that-was-broadcast-on-911/>. Accessed April 17, 2021. See also: “Palestinians Celebrate Here and in Beirut With Gunfire,” *Haaretz*, September 12, 2011, <https://www.haaretz.com/1.5385836>. Accessed April 17, 2021.

⁴⁶⁷ Serap Gur, “Hidden Victims of International Terrorism: Muslim Women in the USA,” *E-International Relations*, October 31, 2016, <https://www.e-ir.info/2016/10/31/hidden-victims-of-international-terrorism-muslim-women-in-the-usa/>. Accessed April 20, 2021.

⁴⁶⁸ Barbara Perry, “Gendered Islamophobia: hate crime against Muslim women,” *Journal for the Study of Race, Nation, and Culture* 20, no. 1 (2014): 77.

⁴⁶⁹ Joana Cook and Gina Vale, “From Daesh to ‘Diaspora’ II: The Challenge Posed by Women and Minors After the Fall of the Caliphate,” *CTC Sentinel*, (July 2019), 30.

beards and semi-automatic weapons,” and while some may fit that profile, the bulk of recruitment is largely limited to interactions between men and men; women and women.”⁴⁷⁰ Even when some of the recruitment is done by men, it is done virtually through the *purdah* (seclusion) of the internet where the digital screen serves as a division between the sexes and the exchanges resemble a negotiation rather than an online flirtation.⁴⁷¹ The grooming of adolescent women was done by other women already enmeshed in the network, as even in the sphere of recruitment and cyberspace, the boundaries between the sexes were kept very much intact.

Yet, while grooming, often included some tales of romance and heroism, many of the women chose to join IS for its promises of autonomy and freedom.⁴⁷² What that autonomy and freedom entailed varied: for some women, it was reductive as a teenage crush, while for others it was a noble endeavor and calling not dissimilar to that of a teenage saint’s first mystical experience. Still others were as “bloodthirsty, disaffected, and politically engaged as men.”⁴⁷³ It does adolescents a disservice to assume that they are all motivated by, to borrow from Katy Perry, a “teenage dream,” as opposed to having at least some level of political and social sophistication that allows them to make mature, albeit drastic, decisions about their futures.⁴⁷⁴ Some of the young

⁴⁷⁰ Deeyah Khan, “For ISIS Brides, it’s not about ‘jihadi brides,’ it’s about escape,” *The Guardian*, June 20, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/21/isis-women-its-not-about-jihadi-brides-its-about-escape>. Accessed September 10, 2019.

⁴⁷¹ Callimachi, “ISIS and the lonely young American.” One of the most compelling portraits of a young American woman seduced by IS recruiters. “Alex” living in a rural area of the US with her grandparents and with little opportunity or direction guiding her future. “Alex” describes the aggressive recruitment and indoctrination online through Skype with IS sympathizers and fighters abroad while “Sisters” send her hundreds of dollars in Islamic texts, including an English translation of the Qur’an to incentivize her conversion to Islam. Their tactics were aggressive but pointed, exploiting the loneliness and isolation of a young woman with limited social opportunities. “Alex” manages to extract herself from IS and return to the stability of her church and community.

⁴⁷² Khan, “Isis Brides.”

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁴ J. Häkli and K.P. Kallio, “Theorizing Children’s Political Agency,” in *Establishing Geographies of Children and Young People*, eds. Skelton T., Aitken S., (Singapore: Springer, 2018).

women who join IS offered explicit, well-articulated reasons and goals for membership, most carefully couched in a seriousness about their faith.

The most important and often neglected aspect of adolescent girls' involvement in ISIS is the timeline of their growing up. Analysts focus on the narrative of the oppression and violence against Muslims globally that influenced these girls, but what made them vulnerable particularly to violence, instead of non-state actors, social organizations or community advocacy work? The 2001 and 2005 terror attacks destabilized adolescence for a generation of Muslim children. Young Muslims speak of understanding yet not fully comprehending the seismic shift in their communities after the attacks; dramatic changes occurred in many homes. Some families left their adopted countries or relinquished signifiers of "Muslim-ness" like *hijab* to present a more secularized identity. Still others adopted a more religious identity as empowerment. A cultural shift occurred in the midst of their early development that shaped the world in which they came of age in profound ways: as girls they experienced anti-Muslim racism, the rhetoric of war, and a society deeply suspicious of immigration ultimately leading to closed borders and to Brexit. Compounded with negotiations of identity and citizenship within the household, this unsettling proved to be fertile ground for IS recruitment among young women whose lives were shaped by 9/11.

In public interactions with families of those women who fled to join IS the girls' fathers generally speak for the families, not their mothers. Occasionally, an older sister who is more comfortable living and speaking in a Western context will speak to the press, like in the case of Kadiza Sultana, whose sister spoke to the press following Kadiza joining the Islamic State in 2015. Mothers of women who join IS are often new immigrants themselves, raising the first generation of daughters in the West and are likely not the product of European or American-style

schooling in their countries of origin. The lack of language, support structure, and systems of integration have had a negative effect on Muslim mothers. Although these women may have had social capital in their community of origin, emigration to the West diminished their social power; now in a country and enclave where entry must be negotiated by newcomers rather than assumed, mothers withdrew from public interaction. This left fathers to become the sole advocate for the family.⁴⁷⁵ Fathers of the *muhajirat* have given interviews with *The Guardian* and *Buzzfeed News*, and have taken to Twitter to appeal for the return of their daughters. For example, the father of Hoda Muthana, the 20-year-old college student from Alabama who joined IS in 2014, admitted that although her mother knew that Hoda was in Syria, she did not yet know that she was married.⁴⁷⁶ Young women may be frustrated with their mothers' own identity crisis and negotiations for status within a community.⁴⁷⁷

Women joined IS for exactly the same reasons as men: religious commitment and the sense of community. Recruiters for IS leveraged Western ideals of empowerment, girl power, and romance to enroll young women. IS representatives inverted popular culture and deployed the frenetic, appealing power of “girl talk” amongst anonymous avatars and Twitter handles, Tumblr blogs, and message boards.⁴⁷⁸ These appeals found favor among a generation of women feeling adrift: first and second generation Muslim women contended with the escalation of violence in their adopted communities, discrimination, and the uncertainty of how *much* of their

⁴⁷⁵ Moaveni, *Guest House for Young Widows*, 117.

⁴⁷⁶ Hall, “Gone Girl: An Interview with an American in ISIS.” Ellie Hall of *Buzzfeed News* remains the sole reporter with the most contact with Hoda Muthana. She interviewed Hoda for her coverage of the women of ISIS in 2015, shortly after Hoda arrived in Syria and began Tweeting about violence against Americans. Hall also interviewed friends and family of Ariel Bradley, another American who joined IS around the same time as Hoda. An interesting point to note is that Hall communicates with Hoda using the same tools that Hoda used for her own messaging and recruitment but Hoda is savvy enough to not attempt to recruit Hall, but use the American journalist as a platform for disseminating pro-IS propaganda.

⁴⁷⁷ Moaveni, *Guest House for Young Widows*, 118.

⁴⁷⁸ Moaveni, *Guest House for Young Widows*, 153. See also: Callimachi, “ISIS and the Lonely American.”

rights of citizenship will be enforced in their adopted countries. This uncertainty, compounded with the fragility and instability of adolescence proved an explosive combination. In the United States, women who joined IS can be likened to women participating in gang violence: they sought structure, community, and commonality in a chaotic landscape of conflicting demands placed on them and their identities by multiple entities at home and through the state.⁴⁷⁹ In Europe, one analyst noted, “plagued by Islamophobia, many girls and women long for a society where their use of *hijab* will not alienate them or make them a target for racism.”⁴⁸⁰ This pattern re-occurs throughout our continued struggling to understand why young women leave the safety of their communities, deceive their parents and families, and risk their lives to become citizens of the caliphate. The adolescent craving for belonging, the conflicting messages from home and the state are relentlessly manipulated by IS and their recruiters. Whether or not these young women will be more at home with IS does not matter.

As Groen and Kranenberg point out in their work on an Islamist network in the Netherlands, “These women are responding not to sinister al-Qaeda recruiters but to self-generated motives, influenced by world events.”⁴⁸¹ Young women who in contrast to young Muslim men, feel a different kind of adolescent disenfranchisement make up the majority of women involved in these networks. They are groomed in the same way that young women are groomed by sexual predators but the grooming is veiled in *dawa* to make it appear less pernicious.⁴⁸² Young women learn repeatedly about the horrors facing Muslims globally, the injustices of Western political and

⁴⁷⁹ Anne Campbell, *The Girls in the Gang* 2nd Edition (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1991).

⁴⁸⁰ Maren Held Bjørgum, “Jihadi Brides: Why do Western Muslim Girls Join ISIS,” *Global Politics Review* 2, no. 2 (October 2016): 95.

⁴⁸¹ Janny Groen and Annieke Kranenberg, *Women Warriors for Allah: An Islamist Network in the Netherlands* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006). Groen and Kranenberg’s work is based on interviews with women members of the Hofstad network in the Netherlands, the group responsible for the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo Van Gogh in November 2004.

⁴⁸² “What is Sexual Grooming?,” *Think U Know*, <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/articles/what-is-sexual-grooming/> Accessed August 24, 2019.

cultural rule, and the erosion of Muslim belief and practice by secular society. For the teenage and young adult mind, this is heady stuff that expedites growing up, promises them autonomy (especially appealing in more traditional households), and, I would argue, enables them to remove themselves defiantly from societies with persistent, overt racist, anti-Muslim rhetoric and violence. When they leave their Western societies and households, they join a group, first within virtual reality and then in reality where they are insulated, elevated, and respected. Anti-Muslim hatred creates new recruits to the caliphate.

In leveraging empowerment, recruiters hid behind dramatic avatars ranging from the feminine to the strictly Islamic; they manipulated gendered popular culture, luring young women with the appeal of a dour, but noble and virtuous sorority.⁴⁸³ One of the most active Tumblr accounts of the 2014-15 period when IS recruitment of young women peaked offered a narrative of the romanticized journey into Raqqa, Syria (IS territory) and also referenced the connections made on social media between young women before and during their travel. On this Tumblr, “Bird of Jannah,” whose Tumblr account was called, “Diary of a Muhajirah,” wrote:

Umm Tamīm al Britaniyah - she’s my best friend that I met two years back on Facebook. We always discussed matters about *jihad* and *hijrah*, and Al Hamdulillah a month after she made her hijrah, I made mine. We promised to meet each other in Raqqah.

About 9am, the bus arrived. I hugged the house owner and other sisters and thanked them for everything.⁴⁸⁴

I looked at the bus, the word “Dawla Islamiyah al Iraq wa Shaam” was written on it.

"Shams, you are about to witness big things very soon." My heart whispered.

⁴⁸³ See Figures 2 and 3. See also: Galit M. Ben-Israel, “Telling a Story Via Tumblr Analytics: Europe’s Young Muslim Female Attraction to ISIS,” *International Annals of Criminology* 56, (2018): 57.

⁴⁸⁴ @birdofjannah, “Diary of a Muhajirah,” *Tumblr*, 2015.

As usual I sat next to window, thanking Allāh over and over again.⁴⁸⁵

Her Tumblr also contains feminized images from inside IS territory including study materials in pink folders and ID cards with roses blooming against the flag of the Islamic State:

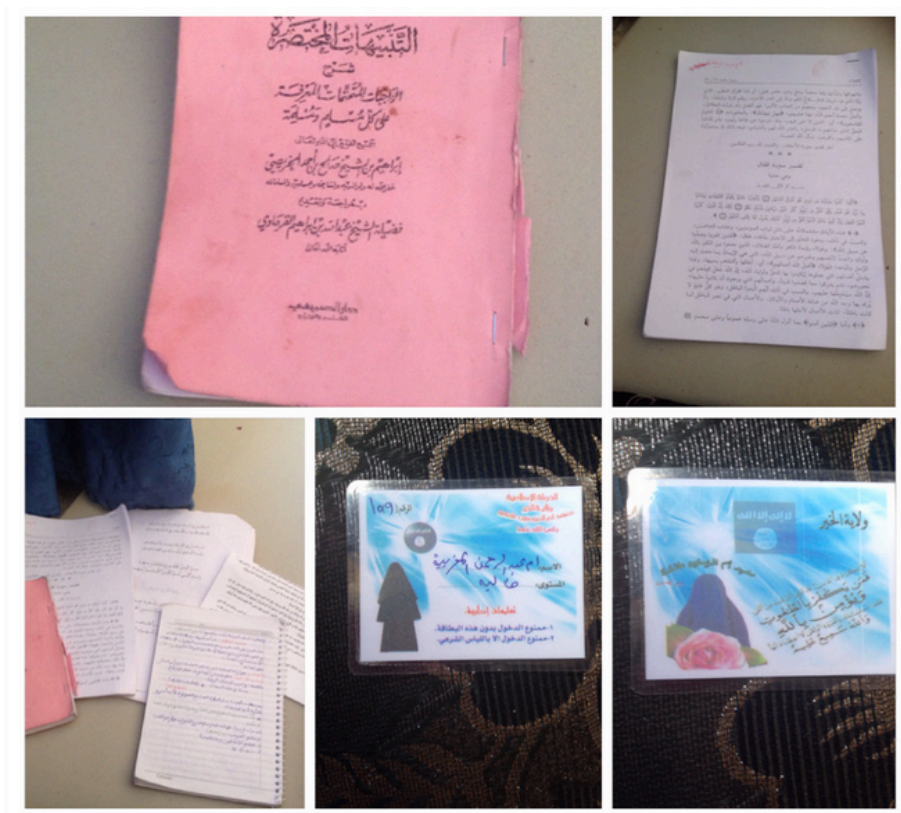


Fig. 28. Images from the Tumblr account “Diary of a Muhajirah. The images feature a study guide for Qur’an and an ID card.⁴⁸⁶

The materials are tidy, feminine, and give the appearance of an orderly society where roles and responsibilities are defined and controlled. The pink study materials and ID cards represent an

⁴⁸⁵ “Diary of a Muhajirah,” *Tumblr*, September 2014. (<https://web.archive.org/web/20150130220936/http://diary-of-a-muhajirah.tumblr.com/>). Accessed: September 10, 2020. See also: Suhartini Samsudin and Anitawati Mohd Lokman, “Women and Emotion: The Themes and Narratives of the ‘Diary of a Muhajirah’ Tumblr Page,” Paper, International Conference on Kansei Engineering and Emotion Research, 2018.

⁴⁸⁶ “Diary of a Muhajirah,” *Tumblr*, September 2014. (<https://web.archive.org/web/20150130220936/http://diary-of-a-muhajirah.tumblr.com/>). Accessed March 25, 2021.

identity that has already been created for them and that does not exist in the West except virtual communication and in person through Circles of Knowledge.

3.2 Salafism, Women, and the Islamic State

The second-half of the twentieth-century saw independence movements and the installation of secular, authoritarian governments in countries like Egypt, Algeria, Libya, and Syria, but it also saw an increasing movement of former colonial subjects out of newly independent nations and into the boundaries of their formal colonizers.⁴⁸⁷ This movement, precipitated by economic necessity (since the colonizer provided the infrastructure staffed by indigenous communities) was not always productive or successful. The ghettoization of large populations of the formerly colonized, especially in Parisian suburbs or in London's Brick Lane, cultivated localized strands of extremism which only burgeoned with the internet's array of transnational cyber communication platforms. The natural and expected outcome of such social arrangements, along with the preclusion of the formerly colonized from full citizenship, was a violent movement that contested the *status quo* of a Christian dominated culture, using Islam and violence as its vehicle. There have been some moderately successful revolts masquerading as terror attacks orchestrated and carried-out by Salafi-identifying perpetrators in Europe: the July

⁴⁸⁷ Andy J. Semotiuk, "France Struggles with its Immigrants in the Midst of National Security Concerns," *Forbes Magazine*, January 17, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/andyjsemotiuk/2018/01/17/france-struggles-with-its-immigrants-in-the-midst-of-national-security-concerns/#5fb3c305efc7>. Accessed March 10, 2021. Algerian immigrants to France are a particular challenge. North African, Muslim, and ghettoized in Parisian neighborhoods, they represent a challenge to integration and France's fiercely secular status. The eight-year Algerian War for Independence (1954-1962) is one of the most heavily memorialized and commented on moments in North African history and represented a brutal, bloody defeat for French colonizers. It was also during this prolonged war that women became agents in armed struggle against the colonizers. Algerian resistance used veiled women who would not be susceptible to the same scrutiny as men to perform attacks against French interests. See: Assia Djebar, *Women of Algiers in their Apartments* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1980). and Meredith Turshen, "Algerian Women in the Liberation Struggle and the Civil War: From Active Participants to Passive Victims?" *Social Research* 69, No. 3: 895.

7, 2005 (7/7) London bombings, the 2015 massacre at the *Charlie Hebdo* offices, and the grisly carnage left at the Bataclan night club in Paris later that year.⁴⁸⁸ These were “successful” in that they made pointed statements against the perceived decadence of European culture in contrast to Islamic, Salafi ideals, but they did little to advance any European society toward Islamization. This statement offered a convincing alternative to life in the West for young European and American Muslims: to seek out and populate a tangible caliphate in a Muslim-majority country. Ironically, in the case of Iraq, the US and its European allies toppled a secular government, doing the heavy lifting first for Al-Qaeda in Iraq and then IS to establish itself as an outpost for *Dar al-Islam* (The House of Islam) in the chaos of *Dar al-Harb* (The House of War).⁴⁸⁹ The appeal of Salafi Islam is fairly straight forward: it is an alternative to the chaos of modern life, a longing to return to a simpler time, a return to that most ubiquitous of historical living terms, the “authentic.” The nostalgic desire to engage authenticity in history represents a temporary distraction, escapism from a chaotic day, month, or period. For most, it is not a life-altering change, but for many young Muslims, Salafism is a permanent, nostalgically viable vehicle to being spiritually and socially secure and satisfied.

⁴⁸⁸ Salafi refers to someone who subscribes to the interpretation of Islam called Salafism. It is closely linked to Wahhabism. It emerged from the writings of Sayid Qutb and refers to a strict interpretation of Islam. The name refers to the first three generations of Muslims (*salaf*) and endeavors to strip away what it sees as *bid'a* (innovation) from the practice of Islam. It is specific to Sunni Islam. France is perhaps the European country that has suffered the greatest insurgence of Salafi-led terror attacks. France’s refusal to grant full citizenship rights to its former colonial citizens, particularly in the case of the *hijab*, has made it a productive target for Salafi groups. In the case of *Charlie Hebdo*, the debate over France’s officially secular identity with a free press was met with gratuitous violence in response to equally gratuitous and obscene caricatures of French Muslims. The mutual provocation between the two groups continues to destabilize French security and identity. *Hebdo*’s own manifesto states: “It’s a rag that has nothing to lose in the afterlife for the laudably simple reason that there is no afterlife.” Its explicit subscription to “New” Atheism is not only provocative but also anathema to Salafi objectives in France. For examples of *Charlie Hebdo*’s work, see: <https://charliehebdo.fr/en/>.

⁴⁸⁹ *Dar al-Harb* v *Dar al-Islam*. “*Dar al-Harb*” is the “House of War” where non-Muslims and some Muslims reside. For those in the Islamic State, there is a religious obligation to leave *Dar al-Harb* for *Dar al-Islam*, which are the lands of the caliphate and those populated by a Muslim majority. It is a medieval conceptualization of the world and one re-adopted by contemporary Islamists to illustrate a dichotomy between the secular and religious worlds in the advent of colonialism and secular rule.

The Islamic State is a Salafi-jihadist organization. The “jihadist” is particularly important to this descriptor because Salafis, although ultra conservative, are not inherently violent or any more prone to violence than any other Sunni group. They are Islamists, but they are not (in keeping with the majority of Islamists) inherently violent. Rather they focus on political reform in favor ultimately of a true embodiment of an Islamic state. They do not, as a majority, condone violence. *Salaf*, in Arabic, means “ancient one” and is one of many names for the earliest companions of the Prophet Muhammad.⁴⁹⁰ Muslims regularly strive to live by *sunnah* (the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad), modeling their social structures and behaviors on the way of the Prophet Muhammad. Salafi ideology contends that Muslims strayed far from *sunnah* and aspire to live lives as in close approximation to those of the early community. As Giles Kepel explains, “Salafists originally are supposedly not violent, they are not advocating the revolt against one who holds power, against the powers that be. They are calling for re-Islamization at the daily level.”⁴⁹¹ Organically, the Salafi movement is rather innocuous, the rough equivalent of the Amish in their desire to remove the impediments that modern materialism pose to faithful service of God. This does not, contrary to popular interpretation, mean that they regularly or faithfully invoke violence as a means to an end.

Salafism originated in the mid-20th century with the Egyptian intellectual and Islamist, Sayid Qutb (1906-1966), a product of the Muslim Brotherhood (1928) and postcolonial Egypt, whose many tracts on the subject of returning his home country of Egypt back from the decadence of secular rule, formed the underpinnings of political violence as a viable component of Salafism. Sayid Qutb, before inking the cornerstone of Salafi belief, was Western educated,

⁴⁹⁰ Giles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003), 20.

⁴⁹¹ Bruce Livesy, “The Salafist Movement,” *PBS*, January 25, 2005, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/front/special/sala.html>. Accessed August 24, 2019.

admired the West, but was shocked disenchanted by the West's postwar materialism. He rejected the Renaissance, Darwin, and Freud, accusing them of contributing to Western decadence over the latter half of the millennia and found intellectual and spiritual refuge in the writing of the medieval Islamic scholar, Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328).⁴⁹² Ibn Taymiyya was a literalist, insisting that the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* were to be taken literally. He also emphasized the social and spiritual divide between Muslims and non-Muslims.⁴⁹³ After aligning himself with Ibn Taymiyya's writing and jurisprudence, Qutb accused fellow Muslims of living in the *jahaliyyah* (the period of ignorance before the revelation of Islam). In his seminal work, *Milestones* (1964), Qutb wrote: "that the world had reached a crisis point: The human race had lost touch with nature. Man's inspiration, intelligence and morality were degenerating. Sexual relations were deteriorating 'to a level lower than the beasts.' And he laid blame at the doors of Judaism and Christianity, arguing that these faiths had strayed from God's true path. Qutb concluded that only through Islam would humankind be saved from its alienated state."⁴⁹⁴ Here indeed are the underpinnings for the Salafi animosity toward Jews and Christians, compounded by colonialism and the incursion of the State of Israel into Muslim-majority countries in the Levant. An *umma* already suffering from centuries of increasingly despotic and destabilizing dynastic rule looked to the possibility of an Islamic renaissance, embodied in groups like Hassan al-Banna's Muslim Brotherhood. Qutb is still cited and alluded to by contemporary *jihadists*; despite the intellectual arguments being watered down with blood and bravado, the roots of contemporary Islamist rhetoric begin with Ibn Taymiyya and evolved with Qutb. During the latter part of the twentieth-

⁴⁹² Naser Ghobadzeh and Shahram Akbarzadeh, "Sectarianism and the prevalence of 'othering' in Islamic thought," *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (May 2015): 693.

⁴⁹³ "Ibn Taymiyyah," *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e959>.

⁴⁹⁴ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones* (Cairo: Kazi Publications, 1964), 10. *Milestones* was published in 1964, two years before Qutb was executed in Egypt for fomenting opposition to Nasser's government through the Muslim Brotherhood. The work itself is considered to be one of the formative texts for contemporary radicalization being used in tandem with the work of Ibn Taymiyya by groups like al-Qaeda and IS.

century, as colonial rule was upended by independence movements and secular authoritarian rule supported by Western governments took over much of the Muslim world, the minority Salafis gained more traction especially with their ideas of a violent, rather than spiritual *jihad* as an authoritative and effective way to force change and gain traction.⁴⁹⁵

Qutb's body of work represents not only a prolific archive on the subject of Islamic beliefs and thought in a decadent form, but it also remains the most important component of contemporary Islamism in the form of Salafism. For Qutb, the Islamic state "is to be founded on the *Qur'an* as its constitution; on *shura* [consultation] as the method of governing; and on a ruler who is bound by the teachings of Islam and the will of the people. Such a state would have a just and efficient government, consistent with the traditions of society, and would, therefore, be able to ensure its people's welfare."⁴⁹⁶ Indeed, these sentiments are all articulated in IS's propaganda, appeal, and social media interactions, arguing that IS is the *true* "welfare state," unlike England or the United States. He also has strong opinions about the role of women in the model Islamic state, attributing the most obvious cause of *jahaliyyah* is the movement of women outside of the home and the slackening of relations (especially sexual) between men and women. Qutb objects to the movement of women outside the home as co-breadwinners as it focuses her attention on material production (an adjunct cause of *jahaliyyah*) and not on what he refers to as, "the manufacture of humanity."⁴⁹⁷ Half-a-century later, Qutb's injunction is spelled-out in "Women of the Islamic State: A manifesto on women by the *Al-Khansa* Brigade."⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁵ Kepel, *Trail of Political Islam*, 35.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁴⁹⁷ William E. Shepard, *Sayyid Qutb and Islamic Activism*, (London: E.J. Brill, 1996).

⁴⁹⁸ "Women of the Islamic State: A manifesto on women by the *Al-Khansa* Brigade." Trans. by Charlie Winter, Quilliam Foundation, February 2015.

The *Al-Khansa* Brigade is a group of women charged with the duty of cultivating recruits, maintaining the strict gender barriers in and outside of the domestic sphere, and enforcing the social and legal codes that pertain to women in the Islamic State. It also takes aim at the materialism to which Qutb ascribed the return of Muslims to the *jahiliyya*, referring to the “Arabian Peninsula,” meaning Saudi Arabia, in particular, whose gross materialism and exploitation of Mecca and Medina is the subject of widespread criticism even outside of Islamist circles. Its manifesto is only available in Arabic, a deliberate maneuver on the part of the Islamic State to make it accessible to its primary audience: Arabic-literate women. It is primarily for propaganda, drawing upon Qutb’s writing, and was only recently translated into English in 2015 by the Quilliam Foundation. The manifesto outlines three main points for its existence:

1. To clarify the role of Muslim women and the life which is desired for them, that which will make them happy in this world and hereafter.
2. To clarify the realities of life and the hallowed existence of women in the Islamic State, in Iraq, and in al-Sham, and to refute the rumors that detractors advance against it, using evidence support and experienced by women living there.
3. To expose the falsity of the *tawheed* in the Arabian Peninsula [Saudi Arabia], which claims to be unique in protecting the women and preserving her rights and religion.

If you ask any Muslim, male or female, on the reason for the choice of this country as a comparison with the Islamic State, I say, thanks be to God the highest: It is not a secret from those who know expertly that the Arabian Peninsula has a deceptive Islamic model that is intended to be an example for Muslims, not only regarding women, but also economics, education and politics. The genuine article will become clear from the imitator, by God’s leave.⁴⁹⁹

The most Qutbian chapter in the manifesto describes “How the soldiers of Iblis [Satan] keep women from Paradise [*jannah*].”⁵⁰⁰ The manifesto argues that the West has undermined

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., 12.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., 20.

women's place in the divine landscape by encouraging her to leave the home to work, to learn, and to gain an abundance of secular knowledge unnecessary to live faithfully. "Woman, as our best thinkers delineated in the past, if they learn to read and write, about their religion and *fiqh* (law), they become part of this worldly knowledge. This is what is appropriate and appointed for her, the job that the Creator ordained for her. Hence, there is no need for her to flit here and there to get degrees and so on, just so she can prove that her intelligence is greater than a man's."⁵⁰¹ Women's education, which *al-Khansa* claims that IS endorses and supports, is to be limited to religious schooling and imparted upon their "cubs," the future generation of caliphal citizens and *jihadis*.⁵⁰² Education is also to be limited, arguably as a measure of control, to the ages of 7-15, with marriage being permitted as young as nine years of age, thereby further truncating the ability of women to have intellectual agency outside of some literacy in Arabic, in the Qur'an, and knowledge of the basics of Islam as interpreted by Salafism.⁵⁰³ This robust piece of propaganda is not meant to signal a life of leisure but a life of living fully within Allah's purpose, holistically, and Islamically. As Twitter user, @UmmKhatab__, one of the more prolific propagandists on Twitter, tweets to her followers and potential recruits:

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., 21.

⁵⁰² In a chilling shift in propaganda, IS began referring to children in the caliphate as "Cubs" and deploying young boys, barely old enough to hold a weapon, to execute "enemies of the Islamic State." The indoctrination of children into such brutality was particularly disruptive and unsettling.

⁵⁰³ Ibid, 22. The age of marriage is set by the age of the Prophet's favorite wife, A'isha, at the time of her marriage to the Prophet Muhammad. In some Muslim-majority countries, nine is still the legal age, although over the centuries, and especially in the colonial and postcolonial decades, the age is typically older and coincides with menstruation. Arguments against the age of marriage being nine relate to practical issues of human development over the millennia including the average lifespan of a person on the Arabian Peninsula in the 7th century being significantly shorter than 2018 and the equally plausible argument that betrothal to the Prophet Muhammad occurred at age 9 for A'isha and *not* consummation of the relationship.



Fig. 29. Tweet by Aqsa Mahmood (@UmmKhatab_, also known as “Al-Britaniyaa.”) (Translation: The Briton (f.): “You know what me and the sisters here in Syria/Lebanon all had great families and we were all in university or going to university but like pilgrimage is a duty.”⁵⁰⁴)

These soundbites pulled from now-suspended Twitter accounts are as close to non-native speakers of Arabic will get to the manifesto written for women in the caliphate without aid of translated materials. They are the “Cliff’s Notes Version” of the *al-Khansa* manifesto but still have a powerful impact on young women and neatly encapsulate some of the appeal of the Salafism for young women not inclined to perform *hijra* to Syria. On the surface, the emphasis on domesticity and abandoning secular higher education seems that it would appeal to women seeking a passive lifestyle. In reality, *al-Khansa*, as is life in the Islamic State, is a difficult and deliberate life not suited for passive or frivolous actors, nor is the adoption of Salafism outside of the Islamic State.

For some Muslim women struggling to define their own citizenship in secular, multicultural, rapidly evolving Western societies, some fostering a state level contempt for religion, the appeal of conservatism, a straightforward, dogmatic approach to religion, and one that extends into social interactions, is appealing. Salafism is Islam without the cultural baggage

⁵⁰⁴ Aqsa Mahmood (@albritaniyaa), “You know what me and the sisters here in Syria (*Shaam* is the name of the Mediterranean region of Syria during the earliest caliphate) all had great families and we were all in uni (university) or going to uni but like (*Yani* is an Egyptian-style colloquialism, a conversational pause that is articulated, “like” or “uh” to English-speakers) pilgrimage (*hijra* refers to the specific pilgrimage or flight of the early Muslim community from Mecca to Medina and return) is obligatory (*wajib* is an Islamic concept that refers to those things that are incumbent upon all Muslims to obey and tasks to perform.) Twitter, September 8, 2014.

or ethnic enclaves serving as a barrier to admission or immersion by converts. In her ethnographic work on Salafi women in Britain, researcher Annabel Inge quotes school teacher and convert to Islam, Wafa, on Salafism's appeal: "[It was] straightforward,' she said, clicking her fingers. 'No mucking about... [Salafism] had an answer for everything. It's just as simple as 'hear and obey'[clicks fingers] – That straightforwardness is such a... aaaaah,' she heaved a sigh of relief. 'I don't need to think ... don't need to make it complicated... I've got a set way to understand [the Qur'an] ... It's given me that certainty.'"⁵⁰⁵ Wafa was raised Christian in England and converted to Islam at 14. She represents a demographic of young, non-Muslim women who find common ground with born-Muslims in seeking meaning and structure in an increasingly ethically manic landscape. "Salafi teachings actually encourage followers to understand their journey into Salafism as a radical identity renegotiation."⁵⁰⁶ Inge observes that women's affiliation with Salafism is a completely immersive experience that alters their complete identity from personality to appearance to social relationships, making converts out of white women born Muslims and women who convert directly from largely Christian backgrounds to Salafism. These women are known as "total converts."⁵⁰⁷ Indeed, the dogmatic as well as aesthetic (wearing *niqaab* is a common, but not absolute, signifier of adherence to Salafism) aspects of conversion are immersive. Not only are there rules for dress, there are also rules for using the toilet, eating, drinking, and socializing. To convert to Salafism is an immense shift for Western-born and West-immersed women: it bypasses any iteration of moderate Islam including Sufism, which is why the Salafi represent only a fraction of the community.

⁵⁰⁵ Annabel Inge, "Extreme Islam: What makes a young British woman turn to Salafism?" *The Independent*, November 26, 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/young-british-salafi-women-a7436611.html>. Accessed September 10, 2021.

⁵⁰⁶ Inge, *The Making of a Salafi Muslim Woman*, 148.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 63. Inge cites Brenda Brasher's study of fundamentalist women referring to converts as "total converts" as a means of encapsulating the entirety and submersive nature of negotiating an Islamic identity in the context of Salafism.

Within these conversions are two strands, which I have alluded to earlier in this work: those Muslims who are “born” into Islam and Muslims who convert, commonly during their teenage years or early adulthood with overlapping experiences that lead them to Salafism. For Muslim women who were born into Islam, their pre-Salafi religious life is often described as being permeated by *bid’a* or innovation, cultural accoutrements that are a natural byproduct of the mixing of populations within empires.⁵⁰⁸ These women “point out that the Islam they had been taught by their parents was infused with cultural innovations rooted in their countries of origin. The women later became convinced that these rituals and prohibitions were not from the Qur’an or *Sunnah*, and consequently adjusted their practices.”⁵⁰⁹ Women who converted from outside of the *umma* from Christianity or agnostic backgrounds were not burdened by the infiltration of *bid’a* into Islam. The appeal of Salafism is in its apparent authority and inclusivity. Both groups overlap in their backgrounds and conversion processes which means that Salafis are surprisingly diverse. The women come from backgrounds where religion was either haphazard, casual, or non-existent. Salafism rejects the Sunni “tendency...to take jurisprudence rulings only from the *madhab* (school of law) associated with their country of origin,” thereby diluting and corrupting the purest form of Islam as well as alienating those converts to Islam who do not share the same ethnic space as their local co-religionists. The spectacular violence of the September 11th attacks, two wars, and subsequent organized attacks like the 7/7 London bombings provoked not only introspection among Muslim communities in the United States and England, but also among non-believers. Rates of conversion, particularly among women following September 11th were particularly high. As one Muslim leader told Yvonne Haddad, “Not even a billion dollars to support *dawa* would have made it possible to reach as many Americans with the message of

⁵⁰⁸ *Bid’a* is roughly translated as “innovation” and indicates a deviation from the accepted practice in Islam.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.

Islam.”⁵¹⁰ American conversion to Islam after September 11th was precipitated by the attacks. When the dust literally settled, many Americans sought out more information on Islam and Muslims.⁵¹¹

Women who identify as or convert to a Salafi identity appear to be in their teens or early 20s, a time of changes and experimentation with identity, rebellion against cultural norms imposed upon them by transnational communities, immigrant parents, and/or from the broader culture.⁵¹² Young women compete with multiple overlapping areas of cultural saturation at home, school, and in the general public all jockeying for dominance. Salafism offers young women in these circumstances something to tether themselves and their identities to in the midst of adolescent and social upheaval. Recognizing this, Salafi entities encourage what Inge calls, “Circles of Knowledge.”⁵¹³ These circles are informal, small gatherings where women who have gained a specific degree of Islamic knowledge impart their knowledge onto young or new charges in their spiritual care. The relationship is that of a teacher to a student, creating a comfortable atmosphere for the transmission of knowledge and also one that reflects the domestic responsibilities incumbent on young Salafi women. Salafists have crafted their own *isnad* or chain of transmission in which the teacher embodies the *sunnah* (tradition of the Prophet) and who has come to become part of the chain through lengthy study with intellectual authorities approved of by Salafis, such as at the University of Medina in Saudi Arabia. Here, the Salafis appear to deviate from the IS critique of Saudi Arabia. No woman in the Islamic State would be permitted to travel abroad to study Islam, but the University of Medina remains at the

⁵¹⁰ Yvonne Haddad, “The Post-9/11 *Hijab* as Icon,” *Sociology of Religion* 68, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 255.

⁵¹¹ Omar Sacirbey, “Conversion to Islam One Result of Post-9/11 Curiosity,” *Religion News Service*, August 24, 2011, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/post-911-islam-converts_n_935572. Accessed March 25, 2021.

⁵¹² Inge, *Making a Salafi Woman*, 25

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, 100.

forefront of the transmission of Islamic knowledge as the city that gave refuge to the Prophet and his revelations. Credibility is given to “scholars” who can demonstrate some familiarity with Arabic. This credentialing is done informally by the non-Arabic speaking community who recognize Arabic the sacred language of the *Qur’an* and thus imbued with power. The advent of the internet and other forms of wireless communication is a boon for *dawa* and the recruitment of new Muslims, Salafis and otherwise, but it has challenged to Salafism. The semi-private world of the internet enabled Twitter accounts and blogs to contest the authority of the traditionally educated. Competing, virtual “Circles of Knowledge,” other channels of women sharing knowledge, undermine and corrupt the intent of Salifism.

The cozy appeal of “Circles of Knowledge” and bonding through sisterhood was disrupted by the use of Twitter, Kik, Facebook, Tumblr, and an array of other social media sites with greater reach and immediate access than the methods of knowledge transmission favored by Salafists. While these “Circles of Knowledge became fertile grounds for recruitment for IS, curious adolescents, young women are not prepared to out themselves as favoring a stricter, more controlled religiosity, and women without access to religious instruction in person all were vulnerable to the Islamic State’s aggressive avatars of scholarship on the internet. Indeed, a cursory search of something as simple as, “Salafi Mosques” will provide you with websites with a gratuitous use of bold fonts and fire graphics, more about overwhelming seekers with knowledge than any rigorous scholarship. Concise and catchy communication in this age of screens proved essential for religions to compete for young adherents, a fact that IS, with its population of tech savvy adolescents and 20-somethings, capitalized on with great success.⁵¹⁴ On

⁵¹⁴ Gary R. Bunt, *iMuslim: Rewiring the House of Islam*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009). See also: Aleks Krotoski, “What effect has the internet had on religion?,” *The Guardian*, April 16, 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2011/apr/17/untangling-web-aleks-krotoski-religion>. Accessed September 10, 2020.

social media, “the group’s narrative portrays [IS] as an agent of social change, the true apostle of sovereign faith, a champion of its own perverse notions of social justice, and a collection of avengers bent on settling the accounts for the perceived suffering of others.”⁵¹⁵ Individuals within this group “are radicalized by personal grievances and by identity-group grievances as conveyed by mass media, rumor, or the testimony of others.”⁵¹⁶ The insularity of the Salafi movement and its accessibility and the online savvy of its IS-aligned membership, offered a sense of comradeship and security for young women. A range of women have found security, friendship, and community with other like-minded women, had offered stability, security, and, as far as emotions can be conveyed through cyberspace, seemingly deep reserves of empathy. As one sexual abuse survivor told *Guardian* journalist, Deeyah Khan, “a sense of comradeship with pious young women helped her feel safe and protected; that her status as a mother was honored: that it gave her life a sense of purpose. Eventually she left, saying the experience left her feeling spiritually hollow. But for women like her, dealing with *exclusion* (emphasis mine), pain, and disaffection, the Islamic State is only a click away.”⁵¹⁷ IS offers stability in crisis, trauma, and adolescence.

3.3 “U dnt hav 2 pay 4 ANYTHING if u r wife of a martyr”: Recruitment ⁵¹⁸

In a 2014 issue of the magazine, *Dabiq*, a magazine produced by IS for recruitment, one IS member argued that no Muslim should be living in the West, “independent” of IS and called

⁵¹⁵ Loken and Zelenz, *Explaining Extremism*, 19.

⁵¹⁶ Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, “Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways Toward Terrorism, *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 417.

⁵¹⁷ Khan, “Isis women.”

⁵¹⁸ Nabeelah Jaffer, “The secret world of Isis brides: ‘U dnt hav 2 pay 4 ANYTHING if ur wife of a martyr’,” *The Guardian*, June 24, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/24/isis-brides-secret-world-jihad-western-women-syria>. Accessed September 10, 2020.

for Muslims to join and “redeem themselves in death.”⁵¹⁹ The majority of women are under 30 years-old and range from 19-33. They encompass women born and raised in Muslim communities with Muslim identities to women who converted to Islam in the decade after September 11th, 2001. These are women spent their formative years during the post-September 11th decade with two wars in Muslim-majority countries, along with a global rise in Islamophobia and hate crimes. The distancing from the U.S. was compounded with the cycling through of three global Islamic organizations (Al-Qaeda, Al-Qaeda in Iraq, and the Islamic State) promoting *jihad* and the message that the West was using unilateral violence against Muslims in service to its own interests. The advent of social media and a generation of internet savvy entrepreneurs and activists meant that the boundaries of nation-states and the definition and parameters of citizenship were forever altered.⁵²⁰ Furthermore, as *Guardian* journalist Nabeela Jaffer discovered in her interviews with IS women, they “struggled with ambiguity or disorder—in theology, in identity, and in life.”⁵²¹

The 550 women IS indoctrinated and entranced and who then emigrated to the caliphate in Syria call themselves, *muhajirah/muhajirat* (pilgrims), denoting their affiliation not only with Salafism, but also their allegiance to the Islamic State. Women, “by leaving the West to perform *hijra*... demonstrate that they see a superiority of IS’s ideology over the Western worldview, providing important gratification and a significant morale booster for jihadist fighters.”⁵²² *Hijra* in the early days of Islam was a mass-migration of new Muslims from Mecca, a hostile city dominated by pagan tribes, to Medina, a city of sanctuary. The emphasis on this language is to

⁵¹⁹ Jaffer. The city of Nabiq is located in Syria and is particularly significant to IS due to its proximity to the Turkish border (approximately 10 miles) and because it features into the Islamic apocalyptic prophecies as the site of a major battle between Believers and Unbelievers.

⁵²⁰ Bunt, *iMuslim*, 57.

⁵²¹ Jaffer, “Secret World of Isis Brides.”

⁵²² Anita Perešin and Alberto Cerrone, “The Western *Muhajirat* of ISIS,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 38, no. 7 (2015), 500.

relate the movement of Muslims from the non-Muslim “West” to the sanctuary of the Muslim “East.” Inside the caliphate, traditional Arabic titles of “*Abu*” and “*Umm*,” “Father” and “Mother” emphasize gender roles but also the reproduction of the caliphate and the household as the nexus of society. The use of Arabic and Islamic terms is laden with symbology, allowing contemporary Muslims in the Salafi movement to assume the mantle of the early companions. By constructing this ancient kinship inside of the contemporary *umma* with those in the early one, “*muhajirah*” offers legitimacy to the movement and draws boundaries around the community within the *umma*. In sum, it dovetails neatly with the Salafi ideology to which IS belongs.

An admittedly inadequate term (based on a narrow understanding of the complex motivations of women who travel to join the Islamic State) women who are successfully recruited are called “Jihadi Bride” or “ISIS Bride.”⁵²³ This patriarchal label to describe women who join the Islamic State assumes that women join IS to fulfill some kind of romantic fantasy. This term coined by the Western media diminishes the significance of the sincere faithfulness of many recruits, their agency, and the sophistication of IS as an organization.⁵²⁴ It essentializes the motivations of all women who join IS, creating a monolithic entity that fails to fully articulate women’s roles and motivations for joining the organization. Mia Bloom argues that women recruited are simply “baby making factories” which is a crude and reductionist view of women’s role within IS.⁵²⁵ IS is fixated on producing human capital either through slavery, reproduction,

⁵²³ Azadeh Moaveni, “‘Jihadi bride’ doesn’t fit: we need a new language for female militants,” *The Guardian*, February 26, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/feb/26/jihadi-bride-shamima-begum-female-militants>. Accessed December 10, 2020.

⁵²⁴ Various iterations of “Jihadi Bride,” “ISIL Bride,” and “ISIS Bride,” are used throughout the media coverage of women joining the Islamic State (IS). An ongoing argument is how to label female militants without sensationalizing being reductive about their relative youth and/or the level of their involvement in the Islamic State. The “Jihadi bride,” label invokes a kind of passivity and obedience that is in many respects false, as women are actively engaged in the mission of the Islamic State and are not passive actors.

⁵²⁵ Bloom, *Bombshell*, 95.

and/or recruitment, but it is also building a society constructed on what they believe is demanded of the faithful, and that means marriage and children.⁵²⁶ Women in this caliphate are living a particular understanding of their *deen* (custom) which does not solely revolve around reproduction of babies but also of Islamic knowledge, kinship ties, and the management of a diverse region thanks to the emigration of foreign fighters, including women.

IS propaganda materials are prolific, polished, and represent a sophisticated use of Western stylization to appeal to Western audiences. IS's propagandizing replaced the clandestine release of a VHS tape or YouTube upload of an al-Qaeda release and, in respect to violence *and* propaganda, IS has replaced al-Qaeda. Tape recordings of Osama bin Laden now seem almost quaint compared to the lavish productions staged by IS. According to the Quilliam Foundation's report on the "Virtual Caliphate," the *official* IS social media accounts generate an average of 38.2 individual posts *every day*.⁵²⁷ This number, however, does not include the number of memes and other content developed by accounts that are not officially part of IS's "brand" nor does it include material shared between recruiters and their recruits via social media chat functions and apps. The images are sophisticated and clever, like the parody of a Cover Girl ad and the more typical IS "brand" in the second image:

⁵²⁶ Emily Parker, "Freeing Yazidi Women: Combating a 21st Century Slavery Revival Project," *The Wilson Center*, October 31, 2014, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/freeing-yazidi-women-combating-21st-century-slavery-revival-project>. Accessed August 24, 2019.

⁵²⁷ Charlie Winter, "Documenting the Virtual 'Caliphate': Understanding the Islamic State's Propaganda Strategy," Paper, (Washington, D.C.: Quilliam Foundation, 2015).

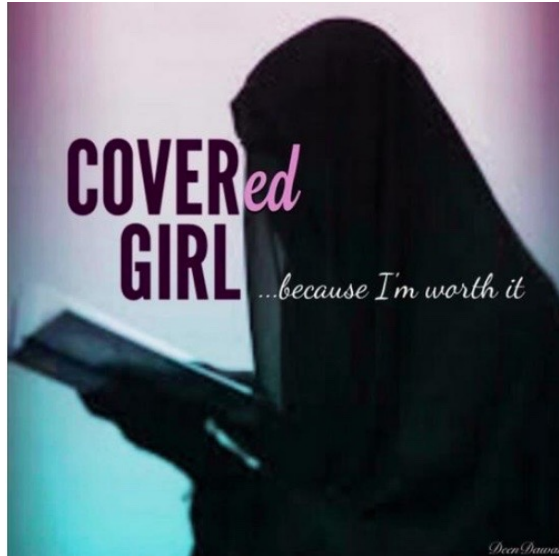


Fig. 30. Parody meme of Cover Girl ad posted by IS account for women.⁵²⁸



Fig. 31. Typical of the IS “brand” with its muted, foreboding colors, and capitalizing on the Western stereotype of Muslim women as an exotic, veiled woman. The premise of the advertising being membership in IS as a way to achieve status, beauty, and power. The landscape, green, lush, a reflection of Paradise and not dusty, dilapidated landscape of Syria or Iraq.⁵²⁹

⁵²⁸ @shakhabeet, *Telegram*, <https://t.me/shakhabeet>, c. 2016.

⁵²⁹ Brandee Leon, “Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State,” *The Strategy Bridge*, March 1, 2016, <https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2016/3/1/the-roles-women-play-al-qaeda-and-the-islamic-state>. Accessed August 23, 2019.

IS excels at propaganda, in visual messages, and in appropriating images for their usage: everything from the lions in a pride (above) to beautiful, veiled women superimposed on rolling green hillsides. They excise the green of the West as a stand-in for *Jannah* and the exoticism of stock image models as a promise as ubiquitous as that promised by Western consumerism: join IS, come to Syria, fulfill your *deen* **and** be a queen. The sophisticated media campaign is in every way a “Virtual Caliphate:” its utopian attributes only exist in cyberspace, is very much a deliberate media strategy to entice Western viewers. It is a kind of “soft launch” of the IS brand meant to generate interest in IS. The Tumblr blogs and Twitter accounts of women in the movement are a mix of romantic meme’s, teacups, and inspirational quotes that mask the realities of living in the caliphate, a war zone.⁵³⁰ A post on Tumblr has a photo of a teacup and a book open to a page from *Huckleberry Finn*, ironically the story of an American runaway, but used as a prop in a pro-IS post. It represents the supporter’s encouragement of her sisters, but it also represents the women’s inability to fully disengage from their Western backgrounds.⁵³¹ This image strategy evokes what Katherine Brown called, “naïve romanticism” in her analysis of IS for the BBC in 2014.⁵³² The women of IS are responsible for not only growing the caliphate through reproducing the next generation of *mujahideen*, they are responsible for “reproducing” more wives for the current generation of *mujahideen*.

Unlike previous violent Islamist groups, IS actively recruits women, and they do so out of necessity. In recruiting young women to join IS, members of the group seek out those who are

⁵³⁰ Caitlin Moscatello, “British ISIS Bride Reportedly Recruiting Women to Marry Islamic State Militants,” *Glamour*, September 8, 2014, <https://www.glamour.com/story/british-bride-of-isis-reported>. Accessed August 23, 2019.

⁵³¹ Al-Amriki (@alamriki), *Tumblr*, January and March 2016, <http://al-amriki.tumblr.com/>. The Tumblr, like most IS-related accounts, was removed by Tumblr.

⁵³² Katherine Brown, “Analysis: Why are Western women joining the Islamic State?” *BBC News*, October 6, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-29507410>. Accessed September 10, 2019.

isolated and adrift.⁵³³ American and British women are the most effective recruiters due to their intimacy with Western culture and English being their native tongue. Some, like Aqsa Mahmood, achieve a degree of online notoriety for their bravado as well as their ability to draw new recruits.⁵³⁴ This process replicates the “Queen Bee” social dynamic that Western women are familiar with in their immediate social orbits and also in popular culture.⁵³⁵ Young women who are already on the periphery of their social and religious groups and/or who lack strong maternal support, flock to the virtual persona of the “Queen Bee” who draws them into her world.⁵³⁶ One of the most well-known examples of this “Queen Bee” is Tumblr user “Al-Amriki,” a still anonymous American woman who was 19 at the time of this post in 2016. “Al-Amriki” clutters her Tumblr with stylized images of *jihad*, weapons, and cups of tea all presented through a soft, ethereal filter. Her Tumblr is a manic pastel scrapbook and captures the essence of the adolescent mind and the young women who have joined the Islamic State.

⁵³³ Callimachi, “ISIS and the Lonely Young American.”

⁵³⁴ Moscatello, “British ISIS Bride Recruiting.” Aqsa Mahmood is believed to be the source of the radicalization of Sharmeena Begum and her three friends in early 2015. One of the three girls Tweeted to Aqsa, “Follow me so I can dm you back.”

⁵³⁵ Rosalind Wiseman, *Queen Bees and Wannabes: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends, and the New Realities of Girl World* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2011).

⁵³⁶ Callimachi, “ISIS and the Lonely Young American.”

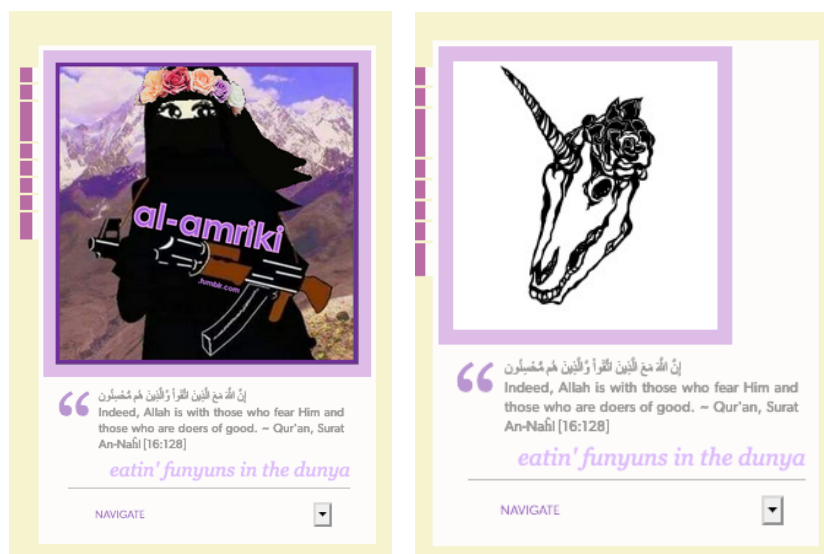


Fig. 32. Userpics taken from Al-Amriki’s Tumblr from January and March 2016, respectively. Her tagline, “eatin’ funyuns in the dunya (the mortal world)” speaks to both her American and Muslim identities. The background of her photo may be Afghanistan as many of her meme’s refer to Osama bin Ladin and Anwar al-Maliki, leaders of al-Qaeda. The second photo, which is unusual, speaks to her age and adolescent status and seems to be in opposition to her identity as a woman prepared for jihad.⁵³⁷

These social media accounts used for recruitment are also especially narcissistic, a boon for groups like IS, with social media encouraging the cultivation of a more explicitly narcissistic culture and generation. As one of Hoda Muthana’s friends pointed out, before the 20-year-old co-ed from Alabama fled to join IS in Syria, she was two separate personalities in life and in cyberspace: in reality she was quiet, distant, and adrift in a religious and conservative region. Online, she could reinvent herself as devout, confident, and popular without self-conscious vulnerability.⁵³⁸ Recruiters and recruits become part of a cyclical reproduction of narcissistic behavior and are finally, and most importantly, perhaps for the first time in their own lives, they

⁵³⁷ @al-Amriki Tumblr, November 2015.

⁵³⁸ Ellie Hall, “Gone Girl: An Interview with an American ISIS,” *Buzzfeed News*, April 17, 2015, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/elliehall/gone-girl-an-interview-with-an-american-in-isis#.heGXm80KZ>. Accessed September 30, 2020.

are able to achieve the dream of being a “Queen Bee” in their own right. They are the dominant, influential, and admired in a community that accepts them wholly and gives them social and political power, aspects of their current lives that are either lacking or non-existent in their communities and countries.

Studies of the social media presences of women who successfully join IS note that women consistently “reveal their alienation from their host ... and even from diaspora communities.”⁵³⁹ They are ethnically and socially diverse, but the one element they all have in common is that they are alienated to some degree from their communities.⁵⁴⁰ They have deep interests in Islam, but despite the number of hours they may spend on YouTube, Kik, TikTok, Twitter, Skyping with more “knowledgeable” contemporaries, or Islamic apps they may download, their knowledge of Islam is, at best, superficial, their understanding of the conflict limited.⁵⁴¹ They are part of what Peresin and Cerrone call a “jihadi girl power subculture” one that could easily be limited to the boundaries of cyberspace, but also evolved into occupying real space in Syria and Iraq, with some women occupying both.⁵⁴² This notion of “jihadi girl power” is also echoed by Nabeelah Jaffer in her interviews with IS women, including one called “Umm Kulthum,” Jaffer notes that, “for all her hostility to the west, her western education had helped to shape her. Like the other women, she used the language of ‘human rights’ and ‘girl power.’ She shared stories of women in *niqabs*, with weapons, charging into battle.”⁵⁴³ These are women who

⁵³⁹ Peresin and Cerrone, “The Western *Muhajirat of ISIS*,” 500.

⁵⁴⁰ Peresin and Cerrone “The Western *Muhajirat of ISIS*,” 500.

⁵⁴¹ Peresin and Cerrone, “The Western *Muhajirat of ISIS*,” 500.

⁵⁴² Peresin and Cerrone, “The Western *Muhajirat of ISIS*,” 503.

⁵⁴³ Jaffer, “Secret world of Isis brides.” The name, “Umm Kulthum” belongs to both the famous Egyptian singer of the 20th century and to one of the first converts to Islam. She fled to Medina to the Prophet Muhammad’s protection claiming that she could not live faithfully among polytheists in Mecca. Soon after her arrival, the Prophet received a new revelation: “O you who believe! When believing women come to you as emigrants, examine them; Allah knows best as to their faith, then if you ascertain that they are true believers, send them not back to the disbelievers. They are not lawful for the disbelievers nor are the disbelievers lawful for them. But we give them (disbelievers) that which they have spent (on their dower). (*Qur'an* 60:10) The name is a clever and strategic reference to one of

came of age listening to the Spice Girls and the funneling of second wave feminism into girlhood, so it is not surprising that the language is demonstrative of the conflict of identity and the dislocation that the women drawn into IS feel can be remedied through joining IS, but it fails to do so. The women who inevitably joined IS did not finally find their place in the wider world or in the *umma*: they found a war that was more than a spiritual struggle and one that they could not, and in some instances would not, escape.

3.5 “I don’t want to be IS poster girl.”⁵⁴⁴

There are many storytellers among the women of the Islamic State. As the organization continues to lose ground both ideologically and geographically, the number of women who fulfill these roles will increase. For the purposes of this dissertation, I chose two women whose stories are important and still unfolding: Shamima Begum (UK) and Hoda Mathana (Alabama, US). No standardized profile of the “average IS woman” exists: they come from a range of backgrounds from affluent to impoverished, some with strong social and familial support, and some with strong ties to conservative religious groups.⁵⁴⁵ Most of the women were considered bright, social, and precocious teenage girls with developing adolescent interests and goals. Their “diary entries (were) about youthful Muslim political grievance and identity agony... in sharp contrast to the deeply theorized political and ideological writings of ISIS female leaders in Arabic, anchored in the discord of their societies. For Arabic-illiterate Western women, going on the hybrid aesthetics and lofty resistance narratives of ISIS videos, and their own scattered, naïve longings

the earliest believers and to a woman who could not live faithfully outside of a Muslim city. Umm Kulthum’s name is a discreet beacon for women seeking out other Muslim women online but also for conveying IS ideas and propaganda.

⁵⁴⁴ “Shamima Begum: ‘I didn’t want to be IS poster girl,’” *BBC News*, February 18, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-47276572>. Accessed September 10, 2020.

⁵⁴⁵ Pamela Engel, “They ‘can go viral in a matter of seconds: An inside look at how ISIS sympathies spread in the US,” *Business Insider*, December 27, 2015, <https://www.businessinsider.com/isis-twitter-in-us-2015-12>.

for community, joining ISIS was not unlike a rebellion.”⁵⁴⁶ The girls embraced family, good grades, Forever 21 (clothing store chain for young women), and Islamic extremism.⁵⁴⁷

A common trait amongst all of the women involved in recruitment to and within the Islamic State is the originally benign desire to know more about Islam and the global Muslim community. Their interested questions were answered quickly by extremists lying in wait for their prey. Exploiting grief, disenfranchisement within these young women’s homes and wider communities, and their developing adolescent identities, IS recruiters were able to convince them to leave everything behind and travel to a war zone. That the majority of them are older millennials or members of Generation Z is no coincidence, as their comfort with technology and constant messaging and their relatively young age, made them easy targets of influence. They were all vulnerable children grossly exploited for the benefit of an organization that terrorized the areas they occupied and the girls they lured into their world.

Shamima Begum’s recruitment into the Islamic State originated when her classmate Sharmeena Begum (no relation), began an online correspondence with Aqsa Mahmood, a 19-year-old college co-ed from Glasgow University. Aqsa was among the first of the so-called “Jihadi Brides” to travel to Syria.⁵⁴⁸ Aqsa’s social media presence coupled with being one of the first known members of the Islamic State in 2013 made her a celebrity among young women interested in IS.⁵⁴⁹ Her online identities were “*Umm Layth*” and “*Al Britaniyya*” on Tumblr and

⁵⁴⁶ Moaveni, *Guesthouse for Young Widows*, 114.

⁵⁴⁷ Azadeh Moaveni, “It could have been me: On the trail of the British teenagers who became ‘brides of Isis,’” *The Guardian*, October 6, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/06/how-bright-successful-british-muslim-girls-were-lured-into-joining-isis>. Accessed September 10, 2020.

⁵⁴⁸ Alice Martini, “Making women terrorists into ‘Jihadi brides’: an analysis of media narratives on women joining ISIS,” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 11, No. 3 (2018): 459. Newspapers quickly dubbed the girls joining IS “jihadi brides” or “ISIS brides” to sensationalize their roles in the organization.

⁵⁴⁹ Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee, *United Nations Security Council*, September 28, 2015, https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1267/aq_sanctions_list/summaries/individual/aqsa-mahmood. Accessed March 3, 2021.

Twitter respectively.⁵⁵⁰ Although she denied it, authorities believe that she was the primary recruiter of the Bethnal Green school girls: Shamima Begum, Kadiza Sultan, and Amira Abase.⁵⁵¹

On her Tumblr, Aqsa writes advice and encouragement to other young women contemplating traveling to Syria

The first phone call you make once you cross the borders is one of the most difficult things you will ever have to do. Your parents are already worried enough over where you are, whether [sic] you are okay and what's happened. How does a parent who has little Islamic knowledge and understanding comprehend why their son or daughter has left their well off [sic] life, education and a bright future behind to go live in a war torn country. Most likely they will blame themselves, they will think they have done something. But until they truly understand from the bottom of their heart that you have done this action sincerely for Allah's sake they will live in hope that you will return. They might assume this is a 'phase' you are going through or a huge mistake you have made. I know of people who have been here in Shaam for over 2 years and their parents still try to persuade them to come back and live in false hope. Make Duaa that Allaah makes it easy for your parents to understand and accept your *Hijrah*.⁵⁵²

Her Twitter accounts are also scattered with references to travel to Syria and offers of sisterly advice to would-be pilgrims to Syria: "Sisters please don't forget to pack thermal clothing or you'll regret it later on."⁵⁵³ In examining her digital world, author Azadeh Moaveni writes of Mahmood, "...she used all the tools of her western upbringing to marshal that idealism, so she

⁵⁵⁰ Like "Umm Kulthum," Aqsa Mahmoud's online identity is embedded in her Muslim identity and is demonstrative of the fact that Aqsa, unlike the Bethnal Green school girls, was not a naïve teenager in search of meaning. Her name, "Umm Britaniyya" refers to her British identity. "Britaniyya" is the feminine form of "British." Loosely translated, "Mother of Britain." Her second username is more interesting because in Arabic, "layth" is "lion" which is deeply symbolic within the Qur'an and an image used by IS in propaganda and recruitment. "Layth" is also a Scottish Gaelic word meaning "river" and is another reference to Aqsa's homeland of Scotland, embedded in her new identity. Images of water and rivers are important in Islamic theology as a river runs through Paradise and on the day of judgment, the resurrected souls will experience a great thirst.

⁵⁵¹ Moaveni, "It could have been me."

⁵⁵² Aqsa Mahmood (@fa-tubalilghuraba), "Umm Layth," *Tumblr*, 2015, <http://fa-tubalilghuraba.tumblr.com>. Accessed September 10, 2020.

⁵⁵³ Callimachi, "ISIS and the Lonely Young American."

became this hybrid phenomenon, sharing her experiences in an individualistic, millennial way.”⁵⁵⁴ Her effectiveness as a recruiter and communicator came from the power of millennials’ ability at effective, broad messaging and creating personal brands through social media platforms rather than more traditional and nuanced forms of recruitment via in-person meetings and passing pamphlets. Aqsa, like “Umm Kulthum” and “Diary of a Mujahirah/Green Bird of Jannah,” referred to earlier in this chapter, skillfully used social media to manipulate their peers. It was through her clever correspondence that Aqsa drew Shamima Begum and the Bethnal Green schoolgirls into IS.

Shamima Begum’s radicalization began in 2014 with her group of friends: Sharmeena Begum, Kadiza Sultan, and Amira Abase. All three of the girls came from London’s East End and the Bethnal Green Area. The neighborhood is home to immigrants from Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka and proximate to the famous Brick Lane where vendors of saris and Islamic fashion exist side-by-side. The area’s Muslim enclave makes up “rows of housing complexes behind Bethnal Green’s main street...(and a) deeply conservative Muslim community where the lines between religion and extremism can be blurred, including in at least one of the girls’ families. In this community, the everyday challenges that girls face look very different from those of their male counterparts.”⁵⁵⁵ According to Zahra Qadir, an anti-radicalization activist working in Bethnal Green, “Girls used to want someone who is good-looking; nowadays, girls want Muslims who are practicing. It’s a new thing over the last couple of years. A lot of

⁵⁵⁴ Dani Garavelli, “Glaswegian ISIS bride Aqsa Mahmood is a classic example of cult-grooming,” *The Herald Scotland*, October 12, 2019, <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/17951717.glaswegian-isis-bride-aqsa-mahmood-classic-example-cult-grooming/>. Accessed March 3, 2021.

⁵⁵⁵ Katrin Benhold, “Jihad and Girl Power: How ISIS Lured 3 London Girls,” *The New York Times*, August 17, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/18/world/europe/jihad-and-girl-power-how-isis-lured-3-london-teenagers.html>. Accessed September 10, 2020.

girls want that, even some nonpracticing girls.”⁵⁵⁶ According to Qadir, this shift in what girls in this conservative enclave are looking for is the product of a post-9/11 world that deeply effected the community’s economic and social agency. Religious conservatism bloomed in Muslim enclaves in East London and with it more social pressure on girls.⁵⁵⁷ Families banked intangibles like girls’ piety and educational achievement to provide the wealth that neither the economy nor society at large would offer Muslims. The Bethnal Green schoolgirls were an example of this shift but with disastrous consequences.

Sharmeena was the first to be radicalized after the death of her mother and her father’s remarriage in September 2014. Her interest in Islam and her isolation was understandably attributed to grief and her father’s quickly arranged second marriage.⁵⁵⁸ She left London in December 2014 to join the Islamic State in Syria. On February 5, approximately six weeks after Sharmeena’s flight to Syria, school officials and police asked to take statements from her friends, Shameema, Kediza, and Amira, about Sharmeena’s activities and motives. The authorities made a fatal mistake; instead of giving the letters asking for parental permission to the parents directly, they gave a copy of each letter to the three girls separately.⁵⁵⁹ The three girls were briefly questioned but remained evasive. Twelve days later on February 17, 2015, admiring their clever friend, Shameena, and emboldened by the visit from the counterterrorism officer, Shamima, Kadiza, and Amira left London and were smuggled into Syria from Turkey. They did not leave a digital footprint of their plans, only a crumpled list of items they needed to bring with them to

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid. See also: Aziz Z. Huq, “Community-Lead Counterterrorism,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 40, No. 12 (February 2017): 1039.

⁵⁵⁷ Benhold, “Jihad and Girl Power.”

⁵⁵⁸ Vikran Dodd, “Sharmeena Begum – British girl left to join Isis after upheavals at home,” *The Guardian*, March 13, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/13/shar-meena-begum-first-of-british-girl-isis>. Accessed March 26, 2021.

⁵⁵⁹ Benhold, “Jihad and Girl Power.”

Syria, so we can only conjecture what their conversations and planning entailed.⁵⁶⁰ From the moment that the girls disappeared from the grainy surveillance footage, they were lost. Kadiza was killed in an airstrike in August 2016 and Amira, according to Shameema, is still in Baghuz, one of the Islamic State’s last strongholds.⁵⁶¹ Sharmeena, coached by Aqsa to lure her girlfriends abroad, is still missing.⁵⁶²



Fig. 33. (L to R): Kadiza Sultana, Shamima Begum, and Amira Abase pass through airport security on their way to Syria in February 2015.⁵⁶³

For four years, Shamima’s whereabouts were unknown until 2019, when Anthony Lloyd of the *Times* in London discovered her in the Al-Hol refugee camp in northeast Syria where she was known simply as, “No. 28850.”⁵⁶⁴ In one breath, she told Lloyd, “I’m not the same silly little

⁵⁶⁰ Moaveni, *Guest House for Young Widows*, 153.

⁵⁶¹ Laura Mowat, “‘I’m scared’ Bethnal Green schoolgirl Kadiza Sultana’s chilling call before death,” *The Express*, August 12, 2016, <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/699366/Bethnal-Green-schoolgirl-Kadiza-Sultana-s-chilling-phone-call-from-Syria>. See also: Sunita Patel-Carstairs, “Islamic State brides – where are the female jihadists now?” *Sky News*, February 14, 2019, <https://news.sky.com/story/islamic-state-brides-where-are-the-female-jihadists-now-11637068>. Accessed March 27, 2021.

⁵⁶² Frances Perraudin, “Shamima Begum tells of fate since joining Isis half-term,” *The Guardian*, February 14, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/feb/14/shamima-begum-friends-kadiza-sultana-amira-abase-joined-isis-syria>. Accessed March 27, 2021.

⁵⁶³ Benhold, “Jihad and Girl Power.” This image of the three girls passing through security was shared widely through the media in an effort to identify Kadiza, Shamima, and Amira. It is the last known photo of the girls outside of the Islamic State until 2019 when Shamima was discovered in a refugee camp.

⁵⁶⁴ Anthony Lloyd, “Shamima Begum: Bring me home, says Bethnal Green girl who left to join Isis,” *The Times London*, February 13, 2019, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/shamima-begum-bring-me-home-says-bethnal->

15-year-old schoolgirl who ran away from Bethnal Green four years ago... And I don't regret coming here."⁵⁶⁵ In taped interviews with Shamima, she speaks with a flat affect, still a teenager but already a widow who had lost three children to war.⁵⁶⁶ In another interview with the BBC in 2019 from a refugee camp in Syria, she told reporters, "I don't want to be the poster girl for IS."⁵⁶⁷ After all of the media attention, Shamima was moved to Al-Hol Refugee camp where there are more women who abandoned the Islamic State and its ideology.⁵⁶⁸ At the camp, she removed her *hijab* and returned to Western dress (her transition pictured below). According to Vera Mironova, "I don't think it's a strategy, a woman who is pro-ISIS wouldn't take it off to get repatriate [sic]," adding that women who retain their connections to the Islamic State in refugee camps receive money, phones, and other resources through a clandestine network.⁵⁶⁹ A return to Western dress is a bold move for women who, despite living in the relative safety of a refugee camp, still move among women who have not disavowed themselves of affiliation with the Islamic State. For Shamima, the return to a Western style of dress is perhaps the biggest sign of her maturity and recognition of her actions as an adolescent and coming to terms with her Western and Islamic identities.

Shamima's British citizenship was revoked in 2019; in June 2020, she won the right to return to the UK in an effort to restore her citizenship.⁵⁷⁰ The June 2020 ruling was subsequently

green-girl-who-fled-to-join-isis. Accessed September 10, 2021. It is important to see Shamima's early interview to see a traumatized girl speak: "Shamima Begum: Isis runaway asking for sympathy," *The Guardian*, February 22, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qFyBAZ14ArQ>. Accessed February 10, 2021.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁶ Elian Peltier, "Shamima Begum, Who Joined ISIS in Syria, Can Return to U.K., Court Says," *The New York Times*, July 16, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/16/world/europe/shamima-begum-isis-uk.html>. This decision was later overturned in February 2021.

⁵⁶⁷ BBC News, "Poster girl for IS."

⁵⁶⁸ Campbell MacDiarmid, "Exclusive pictures: Shamima Begum seen in Western clothes as she seeks break with IS past," *The Telegraph*, March 14, 2021, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/03/14/exclusive-shamima-begum-seen-make-up-western-clothes-seeks-break/>. Accessed March 26, 2021.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁰ Peltier, "Shamima Begum."

overtaken in February 2021, but Shamima can still fight to restore her citizenship from the refugee camp where she resides among the other stateless women, waiting to be returned and repatriated. She no longer gives interviews after regrettably being made the “poster girl” for the Islamic State as the only surviving member of her group of school friends who traveled to Syria in 2014.



Fig. 34. *Shamima Begum’s age progression through her journey with the Islamic State.* Left to Right: Age 15 in Bethnal Green in her school uniform. Age 19 as “No. 28850” in a Syrian refugee camp after fleeing IS. Age 21 in a new refugee camp wearing Western dress and a expressing a desire for anonymity while the court hears her appeal for citizenship.⁵⁷¹

Hoda Muthana, the second of the IS storytellers, had years of Islamic education in Alabama where she memorized the Qur’an and was active in the local Muslim community but without the close bond shared by the Bethnal Green schoolgirls.⁵⁷² Her family was religiously and socially conservative, so Hoda grew-up in an environment where the foundations of conservative Islam were in place. Part of this conservatism was the lack of a cellphone until she

⁵⁷¹ Benhold, “Jihad and Girl Power” and MacDiarmid, “Exclusive pictures: Shamima Begum seen in Western clothes.”

⁵⁷² Saul Elbein, “The Un-American,” *The New Republic*, March 23, 2020, <https://newrepublic.com/article/156793/isis-american-hoda-muthana-trump-birthright-citizenship>. Accessed March 14, 2021.

turned 18. Access to the internet was monitored by her father, Muhammad, to make sure that she was not talking to boys. Sharing photos of her face, even wearing *hijab*, was off-limits.⁵⁷³

According to Hoda, her family appreciated her growing sense of modesty and her deepening interest in her faith. This changed, Hoda said, when “they saw me getting *jihadi*.”⁵⁷⁴ A devout and well-educated daughter was an honor, but one who ran away from home, unaccompanied, to join the Islamic State was a disaster.

In 2015, Hoda was interviewed by Ellie Hall of *Buzzfeed* news via the app Kik.⁵⁷⁵ Hoda told Hall, “I started getting interested in my *deen* [religious life] around 2012. I felt like my life was so bland without it. Life has much more meaning when u know why ur here.”⁵⁷⁶ Like Aqsa Mahmood, Hoda’s interest in Islamic political thought began around the time of the start of the civil war in Syria (2011-ongoing). Access to the internet gave Hoda unrestricted access to an endless array of information and interpretations of Islam. She watched sermons on YouTube and in Fall 2013, she created a secret profile on Twitter where she eventually gained over 1,000 followers, one of which was Aqsa Mahmood.⁵⁷⁷ One year later, in November 2014, Hoda left Alabama for Syria and life with the Islamic State.

⁵⁷³ Hall, “Gone Girl.”

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., see also: Jared Cohen, “Digital Counterinsurgency: How to Marginalize the Islamic State Online,” *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/digital-counterinsurgency>. Accessed September 10, 2020. The messaging application, Kik, is one of the preferred methods of digital communication among members of the Islamic State. The platform allows users to remain anonymous and messages sent are only available for ten seconds before they are deleted making it ideal for IS. See: Alexander Mamaev, “Cyber Caliphate: What Apps Are the Islamic State Using?,” *Russian International Affairs Council*, May 25, 2018, <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/cyber-caliphate-what-apps-are-the-islamic-state-using/>. Accessed March 3, 2021.

⁵⁷⁶ Hall, “Gone Girl.”

⁵⁷⁷ Yoree Koh, “Twitter Suspended 125,000 ISIS-Related Accounts in Six Months,” *The Wall Street Journal*, February 5, 2016, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/BL-DGB-44836>. See also: J.M. Berger and Jonathon Morgan, “The ISIS Twitter Census: Defining and describing the population of ISIS supporters on Twitter,” *The Brookings Institute*, No. 20 (March 2015) and Anne Jacobs, “The Evolution of Women in the Islamic State,” *The Washington Institute*, September 26, 2017, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/evolution-women-islamic-state>.

Unlike Shamima, Hoda left a social media trail before Twitter and Tumblr suspended IS accounts in 2015.⁵⁷⁸ Her Twitter account (@ZumarulJannah) was where she proudly renounced her US citizenship along with three other women traveling to Syria with her stating that soon she would burn her passport.⁵⁷⁹



Fig. 35. Photo from Hoda Muthana’s Twitter account on December 1, 2014, just days after she left her home in Alabama.⁵⁸⁰

Hoda tweeted from her account in Syria and called upon American Muslims to commit terrorist attacks in the United States: “Americans wake up! You have much to do while you live under our greatest enemy, enough of your sleeping! Go on drive-bys [sic] and spill all of their blood, or rent a big truck and drive all over them.”⁵⁸¹ The war against the West was easier to fight on

⁵⁷⁸ Koh, “Twitter Suspended 125,000 ISIS Accounts.”

⁵⁷⁹ Hall, “Gone Girl.”

⁵⁸⁰ Hoda Muthana (@ZumarulJannah), “Bonfire soon, no need for these anymore. Alhamdulillah,” *Twitter*, December 1, 2014.

⁵⁸¹ Muthana, (@ZumarulJannah), *Twitter*, August 2015.

Twitter and like Shamima, Hoda’s enchantment with IS was short-lived: by 2016 she was already widowed, remarried, and pregnant with her only surviving child.⁵⁸²

In 2019, Hoda lived amidst famine in what was supposed to be a land of plenty and subsisted on boiled grass: she wanted to come home.⁵⁸³ The Constitutional Law Center for Muslims in America and attorney Charles Swift, helped make clandestine arrangements for Hoda to escape and surrender to American or allied forces. Hoda and her baby successfully escaped IS on their third attempt, surrendering to Kurdish forces (*peshmerga*).⁵⁸⁴ She was transported to the Al-Hol refugee camp where she and her infant son were given care. In 2019, she told journalists from ABC News, “I wish I could take it completely off the Net, completely out of people's memory. ... I regret it. ... I hope America doesn't think I'm a threat to them and I hope they can accept me and I'm just a normal human being who's been manipulated once and hopefully never again.”⁵⁸⁵ Her earnest sentiments echoed those of another resident of the camp: Shamima Begum. Indeed, their stories continue to run parallel to one another. Responding almost immediately to the broadcast of Hoda’s pleas, President Trump tweeted



Fig. 36. Tweet from President Donald Trump’s account regarding Hoda Muthana.⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁸² Elbein, “The Un-American.”

⁵⁸³ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁵ Enjoli Francis and James Longman, “Former ISIS bride who left US for Syria says she ‘interpreted everything very wrong,’” *ABC News*, February 19, 2019, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/isis-bride-left-us-syria-interpreted-wrong/story?id=61175508>. Accessed March 26, 2021.

⁵⁸⁶ Donald Trump (@realDonaldTrump), *Twitter*, February 20, 2019. See also: Rebecca Morin, “Trump says he directed Pompeo not to let ISIS bride back in U.S.,” *Politico*, February 20, 2019, <https://www.politico.com/story/2019/02/20/trump-hoda-muthana-isis-1176678>. Accessed March 26, 2021.

In November 2019, a US Court revoked her citizenship.⁵⁸⁷ Two years later, in January 2021, the Washington, D.C. Circuit court unanimously upheld the ruling, stating that although Hoda was born in the United States, her father had not informed the government of his loss of a diplomatic post prior to her birth, and thus she was not entitled to US citizenship.⁵⁸⁸ Despite the resources available to Hoda, she remains in diplomatic limbo, as does Shamima. The US and UK are still reluctant to repatriate these women who were legally minors when they left, insisting that they be assessed as adults.

One question remains unanswered: if the state will take them back without significant repercussions, will the families? Will the communities be willing to put in the labor necessary to support and deradicalize these girls? The courts in the UK and the US argue that repatriating women who joined IS is dangerous and that as women, they are more likely to successfully carry-out attacks on-behalf of local terror cells.⁵⁸⁹ There is merit to this argument because without proper support from families, communities, and the state, these women are still vulnerable. They have gaps in their education and emotional and social development that must be addressed as part of counterterrorism efforts.⁵⁹⁰

⁵⁸⁷ Charlie Savage, “American-Born Woman Who Joined ISIS Is Not a Citizen, Judge Rules,” *The New York Times*, November 14, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/14/us/hoda-muthana-isis-citizenship.html>.

⁵⁸⁸ Irina Manta, “D.C. Circuit (Sadly) Affirms District Court in Hoda Muthana Case,” *Reason*, <https://reason.com/volokh/2021/01/19/d-c-circuit-sadly-affirms-district-court-in-hoda-muthana-case/> Accessed February 1, 2021.

⁵⁸⁹ Catherine Baksi, “Shamima Begum ruling ‘not a perfect solution’: By refusing her entry to the UK, the Supreme Court leaves Begum in a legal black hole,” *The Times London*, March 4, 2021, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/shamima-begum-ruling-not-a-perfect-solution-dbk8rdq2r>. Accessed March 4, 2021.

⁵⁹⁰ “Handbook on Children Recruited and Exploited by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups: The Role of the Justice System,” (Vienna: The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2017), https://www.unodc.org/documents/terrorism/Publications/HB%20Children/Handbook_on_Children_Recruited_and_Exploited_by_Terrorist_and_Violent_Extremist_Groups_the_Role_of_the_Justice_System.E.pdf. Accessed April 21, 2021. See also: Paul Thomas, “Youth, terrorism and education: Britain’s Prevent programme,” *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Spring 2016): 171-187.

Shamima and Hoda do not have control over any aspect of their identities now except for their aesthetic devices, an occasional statement through their attorneys, and sporadic updates from family members willing to speak to the media. Shamima's transformation from a young widow draped in black to a fashionable woman with hennaed hair and sunglasses reminds us of how young she was when she ran away and how quickly she had to grow up. Hoda also dispensed with the black *niqaab* and *abaya* (cloak) and returned to the modern *hijab* she favored as a teenager in Alabama. Through aesthetics and signifiers deemed non-threatening to Western observers, they are trying to reclaim their identity and their innocence that was lost when they decided to join IS and to ensure the West, without words, that they are no longer a threat (and perhaps never were).

3.6 CONCLUSION: THE MUHAJIRAT IN DIASPORA

In Raqqa, the capital of the Islamic State, Scheherazade's final words to her father echo through a 21st century phone call 700 miles from Baghdad: *"I don't have a good feeling. I feel scared. You know if something goes wrong, that's it. I'll never be able (to come home)."*⁵⁹¹ The women who joined IS from the West fled their communities virtually and literally, becoming part of an ultimately unsuccessful and unsustainable utopia abroad. These women left their communities, frustrated with their lack of social, religious, and economic agency to join a young, diverse group of coreligionists with a vision that became more of a dystopia than a utopia. Many of these women are dead, while others are living in limbo with nebulous to non-existent citizenship. Their childhood and adolescence were shaped by a competing cacophony of

⁵⁹¹ Merritt Kennedy, "British Schoolgirl Who Ran Away To Join ISIS Feared Dead in Syria," *NPR*, August 12, 2016, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/08/12/489799007/british-schoolgirl-who-ran-away-to-join-isis-feared-dead-in-syria>. Accessed April 18, 2021.

narratives born from terror and warmongering. As a result, they were disenfranchised through war, Islamophobia, racism, the effects of an ongoing economic crisis, and a youth bifurcated by large scale terror and exhaustive wars. The residual stress and uncertainty, the dramatic shift in politics and social norms permeating every interaction and social institution, deeply affected many of these women, leading them to leave the West to seek security and acceptance elsewhere.

In 2017 and into early 2018, IS ceded much of its territory to Iraqi and Syrian forces, leaving IS fighters stranded, imprisoned, and executed. For foreign women, the situation was particularly grave as their sense of security disappeared and they were quickly strangers in a strange land and a land that did not want them permanently. Some of the women who joined IS were killed by government forces, some have disappeared entirely, some languish in refugee camps in limbo between states, and some may be in captivity with Iraqi and Syrian governments. A handful of women have returned to their home countries with no consequences and their citizenship still intact. Jurists in these countries have handed down light sentences, if any at all, and some women have begun to educate other women of the dangers of extremism.⁵⁹² Many of the women returning to their countries of origin are returning with psychological issues like PTSD and are also single mothers bearing children fathered by IS fighters, while others, it is suspected, are returning on false premises of reconciliation, only to become embedded with a new group of IS sympathizers. This again complicates the idea of citizenship in Western countries for Muslim women creating a complicated and perverse diaspora from a non-state that countries must contend with to maintain their own security. What rights do women returning from IS have after fleeing the United States, Great Britain, and other Western nations, burning

⁵⁹² Anne Speckhard and Ardian Shajkovci, "Beware the Women of ISIS: There are Many and They May Be More Dangerous Than the Men," *The Daily Beast*, September 12, 2017, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/beware-the-women-of-isis-there-are-many-and-they-may-be-more-dangerous-than-the-men>. Accessed August 19, 2020.

their passports, promoting terror, and undermining the security of the state? These were women who are capable of duplicitous behavior, presenting one façade to their local community and another through social media. They have been vehicles for IS once, at what point do they cease to be a threat? By joining IS in search of a form of citizenship that appealed, embraced, and enabled these women, they have further complicated the citizenships they left behind. Their rights are limited by the state and, for women returning to families scandalized by their daughters' departures, curtailed by families and communities, too. As of this writing, it is too early to tell how this group of women will renegotiate their citizenship, if they do at all, and how states will cope with the emerging and returning threat of radicalized and traumatized women.

Scheherazade's last words to her father demonstrate that she knew the risk of marrying the Sultan, but she persisted, knowing that it could and would be an immense personal sacrifice regardless of the outcome. She had faith that her actions were correct and that whatever the outcome, it would not be in vain. The women of the Islamic State also understood this to varying degrees, that the risk of fleeing to the caliphate carried the risk of death, but their desire to be among others who understood them, their stories, their histories, their identities was too powerful. Scheherazade was prepared to sacrifice herself for the benefit of other women in her kingdom. The women of the Islamic State were prepared to make the same sacrifices for the benefit of the *umma* and to restore the caliphate as a center of learning and culture like medieval Baghdad where Muslims flourished and were protected. The future of the caliphate and the women who sacrificed their families, citizenship, and lives, to support it, is tenuous. While some women remain loyal to the Islamic State, others like Shamima Begum and Hoda Muthana pivoted to seek a different kind of caliphate that requires faith, patience, and community rather

than faith, violence, and isolation. Shamima and Hoda's stories, yet to be fully told, will undoubtedly be about their reconciliation with family, community, and, most importantly, Islam.

V: CONCLUSION

The Midway Plaisance is now Midway Plaisance Drive and the land that once hosted the “Sliding Scale of Humanity” is Midway Plaisance Park. The park is a blank strip of green grass, scattered with a handful of trees and some benches. It separates the University of Chicago’s campus from the Woodlawn neighborhood on Chicago’s East Side. The majority of Woodlawn’s residents are African-American and the median household income is \$13,000.⁵⁹³ The Midway Plaisance in 1893 was a place to display and interact at a “safe” distance with races and cultures considered inferior to the white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant majority in the United States. Over a century later, the exhibits are gone, but the Midway Plaisance still forms a borderland between race and class.⁵⁹⁴ The juxtaposition of the University of Chicago’s gothic, Anglo architecture looming over dilapidated apartment buildings, bodegas, and the disenfranchised loitering on the streets is a contemporary iteration of the Midway. Researchers, Chicagoans, and students from the university visiting, observing, and maintaining a distance between us and *them*. There is no memorializing of the Midway nor of the anonymous bodies exhibited and lost to time.

The process of integrating *hijab* into American culture continues to accelerate as more Muslim entrepreneurs enter the marketplace to build Muslim-centered brands for an expanding global market. In 2017, American Eagle, a brand marketed to American teenagers, introduced a denim *hijab* that quickly sold-out. This denim *hijab* was a new take on the ultimate American textile: denim. This sartorial statement was also a way to integrate teenage Muslim girls into the

⁵⁹³ World Hijab Day Homepage (<https://worldhijabday.com/>)

⁵⁹⁴ “We are Here,” *The Chicago Blog*, Blog Post, The University of Chicago Press, July 23, 2013. <https://pressblog.uchicago.edu/2013/07/23/we-are-here.html>. This blog post offers an aerial view of the site of the Midway bifurcating the Woodlawn. To the right is the University of Chicago’s campus and to the left is the Woodlawn neighborhood of Chicago’s East side.

fashions of American adolescence. In early 2018, Macy's introduced a modest fashion line called, "Urban Modesty," to cater to Muslim women. The collection features stylish dresses and tops made modest by longer hemlines and sleeves.⁵⁹⁵ In September 2020, Melanie Elturk, the founder of *HauteHijab* announced plans to expand her *hijab* empire to the United Kingdom by the second fiscal quarter of 2021 and to the Middle East by the end of the year.⁵⁹⁶ The market for contemporary Muslim fashion is now estimated at \$270 billion.⁵⁹⁷ American Muslim women are a major driver of the growth of that market as a result of their experience creating an identity that honors their Muslim identity and the necessity of integrating that identity into American culture.

In Los Angeles, the Women's Mosque of America exists as another iteration of *hijab*, in the form of a women's-only mosque. The mosque expanded upon the work of the "Side Entrance" project in the North America, which refers to the special entrance, separate from men, where women enter, pray, and gather.⁵⁹⁸ Instead of attempting to continue the work of Amina Wadud and Asra Nomani in integrating prayer, the founders of the Women's Mosque of America sought to create a women-only space for worship.⁵⁹⁹ The Women's Mosque of America reflects the position of women in the earliest days of Islam, segregated from men but gathered around A'isha, the Prophet's favorite wife and the companion with the most prolific number of *hadith* to share with her intimate community of women.⁶⁰⁰ In this way, the Women's

⁵⁹⁵ Christina Caron and Maya Salam, "Macy's Courts Muslims with New Hijab Brand," *The New York Times*, February 8, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/08/business/macys-hijabs.html>. Accessed March 14, 2021.

⁵⁹⁶ Sara Holzman, "Melanie Elturk's Bold Approach to Modest Fashion," *Marie Claire*, February 19, 2021. <https://www.marieclaire.com/fashion/a35153013/melanie-elturk-haute-hijab/>. Accessed March 14, 2021.

⁵⁹⁷ Charlotte Rogers, "Why fashion brands must try harder to capture the 'Muslim pound,'" *Marketing Week*, February 11, 2019. <https://www.marketingweek.com/why-fashion-brands-must-try-harder-to-capture-the-muslim-pound/>. Accessed March 13, 2021.

⁵⁹⁸ "Side Entrance Blog." <https://sideentrance.tumblr.com/>. See also: Aysha Khan, "How Hind Makki is changing the conversation around women's inclusion in mosques," *Religion News*, April 1, 2019. <https://religionnews.com/2019/04/01/hind-makki-is-helping-lead-the-conversation-around-womens-inclusion-in-mosques/>. Accessed March 14, 2021.

⁵⁹⁹ Nomani, *Standing Alone in Mecca*. See also: Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (New York: Oneworld Publications, 2006).

⁶⁰⁰ Abbott, *Aisha*.

Mosque of America introduced one of the earliest practices within Islam to the United States. In 2020, the Friday *khutbah* (sermon) and sharing of *hadith* was moved to Zoom creating yet another dimension of *hijab* for the contemporary practice of Islam.

The final chapter of this dissertation centers on the women of the Islamic State (IS/ISIS) and an important part of Muslim women's identity formation in the West. IS is a result of the destabilization of Iraq and Syria through American and British intervention.⁶⁰¹ Recruitment of women from the United States and Great Britain is supported by two decades of Islamophobia and disenfranchisement of young Muslims living abroad, but there is no exact profile of young Muslim women, either born or newly converted, who join IS.⁶⁰² There may be parallels between women who join gangs in that these groups offer a form of power, community, and protection.⁶⁰³ Those looking for community and an identity that is in active political and aesthetic opposition to the status quo are increasingly drawn to Wahhabism, the ideological and political foundation of IS.⁶⁰⁴ These are mostly adolescents and young adults who are in search of meaning and community.⁶⁰⁵ Some of these participants were born or came of age in communities and countries where they are estranged from both their countries of origin and the country their families settled. Other young women are estranged from their families or peers and the

⁶⁰¹ Joby Warrick, *Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS* (New York: Anchor Books, 2016). See also: Haroro J. Ingram and Craig Whiteside, *The ISIS Reader: Milestone Texts of the Islamic State Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

⁶⁰² Moaveni, *Guest House for Young Widows*.

⁶⁰³ Anne Campbell, *The Girls in the Gang: A Report from New York City* (New York: Olympic Marketing Corporation, 1984). I found Campbell's research of adolescent girls in gangs in New York City particularly compelling, especially in the parallels between motivations for joining a gang or IS and the perceived cost/benefits from association. The power dynamic between men/women in the gang was also compelling and similar to that in IS. This parallel is something I would like to explore in future research on IS.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 49. See also: Adriana Galván, *The Neuroscience of Adolescence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) and Frances E. Jensen and Amy Ellis Nutt, *The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist's Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults* (New York: Harper Books, 2016).

⁶⁰⁵ Anne Speckhard and Molly D. Ellenberg, "ISIS in Their Own Words: Recruitment History, Motivations for Joining, Travel, Experiences in ISIS, and Disillusionment Over Time – Analysis of 220 In-depth Interviews of ISIS Returnees, Defectors, and Prisoners," *Journal of Strategic Security* 13, no. 1 (2020): 82-127.

messaging from IS recruiters resonates more strongly than the other forms of online grooming. These variables combined in different ways form the profiles of the various girls who left their homes to join IS.

The significance of IS as another venue of identity formation for Muslim women cannot be ignored. It is uncomfortable to acknowledge and accept that the participation of women in terror groups and as non-state actors.⁶⁰⁶ As Sjoberg and Gentry write, “portrayals of women terrorists rarely if ever characterize them as having individual agency in general or with respect to their violence specifically. This voiceless picture of women terrorists shows a lack of knowledge and understanding of the ‘subject’ on the part of the media (and even on the part of the academy).”⁶⁰⁷ In the context of IS recruitment, the participation of women is complicated by the average age of the recruits and the process through which they are brought into IS via online grooming.⁶⁰⁸ The age of the recruits must be considered: adolescents are not cognitively developed enough to consider the long-term consequences of their risk-taking behavior yet for many of the young women in IS, there appears to be a ruthless maturity that mitigates biology.⁶⁰⁹ They are almost universally groomed by online recruiters in the same way that sexual predators groom young girls online but recruiters for IS frame their grooming in the context of inviting young women to help reestablish the caliphate and to leave the City of Brass for a Golden Age Damascus. This method of recruitment ages these adolescents because of the parallels with rituals of adulthood especially in Jewish and Christian traditions.⁶¹⁰ Islam, like Judaism and

⁶⁰⁶ Sjoberg and Gentry, *Women, Gender, and Terrorism*, 4.

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁰⁸ Moaveni, *Guest House for Young Widows*, 105.

⁶⁰⁹ Laurence Steinberg, “A Social Neuroscience Perspective on Adolescent Risk-Taking,” *National Institute of Health* (Washington, D.C., 2008). See also: Joe Magliano, “Why Are Teen Brains Designed for Risk-taking?” *Psychology Today*, June 9, 2015 (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-wide-wide-world-psychology/201506/why-are-teen-brains-designed-risk-taking>). Accessed March 25, 2021.

⁶¹⁰ In reference to confirmation in the Catholic and Protestant tradition and the Bar/Bat Mitzvah of Jewish tradition. Islam does not have a formal ceremony that acknowledges the transition from child to adult member of the faith.

Christianity, grants them the status and authority of adults even when they are not considered adults by secular society and this is how we must understand their involvement in IS.

Membership in IS is a rite of passage and a conscious decision made in the context of what these young women believe is a return to the uncorrupted form of Islam and with it, a complete identity.

Among the girls recruited by IS, many are dead, some are missing, and many are in diplomatic limbo, like Shamima Begum. During the writing of this dissertation, I followed Shamima's case from the time of her flight as a 15-year-old runaway to Raqqa from the London neighborhood of Bethnal Green in 2014. Shamima left London for Syria accompanied by two of her school friends, Amira Abase and Kediza Sultan.⁶¹¹ Amira and Kediza were killed in Syria and Shamima fled to a refugee camp in 2019.⁶¹² Shamima was interviewed by the BBC in February 2019, still a teenager, her flat affect was indicative of someone who experienced significant trauma but was perceived by many as dismissive and possessing the cadence of a typical, bored teenager.⁶¹³ She offhandedly recalled how she saw heads in barrels and appeared unmoved but also stated, "I don't want to be an IS poster girl."⁶¹⁴ Reports about Shamima's involvement in IS included her role in the *Al-Khansaa* Brigade which involved, among other responsibilities, sewing fighters into suicide vests so they could not free themselves except

⁶¹¹ Moaveni, *Guest House for Young Widows*, 105. See also: Lizzie Dearden, "Shamima Begum: 'Silly little girl' who fled UK for Isis at 15 may finally account for actions in court," *The Independent*, July 16, 2020. <https://www.independent.co.uk/independentpremium/news-analysis/shamima-begum-court-isis-bride-syria-a9623496.html>. Accessed March 13, 2021.

⁶¹² Frances Perraudin, "Shamima Begum tells of fate since joining Isis during half-term," *The Guardian*, February 14, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/feb/14/shamima-begum-friends-kadiza-sultana-amira-abase-joined-isis-syria>.

⁶¹³ Ian Sommerville, "Shamima Begum: IS bride says she's sorry for deaths," *BBC News*, February 18, 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-47282536>. Accessed June 15, 2020.

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*

through detonating the bomb.⁶¹⁵ A protracted legal fight continues over Shamima's citizenship and her right to return to the U.K. The government argues that as a foreign fighter, she relinquished her right to citizenship while supporters and counterterrorism researchers insist that Shamima, barely twenty, could be rehabilitated and a valuable asset.⁶¹⁶ In February 2021, the British government upheld its decision to never let her return to reclaim her citizenship, so she remains in limbo in a Syrian refugee camp.⁶¹⁷ Despite her protestations, Shamima *is* the IS poster girl but not in the way she perceives it. Shamima is the only one of the girls who joined IS whose journey is still ongoing and is simultaneously heartbreaking and contemptible: a deeply damaged child who is barely a woman.

The World's Columbian Exposition lasted just over a year in 1893 and left a lasting impression on Americans through its living Orientalist portrait on the Midway Plaisance. The belly dancers of the Midway enabled American men and women to experience desire from a distance. Later, New Age gurus and second wave feminists stripped belly dancing of any of its Islamic elements and used it for empowerment and body positivity. The September 11th attacks did nothing to deter belly dancing's popularity, the violence embedded it deeper into performative imperial feminism. After 9/11, a generation of Muslim women started to challenge the narrative of this imperial feminism by negotiating space within imperial feminism and framing it as *dawah* through World *Hijab* Day, entering the American consumer landscape by creating a market for accessible modest Islamic clothing, and establishing a space set apart to

⁶¹⁵ Richard Hall and Lizzie Dearden, "Shamima Begum 'was member of feared Isis morality police' in Syria," *The Independent*, April 14, 2019. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/shamima-begum-isis-syria-morality-police-suicide-belts-a8869016.html>. Accessed March 13, 2021.

⁶¹⁶ Anthony Lloyd, "Shamima Begum Bring me home, says Bethnal Green girl who left to join Isis," *The Sunday Times*, February 13, 2019. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/shamima-begum-bring-me-home-says-bethnal-green-girl-who-fled-to-join-isis-hgvqw765d>. Accessed March 13, 2021.

⁶¹⁷ "Shamima Begum cannot return to UK, Supreme Court rules," *BBC News*, February 26, 2021. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/amp/uk-56209007>. Accessed March 13, 2021.

exist as a community in the Women's Mosque of America. Other women chose to join terror organizations like *al-Qaeda* or the Islamic State to claim a Muslim identity that was a reaction to secularism, disenfranchisement, and violence against their co-religionists and ethnic group by Western nations. The process of identity formation is happening on multiple sites and at a faster rate than previous generations because of the pace of globalization and the success of organizing and political activism. Two decades after 9/11, a generation of young Muslim women is actively deciding what it means to be Muslim, how to identify as Muslim, and how to negotiate a world where that meaning is constantly challenged and renegotiated.

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