

"Muslimic" Diasporic Identity



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ABSTRACT

Recent times have been turbulent for the perception and understandings of Muslims. The focus has been limited to their integration, with their functioning presumed to be outside of Western societies. This thesis makes no attempt to counter these ideas, as they inherently lack an agential understanding of Muslims, and provide limited understandings. As such this thesis recognises the Muslim diaspora as naturally agential, by focusing on styling and performativity. In doing this, Muslims are innately modern, active in mass media and popular culture. This thesis employs virtual ethnography and textual analysis to make sense and map out the identity negotiation of a London based, female-led, creative collective; the Muslim Sisterhood, through their online presence on the social media platform Instagram.

Key arguments focus on the entanglement of the collective with Neoliberal values, exploring the commodification of Muslim identity, and the impact that this may entail for their cosmopolitanism, as well as solidarity. Ultimately, what is revealed are contradictions within the collective's existence. On the one hand they are community based, displaying diasporic cosmopolitanism through their commitment to inclusivity. On the other hand, there is a clear strive for neoliberal gain, and by competing they commodify the Muslim experience, and produce an idealised Muslim woman for others to aspire to. This only reaffirms Neoliberalism's dominance, as a value system, and as such reaffirms the colonial history from which it was birthed. Regardless, this study refrains from making definitive conclusions, or seeking them out, understanding the need to defy essentialist, reductive dichotomies, highlighting the complex nature of life and politics. Instead Muslim existence, similar to other groups, is heterogenous, and as such deserves a recurring engagement with localised performances of identity to continue to contribute to such a vision.

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INTRODUCTION

Perceptions about Muslims in the West are not positive. An unfortunate truth that cannot be questioned. Unfortunately, what accompanies these understandings is a reduction of Muslim lives to terrorist events. These events have gone on to characterise the practise of Islam, and as such justify anxieties towards Muslims. On the other side of this, as a result, Muslims are delving deeper into their religion and developing stronger identifications as a way to counter this discourse and provide more proof that the “moderate” Muslim is in fact the true Muslim.¹ There is no doubt that there is a constant tussling in the fight to counter the radicalisation thesis, which sees an everyday phrase, like allahu-akbar (God is great), bear such politicised weight.² The demonisation of the religion has taken on a life of its own, and just this month Emmanuel Macron, the President of France, recognised Islam as fundamentally against Western Neoliberal values: “If we are attacked once again it is for the values which are ours: freedom, for the possibility on our soil to believe freely and not to give in to any spirit of terror”.³ These attacks on neoliberal values bear a striking resemblance to those perceived in 9/11, consequently justifying the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, from which neither country would really survive.⁴ The implications of this negative othering discourse enforced on Muslims, clearly, extends much further than the West.⁵ The major pitfall in all of this is the inability for Muslims to be seen outside of essentialist dichotomies.

Working within this history, and these commonly adopted perceptions of Muslims and Islam proves to be frustrating. Attempting to counter these reductive dichotomies may only reaffirm

¹ Maruta Herding, *Inventing the Muslim Cool: Islamic Youth Culture in Western Europe* (Transcript Verlag: Bielefeld, 2013), 22.

² Thijl Sunier, “Styles of Religious Practice: Muslim Youth Cultures in Europe,” in *Muslim Diaspora in the West: Negotiating Gender, Home and Belonging*, eds. Haideh Moghissi and Halleh Ghorashi (Ashgate Gower, 2010), 128; Bbc News, “France attack: Three killed in 'Islamist terrorist' stabbings”, November 1, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54729957>.

³ Bbc News, “France church attacker arrived in Europe from Tunisia days ago”, November 1, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54742403>.

⁴ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 5.

⁵ Kathy Davis, Halleh Ghorashi and Peer Smets, “Epilogue: Reflections on Belonging, Otherness and the Possibilities of Friendship.” in *Contested Belonging: Spaces, Practices, Biographies*, eds. Kathy Davis, Halleh Ghorashi and Peer Smets (Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2018), 380.

them as the starting point. Inspired by Tariq Modood, I sought to find a way that moved beyond Islamophobia as a primary analytical frame for studying Muslims, focusing on the struggle for recognition and giving weight to “insider identifications in all their plurality”.⁶ This plurality was visible in youth cultures, who in navigating their relationship with Islam, are able to generate infinite ways in which to imagine, mediate and perform Islam.⁷ Thijl Sunier also elaborated that the focus on Muslim Youth could restore a vision of agency in Islam: “A way to overcome the omissions and fallacies in much of the present-day research on young Muslims is to elaborate on insights in the study of youth cultures and bring back into the analysis the agency of young Muslims. By approaching young Muslims as active agents of their own cultural environment and not as victims of a cultural clash and/or trapped in an identity crisis, we get a much brighter picture”.⁸ Muslim youth are the key, in their plurality, and are as such the reason for the focus of this thesis.

With this focus outlined, it became evidently clear that, due to its omnipresence, as well as entanglement with youth and popular culture, the market would be crucial. The market that I refer to is based on a Neoliberalism understanding, and will be elaborated on more in the theoretical chapter. Understanding these overlaps has only just begun, but what has been made clear is that they open up the commoditization of religious experience, which has been “instrumental in producing new forms of community”.⁹ Agential understandings like these, albeit in the market, are crucial for charting more heterogeneous understandings of Muslims, and as such is a commitment I make.

With these influences and core principles, I chose to focus on the very localised practice of Muslim identity, as performed by a female-led creative collective in London, the Muslim Sisterhood. Applying Shelina’s Kassam’s understanding, there is “no ‘universal view from

⁶ Tariq Modood, “Islamophobia and the Muslim Struggle for Recognition,” in *Islamophobia, still a challenge for us all*, The Runnymede trust (London: Runnymede Trust, 2017), 68, <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/Islamophobia%20Report%202018%20FINAL.pdf>.

⁷ Sunier, “Styles of Religious Practice: Muslim Youth Cultures in Europe”, 130.

⁸ Ibid, 129.

⁹ Ibid, 130.

nowhere””, I hope to deep-dive into the collectives world, knowing their practice of Islam is mediated, just as others, by social conditions, and as such always open to “interpretation and contextualization”.¹⁰ With this approach I hope to contribute, even if in the slightest, to a Europe where “Muslims are not a ‘them’ but part of a plural ‘us’”.¹¹

RESEARCH AIMS

This research aims to look at the localised practice of Islam, as imagined, mediated and performed by the Muslim Sisterhood. This thesis will work with cosmopolitanism, Neoliberalism and agency as key theoretical topics, with the collective’s functioning in fashion, and consequently consumerism, to chart and make sense of their negotiation with their diaspora identity.

Below are my research questions, divided into main, as well as sub questions:

Main Question:

1. How does the Muslim Sisterhood, as a platform for young Muslims, open up the space for negotiating diaspora identity?

Sub-questions:

- A. How do *Muslim Sisterhood* contribute to the formation of a diasporic cosmopolitan movement?
- B. To what extent does the collectives collaboration with the fashion industry enact a possible commodification of Muslim youth identity?

¹⁰ Shelina Kassam, “Marketing an Imagined Muslim Woman: Muslim Girl Magazine and the Politics of Race, Gender and Representation”, *Social Identities* 17, no. 4 (July 2011), 556.

¹¹ Tariq Modood, “Muslims and the Politics of Difference.” in *Muslims in Britain: Race, Place and Identities*, eds. Peter Hopkins and Richard Gale (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 207.

- C. What implication does that have on the politics of solidarity, as it is embraced by the collective?

To answer these I have studied the work of the Muslim Sisterhood, via virtual ethnography over the course of six months on Instagram, where the majority of their virtual presence lies. This collective, founded in 2017 by Zeinab Saleh, Sara Gilamali and Lamisa Khan, was birthed, as they noted, “out of a need to see ourselves represented authentically in a way that celebrated our identities as young Muslims growing up in London”.¹² Beginning primarily as a space documenting and photographing everyday Muslims, their activity on Instagram slowly gained traction and interest. Now with a following of 11,800, their community has particularly grown because of social media’s ability to create a presence. The collective grew from the demand of a Muslim community, and therefore they choose to serve and represent this community. As such, their work brings Muslim Diaspora identity negotiation to the forefront of their existence and functioning.

KEY TERMS

In his definition, Herding moves away from the two common ways of defining Muslims, being either born a Muslim, or self-identifying.¹³ Instead he depends upon those who practise, drawing upon their involvement in religious expression or attendance in events. This understanding of Muslims fails to recognise that those non-practising Muslims could still be subjected to the same discrimination experienced by practising Muslims. I want to counter this line of thought, by insisting that the politics of representation, and the politics of Muslim identity are applicable to all Muslims, whether they are practising, born Muslims, or self-identifying. In this way the identification of Muslim Sisterhood and its members as Muslims refers to their own personal identifications, and caters to their own levels of practising, as well as their own interpretations. Following Shelina Kassam, there is no universal Islam, and there

¹² Günseli Yalcinkaya, “Muslim Sisterhood”, *Dazed Digital*, accessed November 1, 2020, <https://www.dazeddigital.com/projects/article/48819/1/Muslim-sisterhood-collective-dazed-100-2020-profile>.

¹³ Herding, *Inventing the Muslim Cool: Islamic Youth Culture in Western Europe*, 11.

can be no authentic or pure Islam, with such a theorisation usually mobilised to counter problematic aspects of Muslim identity.¹⁴

In addition to defining Islam, I also want to highlight that I will be referring to the veil in this thesis as the hijab, apart from when using the words of another author. This represents popular English usage, but also is relevant to the Muslim Sisterhood, who commonly use this word throughout their Instagram page.¹⁵ By adopting the terminology of the collective I am hoping to identify the agency of the collective, and centre their voices in the work completed here.

Finally, as this study is looking into the negotiation of diasporic identity, it seems apt to also define diaspora. Referring to Roza Tsagarousianou's theorisation, diasporas are those that are aware of themselves as a diaspora, mobilizing around their identity, and engaging in collective action.¹⁶ What is more is that they are also constantly reproducing themselves, through transformation and difference.¹⁷ This difference, as Peter Mandaville notes, is not only between the diaspora and others, but also a multiplicity within. Where "incoherence, therefore needs to be stressed as much as, if not over, coherence".¹⁸ These ideas are clearly on display in the Muslim Sisterhood, who use their collective identification of Islam as a creative outlet as well as a communitarian one.

STRUCTURE

There are four chapters that make up this thesis, with a short additional fifth chapter that serves as a conclusion. The first chapter, the literature review, will delve into the debates and

¹⁴ Kassam, "Marketing an Imagined Muslim Woman: Muslim Girl Magazine and the Politics of Race, Gender and Representation", 556.

¹⁵ Emma Tarlo, "Islamic Cosmopolitanism: The Sartorial Biographies of Three Muslim Women in London," in *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 11, no. 2/3 (June 2007), 170.

¹⁶ Roza Tsagarousianou, "Beyond the Concept of Diaspora? Reevaluating our Theoretical Toolkit Through the Study of Muslim Transnationalism," in *The Handbook of Diasporas, Media, and Culture. Global Handbooks in Media and Communication Research*, eds. Jessica Retis and Roza Tsagarousianou (NJ, USA: John Wiley & Sons, 2019), 87.

¹⁷ Tsagarousianou, "Beyond the Concept of Diaspora? Reevaluating our Theoretical Toolkit Through the Study of Muslim Transnationalism", 82.

¹⁸ Peter Mandaville, "Communication and diasporic Islam A virtual ummah?," in *The Media of Diaspora*, ed. Karim H. Karim (London: Routledge, 2003), 172.

findings of Muslims, focusing on topics of youth subculture, fashion as well as cosmopolitanism. One section also details the importance of the virtual in the functioning of the world, and its rising importance in the offline world. Following this, the second chapter, the theoretical framework, will delve into the key theories upon which this thesis rests upon. Myria Georgiou's theorisations of diasporic cosmopolitanism will prove crucial to later understandings of the Muslim Sisterhood.¹⁹ In addition, the work of Angela McRobbie will help to develop neoliberal entanglements with fights for equality and representation, with her understanding of commodity feminism.²⁰ The chapter will end with a section on agency, with Saba Mahmood's understanding of agency as non-revolutionary, in her study of Muslim women in Egypt.²¹ The third chapter, the methodology, will explain my method for analysis; virtual ethnography as well as textual analysis. In addition it will also present my positionality, my investment in the topic, and how my access to the collective is helped because of these. The fourth chapter will be my own personal understandings and sense making of the collective, with the application of those noted in the literature review, as well as the theories of the theoretical chapter. This chapter is aptly split into three themes, which were made apparent to me via close ethnography. These themes are Collectivity to Cosmopolitanism, Corporate Collaboration and Street Fashion to High Fashion. This thesis will end with a small final chapter, with concluding remarks, reflecting on the knowledge produced as well as the downfalls.

¹⁹ Myria Georgiou, "Diaspora and the Plurality of Its Cosmopolitan Imaginaries," in *The Handbook of Diasporas, Media, and Culture. Global Handbooks in Media and Communication Research*, eds. Jessica Retis and Roza Tsagarousianou (NJ, USA: John Wiley & Sons, 2019), 63- 76.

²⁰ Angela McRobbie, "Young Women and Consumer Culture: An Intervention", *Cultural Studies* 22, no. 5 (September 2008), 531- 550.

²¹ Saba Mahmood, "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival." *Cultural Anthropology* 16, no. 2 (2001), 202–36.

CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

Muslim populations have been the focus of much literature, but unfortunately it is hard to read any literature on Muslims in the “West”, without coming across the events of the Rushdie Affair or 9/11 (Lewis Reina, Peter Mandaville, Katherin Pratt-Ewing, Maruta Herding, Shelina Kassam, Steven Vertovec and Susanne Wessendorf and Stefano Allievi, just to name a few).²² No doubt these events have affected the lives of Muslims indefinitely, with the rise of Islamophobia. The Runnymede Trust noted that this has created dangers for Muslims.²³ They also noted that events, such as those mentioned above, have “mainstreamed the politicization of ordinary Muslims”.²⁴ These events have been instrumental in normalising islamophobia, and as such cemented Muslims as the “ultimate other”.²⁵ Undoubtedly this has impacted a Muslim youth population negotiating their identity and belonging, especially as belonging is “more pressing to those who ‘inherited’ migration than to those who experienced it first hand”.²⁶ As such, Muslim youth are seen as in between two cultures, and a group of concern for integration. In addition, the Muslim population in the UK has been recorded as having the youngest age profile; with one-third under 16 years old, compared to one-fifth of the general population.²⁷ With these

²² Reina **Lewis**, *Muslim Fashion: Contemporary Style Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); Katherine **Pratt Ewing**, “The Misrecognition of a Modern Islamist Organization Germany Faces ‘Fundamentalism’,” in *Rethinking Islamic Studies: From Orientalism to Cosmopolitanism. Studies in Comparative Religion*, eds. Richard c. Martin and Carl W Ernst (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2010), page 52-71; **Herding**, *Inventing the Muslim Cool: Islamic Youth Culture in Western Europe*; Shelina **Kassam**, “Marketing an Imagined Muslim Woman: Muslim Girl Magazine and the Politics of Race, Gender and Representation”, *Social Identities* 17, no. 4 (July 2011): 543-63; **Steven Vertovec and Susanne Wessendorf**, *The Multiculturalism Backlash : European Discourses, Policies and Practices* (Hoboken: Taylor & Francis, 2010); **Stefano Allievi**, “Islam in the Public Space: Social Networks, Media and Neo-communities,” in *Muslim Networks and Transnational Communities in and Across Europe*, eds. Stefano Allievi and Jørgen S Nielsen (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 1-28.

²³ The Runnymede Trust is a UK independent race equality think tank, generating research and knowledge on topics concerning racial inequality. Their work strives to build a more inclusive Britain which individuals feel accepted, nurtured, and ultimately feel like they belong.

²⁴ Runnymede trust, *Islamophobia, still a challenge for us all* (London: Runnymede Trust, 2017), 24, <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/Islamophobia%20Report%202018%20FINAL.pdf>.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Marjo Buitelaar and Femke Stock, “Making Homes in Turbulent Times: Moroccan-Dutch Muslims Contesting Dominant Discourses of Belonging,” in *Muslim Diaspora in the West : Negotiating Gender, Home and Belonging*, eds. Haideh Moghissi and Halleh Ghorashi (Ashgate Gower, 2010), 178, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uunl/reader.action?docID=605126>.

²⁷ Herding, *Inventing the Muslim Cool: Islamic Youth Culture in Western Europe*, 19.

aspects colliding, inevitably Muslim youth warrant attention.²⁸ Unfortunately this attention has not achieved much in making sense of Muslim youth, but rather has continued reductive and essentialised perceptions.

This literature review will delve further into these essentialisations, as well as beyond, to help not only give context to this thesis, but also to situate the existence of the Muslim Sisterhood. Accordingly, I have separated these relevant discussions into sections, although, as will become evident, they are all extremely entangled. To begin with I will delve into readings on Muslim youth subcultures to bring attention to agential Muslims through styling. The Virtual, the second topic, will highlight the importance of the internet in negotiating identity and belonging. Then under Muslim Fashion, I will bring together aspects of the previous sections with fashion and consumerism to understand the functioning of Muslims within the market and the gains from this. Lastly, contrary to many Western societies perceptions, Muslims will be identified as cosmopolitan with their ability to communicate with local and global forces.

1.1 MUSLIM YOUTH SUBCULTURES AND THE DIASPORA

Muslims were often focused on with debates following either their assimilation, or inability to assimilate. Thijl Sunier presents a good summary on debates around assimilation, noting that the discourse of radicalization or civilization was intricately linked to religiousness.²⁹ He noted that it was believed that integration would eventually lead to more individualised practices of religion which would facilitate belonging.³⁰ This line of argumentation that he highlighted identified the collective Muslim community as a threat to European security. Sunier also noted that there was a common underlying misconception; that culture was a stable category, and it is precisely this that has fuelled an understanding of Muslims as “between two cultures”.³¹ This simplified view of Muslims led researchers to ignore agency, as well as religious stylisations and

²⁸ Buitelaar and Stock, “Making Homes in Turbulent Times: Moroccan-Dutch Muslims Contesting Dominant Discourses of Belonging,” 178.

²⁹ Sunier, “Styles of Religious Practice: Muslim Youth Cultures in Europe,” 126.

³⁰ Ibid, 127.

³¹ Ibid, 128.

performances.³² Sunier implores that we should remove Islam from simple dichotomies, because religion is a very public and performative act, which gives it social meaning.³³ What is perhaps the most crucial part of Sunier's writings is his creation of four conceptual clusters, which he believes will allow researchers to move beyond integration issues: "(1) performance and self-styling, commoditization and popular culture, (2) discipline, embodiment and techniques of the self, (3) authenticity, truth and authority, (4) identity politics and the public sphere".³⁴ He focuses largely on the first; styling, bringing into conversation agency along with power relations. This understanding of Muslims is crucial, and Sunier believes that it must be looked at through and with mass media, popular culture and commoditization, areas which have for too long been neglected for their apparent incompatibility with Islam.

Maruta Herding also explored Muslim youth subcultures, taking his influence from Dick Hebdige, a British media theorist and sociologist.³⁵ In his book, *Inventing the Muslim Cool: Islamic Youth Culture in Western Europe*, Herding notes subculture in relation to media, and that it should consist of three components.³⁶ The first being style, includes fashion, language, music and everything in relation to visibility. The second is idea, and this concerns the community, gender, education as well as values and morality. The last component that Herding notes is Action, which refers to events such as festivals, concerts, but also includes activities such as social work, leisure activities and anything else that comprises social interaction. Herding looks more specifically at the activities of a subculture, as opposed to just their styling, viewing them as producers and consumers, and firmly situating his analysis in the new media age with consumer domination. Similarly to Sunier, Herding acknowledges the importance of media in collectivity and belonging, adding another dimension with consumerism. Herding notes four motivations for producers in creating Islamic youth culture: Campaigners, Improvers, Empowerers and Proselytisers.³⁷ This splits activities into political, social improvement, positive

³² Ibid, 129.

³³ Ibid, 129.

³⁴ Ibid, 129.

³⁵ Maruta Herding, *Inventing the Muslim Cool : Islamic Youth Culture in Western Europe*.

³⁶ Ibid, 122.

³⁷ Ibid, 145.

Muslim identity production, as well extending religious practising to those struggling with current societal value systems.³⁸ The clear distinction, for Herding, for Muslim youth subcultures from other understandings of youth subcultures, is that they are not defined by an inherent rebellious quality. Instead they are “well-behaved, virtuous, compliant and morally conservative”, more focused on tackling conflicts in negotiating their religiosity.³⁹

Sunier and Herding provide much more agential depictions of Muslim youth, but most previous understandings of Muslim youth have failed to do the same. Commonly, Muslim youth are reduced to gendered essentialist understandings, which are “formed in relation to each other”.⁴⁰ Sherene Razack highlighted these tropes as the “dangerous Muslim man” and the “imperilled Muslim woman, adding another aspect in their formulation: the “civilized European”.⁴¹ This imperilled Muslim woman is the carrier of tradition, the site of modernism, and always a victim of her religion.⁴² A victim that needs saving, evident in her lack of agency. Ironically, Muslim women are doubly silenced, with research failing to include their voices, making conclusions and assumptions on their behalf.⁴³ Echoing Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Muslim woman here present a modern day imperialist application of “white men are saving brown women from brown men”.⁴⁴ Interestingly, society has become overprotective of these “brown women”, with everyone claiming to be a feminist when it comes to Muslim women⁴⁵. This concern for Muslim women translates into ambivalence, and a hostility towards the

³⁸ Ibid, 176.

³⁹ Ibid, 143.

⁴⁰ Naaz Rashid, “Everyone is a feminist when it comes to Muslim women’: Gender and Islamophobia,” in *Islamophobia, still a challenge for us all*, ed. Runnymede trust (London: Runnymede Trust, 2017), 61, <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/Islamophobia%20Report%202018%20FINAL.pdf>.

⁴¹ Sherene Razack, *Casting Out: The Eviction of Muslims from Western Law and Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 15.

⁴² Shelina Kassam, “Marketing an Imagined Muslim Woman: Muslim Girl Magazine and the Politics of Race, Gender and Representation,” 557.

⁴³ Thijl Sunier, “Styles of Religious Practice: Muslim Youth Cultures in Europe”, 129.

⁴⁴ Gayatri C. Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-313.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 61.

practices of these groups.⁴⁶ This hostility can be seen in common perceptions of compromising when accommodating for Islam in the community, where Western societies feel they are sacrificing principles and losing their core values.⁴⁷

In line with Herding and Maruta's indication of media as crucial to youth subcultures, it seems appropriate to delve into the importance of the virtual world, and its ability to condense market actions, as well as provide belonging despite space and time limitations.

1.2 THE VIRTUAL

The internet is entangled with daily life functioning and it would be foolish to try to separate these, as Christine Hine notes, "the internet is everywhere".⁴⁸ Virtually all adults from 16 to 44 years old were internet users in 2019, so it comes as no shock that academia has also changed its approach and analysis methods to incorporate the new and growing presence.⁴⁹ In addition, the popularity for approaching and studying online phenomena has been helped with its accessibility, requiring less immersion time than a literal ethnographic study, and less resources too with researchers kept to their desks.⁵⁰ When it comes to defining the internet, it seems hard to pinpoint. Hine brings to the reader's attention the rather abstract but omni-present nature of the internet. There is no real beginning, nor a real end, and its virtuality carries with it the essence of "not quite"⁵¹. There is also an essence of co-presence, a death of distance where "you can be intimate with people who are not there anymore, or who have yet to arrive."⁵²

⁴⁶ Lisa Fishbayn Joffe, "Introduction Theorizing Conflicts between Women's Rights and Religious Laws," in *Gender, Religion, and Family Law : Theorizing Conflicts Between Women's Rights and Cultural Traditions*, eds. Lisa Fishbayn Joffe, and Sylvia Neil, (Mass: Brandeis University Press, 2012), xvi.

⁴⁷ Marth Minow, "Chapter One Principles or Compromises: Accommodating Gender Equality and Religious Freedom in Multicultural Societies," in *Gender, Religion, and Family Law : Theorizing Conflicts Between Women's Rights and Cultural Traditions*, eds. Lisa Fishbayn Joffe, and Sylvia Neil (Mass: Brandeis University Press, 2012), 6 and 15.

⁴⁸ Christine Hine, *Virtual Ethnography* (London: SAGE, 2000), 28.

⁴⁹ Office for National Statistics, "Internet users, UK: 2019", May 24, 2019, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/itandinternetindustry/bulletins/internetusers/2019>.

⁵⁰ Hine, *Virtual Ethnography*, page 12.

⁵¹ Ibid, 65.

⁵² Isabelle Rigoni and Eugénie Saitta, "Democratizing the Public Space? Ethnic Minority Media in a Global Context," in *Mediating Cultural Diversity in a Globalized Public Space*, eds. Isabelle Rigoni and Eugénie Saitta (London:

Almost poetic, but it truly shows the internet's ability in being able to connect people across space and time. It produces a connected presence as Roza Tsagarousianou noted, echoing the work of Dana Diminescu, who coined the term “connected migrant”.⁵³ In this work Diminescu challenges common conceptions of the migrant as uprooted, and rather produces an antithetical image, who through technology has developed networks “which re-introduces them to mobility”.⁵⁴ The internet is intrinsic to the life of migrants, and as such is crucial too for diasporic communities. Perhaps more so as it suits the diasporic condition of creative output, with the internet constantly creating space and opportunities for users to become producers.⁵⁵ With internet exploration, discussion has consequently delved into the impact of the internet on the offline world.

Many writers talk of the importance of the internet to individuals in the offline world. Hine even referred to it “as a culture in its own rights, and as a cultural artefact.”⁵⁶ So entangled in the material fabric of life, it seems unproductive to separate the internet from real life activities. Hine notes that information and communication technologies are in fact “agents of such radical changes in social organisation”.⁵⁷ This is made even more possible with what Isabelle Rigoni and Eugénie Saitta recognise as the internet’s easy accessibility: “By offering new possibilities for intervening in public discussion to individuals who up until then were more spectator (the consuming public) than actor (the communicating public), the new communication patterns ushered in by ICTs – ‘powerful catalysts of social change’ (Miège, 1997) – can legitimately be placed at the centre of our thinking about changes in the public

Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 6; Frances Cairncross, *The Death of Distance: How the Communications Revolution Will Change Our Lives* (London: Orion, 1997) **quoted in** Christine Hine, *Virtual Ethnography* (London: SAGE, 2000), 84; Hine, *Virtual Ethnography*, 84.

⁵³ Dana Diminescu, “The Connected Migrant: An Epistemological Manifesto.” *Social Science Information* 47, no. 4 (December 2008): 565–79, **quoted in** Roza Tsagarousianou, “Beyond the Concept of Diaspora? Reevaluating our Theoretical Toolkit Through the Study of Muslim Transnationalism,” in *The Handbook of Diasporas, Media, and Culture*, eds Jessica Retis and Roza Tsagarousianou (NJ, USA: John Wiley & Sons, 2019), 86.

⁵⁴ Dana Diminescu, “The Connected Migrant: An Epistemological Manifesto.” *Social Science Information* 47, no. 4 (December 2008): 567.

⁵⁵ Peter Mandaville, “Communication and diasporic Islam A virtual ummah?,” in *The Media of Diaspora*, ed Karim H. Karim (London: Routledge, 2003), 145.

⁵⁶ Hine, *Virtual Ethnography*, page 14.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, page 6.

space.”⁵⁸ This is even more important to minority groups who are not always given a seat at the table, but through the internet can contribute to hegemonic ideology and fuel it. Peter Mandaville recognised this capability of the internet for the Muslim diaspora back in 2003, noting that the “true impact of the Muslim public sphere” would emerge in the coming years with the “new generation of IT-savvy diasporic Muslims”.⁵⁹ Reina Lewis’ work focuses on those IT-savvy Muslims, who explore their identity online through fashion, “validating new forms of religious authority”.⁶⁰ Donja Alinejad explored more the meaning of the internet for minority groups, and argued that due to the internet's ability to change the notion of physical space, the term “digital diaspora” was more apt in naming modern diasporas.⁶¹ These digital diasporas are further explored by Pedro J. Oiarzabal, who noted that the web and SNS (social networking sites), create “a renewed possibility to recreate a new home from where to reconstruct the lost social capital.”⁶² The creation of a new, transnational, digital community, which not only serves as a home online, but also can benefit those in creating lost social capital undoubtedly shows its importance to diasporas. The internet’s ability to create a home that extends into the affective, looks to be important for Muslim youth, who grew up with the internet as a daily norm.

This daily interaction with the internet has been helped by social media, which has played a crucial role in sociality and identity negotiation. Elisabetta Costa and Xinyuan Wang explored the use of social media with two diaspora groups; Kurds in Turkey as well as rural migrants in China.⁶³ They found that social media was a place where migrants and diasporic groups “live,

⁵⁸ Isabelle Rigoni and Eugénie Saitta, “Democratizing the Public Space? Ethnic Minority Media in a Global Context”, 9.

⁵⁹ Peter Mandaville, “Communication and diasporic Islam A virtual ummah?,” 147. <https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.4324/9780203380642>

⁶⁰ Reina Lewis, *Muslim Fashion: Contemporary Style Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 243.

⁶¹ Donya Alinejad, *The Internet and Formations of Iranian American-Ness: Next Generation Diaspora*, (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 35.

⁶² Pedro J. Oiarzabal, “(Re)loading Identity and Affective Capital Online: The Case of Diaspora Basques on Facebook,” in *The Sage Handbooks of Media and Migration*, eds Kevin Smets et al. (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2020), 247.

⁶³ Elisabetta Costa and Xinyuan Wang, “Being at Home on Social Media: Online Place-Making among the Kurds in Turkey and Rural Migrants in China,” in *The Sage Handbooks of Media and Migration*, eds Kevin Smets et al. (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2020), 515- 525.

build relationships and create new forms of human sociality.”⁶⁴ Interestingly, it was a place where customs and traditions could be kept alive, a new digital territory preserving and promoting “culture, language, and identity”. In essence, social media is a “tool against assimilation”.⁶⁵ This tool is crucial for diasporic youth in identity negotiation, and representation politics. As Koen Leurs notes, the internet provides young people with a place to represent themselves, allowing them to become active agents.⁶⁶ A place where, as Amaliah noted, gave space for Muslims striving for representation to “micro-narrate” themselves into existence.⁶⁷ More interestingly Leurs notes that youth cultures by nature are political because they foster hybridity, and as such may even work towards cosmopolitanism, contesting racism and nationalism.⁶⁸ Contributing to new futures which embrace cosmopolitan values of exchange is a testament to the youth cultures being developed online.

1.3 MUSLIM FASHION

The virtual world provides the perfect conditions for developing and nurturing the presence of the market. This has now evolved into a dependence, with pleasures found in consumerism. Undoubtedly fashion is a large part of these consumer habits, but has also been a way for individuals to express individuality and identity. For Muslim women their clothing has been used as justification for stereotypes, which their bodies becoming “the site of multiple discourses and ideological battles”.⁶⁹ As Silke Stroh notes, gender roles and clothing are often used as markers for hierarchical ranking, producing an axis of tradition and modernity echoing

⁶⁴ Ibid, 523.

⁶⁵ Oiarzabal, “(Re)loading Identity and Affective Capital Online”, 253; Costa and Wang “Being at Home on Social Media”, 519.

⁶⁶ Koen Leurs, *Digital Passages: Migrant Youth 2.0 : Diaspora, Gender and Youth Cultural Intersections* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), 20.

⁶⁷ Afaf Asad, “On Capitalising on our identities”, *Amaliah*, accessed June 2, 2020, <https://www.amaliah.com/post/58367/disruptive-technology-and-reclaiming-our-voice-islam-diaspora-voices>

⁶⁸ Leurs, *Digital Passages: Migrant Youth 2.0 : Diaspora, Gender and Youth Cultural Intersections*, 47.

⁶⁹ Kassam, “Marketing an Imagined Muslim Woman: Muslim Girl Magazine and the Politics of Race, Gender and Representation”, 556.

colonial discourse.⁷⁰ Within this, Islam is seen as antithetical to modernity and as such antithetical to fashion and style. Instead Muslim women are viewed as at the “hands of an ancient religion”, evident through their “medieval” dress.⁷¹ As such anxieties have increased in Western societies, what Stroh notes as informed by traditional elements of colonialism.⁷² Naaz Rashid noted, in The Runnymede Trust report, that the veil is of particular concern and controversy.⁷³ She splits these concerns into three parts (1) the veil is seen as oppressive, and representative of women’s inferiority in Islam, (2) wearing the veil displays a lack of integration and a failure to conform, (3) and finally the veil is directly tied to extremism and as such raises security concerns. What can clearly be identified in Rashid’s theorisation, is an overall threat to “Western” life.

With the veil representing oppression and the limitation of Muslim women’s autonomy, it is interesting that Özlem Sandıkçı and Güliz Ger can offer a different understanding which sees the veil move from being seen as a stigma, to becoming desirable through consumerism in the context of Turkey.⁷⁴ Sandıkçı and Ger explore the unstudied area of adoption and transformation, looking at the life of the tesettür from its practice in the 1970s within poor and elderly communities, to urban communities, where it has become a fashionable consumption choice.⁷⁵ They found that many methods were responsible for this transformation, but that personalization and aestheticization were the driving forces, allowing individuals to negotiate their identity and ultimately come to the understanding that tesettür was beautiful.⁷⁶

⁷⁰ Silke Stroh, “Muslims, the Discourse on (Failed) Integration in Britain, and Kenneth Glenaan’s Film Yasmin”, in *Hybrid Cultures - Nervous States : Britain and Germany in a (Post)Colonial World*, Eds. Maren Möhring et al. (BRILL: ProQuest Ebook Central, 2011), 230. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uunl/detail.action?docID=668961>.

⁷¹ Andrea Lueg, “The perceptions of Islam in Western debate,” in *The next threat: Western perceptions of Islam*, Eds. Jochen Hippler and Andrea Lueg (London: Pluto Press, 1995), 7–32 **quoted in** Elizabeth Poole, *Reporting Islam : Media Representations of British Muslims*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 45.

⁷² Stroh, “Muslims, the Discourse on (Failed) Integration in Britain, and Kenneth Glenaan’s Film Yasmin”, 230.

⁷³ The Runnymede Trust, *Islamophobia, still a challenge for us all*, 61.

⁷⁴ Özlem Sandıkçı and Güliz Ger, “Veiling in Style: How Does a Stigmatized Practice Become Fashionable?”, *Journal of Consumer Research* 37, no. 1, (June 2010): 15–36, https://www-jstor-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/stable/pdf/10.1086/649910.pdf?ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_SYC-5455%2Fcontrol&refreqid=fastly-default%3A8483f76f54a7ba062053b90d10cbc323

⁷⁵ Tesettür is the Turkish word for Hijab; Ibid, 18-19.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 21 and 27.

Personalization saw individuals questioning the boundaries of tesettür styling, adapting it to fit their needs and lifestyles.⁷⁷ Aestheticization on the other hand was situated more in religion, with informants citing the Koran or Hadits. In addition, aestheticization was intricately linked to fashion, with more desirable pieces producing the rise of the tesettür fashion market.⁷⁸ Sandıkçı and Ger produce an understanding of agency within Islam, where autonomy is not restrained by tesettür. Instead the women see “the boundaries of tesettür as empowering and enabling them to become the women they aspire to be”.⁷⁹ It is precisely through submitting to these supposed “restrictions” that these women feel they are “exercising their free will”.⁸⁰ What is perhaps also relevant to this thesis is Sandıkçı and Ger’s recognition that Islam is not resistant to the modern consumer market, but rather Islam is embedded within it. It is because of the market and consumerism that Islam is cemented in the world, and this entanglement has helped for the prominence, strength and collectivity in Islam.⁸¹ Sandıkçı and Ger’s work highlights exactly what Katherine Pratt-Ewing noted, that Islam is very much compatible with modernity.⁸²

What Sandıkçı and Ger brought attention to was the growing need to meet a valuable and growing Muslim market. A New York Times article from 2007 quoted a Muslim woman, who believed that if a store had specific Ramadan marketing and products that everyone “will run to that store”.⁸³ The capital value to be gained from tapping into this market has not gone unnoticed, and many corporations and fashion brands have targeted Muslims with products, as well as provided representation in their marketing. Nafisa Bakkar explored this more, referring

⁷⁷ Ibid, 26.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 28.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 30.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 31.

⁸¹ Ibid, 33.

⁸² Katherine Pratt Ewing, “The Misrecognition of a Modern Islamist Organization Germany Faces ‘Fundamentalism’,” in *Rethinking Islamic Studies: From Orientalism to Cosmopolitanism. Studies in Comparative Religion*, eds. Richard c. Martin and Carl W Ernst (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2010), page 52-71.

⁸³ Louise Story, “Rewriting the Ad Rules for Muslim-Americans”, New York Times, published April 28th 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/28/business/28Muslim.html?pagewanted=all>.

to the politics of representation in *It's not about the Burqa*.⁸⁴ Bakkar notes that there is a danger in the rise of the acceptable Muslim woman, who may only reaffirm hegemonic norms: "This is the West's version of the default Muslim Woman and we cannot deny she is an extension of Eurocentric beauty ideals".⁸⁵ Shelina Kassam effectively explored this topic in her analysis of the Magazine *Muslim Girl*, based in North America.

Kassam's analysis focuses on how the representations of Muslim women within the magazine *Muslim Girl*, construct a particular identity, contributing to the idea of an 'idealized' Muslim woman.⁸⁶ Kassam notes that this idealised woman is placed in opposition to the fundamentalist Muslim, as well as the normalised white North American subject, with her understanding of Islam to be deemed as modern and liberal.⁸⁷ She is a good Muslim, assimilated, educated and ambitious.⁸⁸ In addition to this Kassam notes that there is an inherent neo-liberal aspect to this idealised identity, being marketable.⁸⁹ This idealised Muslim woman also prioritises choice, choosing the privileges of the North American society. This aspiration to become a part of North American society echoes Bhabha's concept of mimicry, where colonial power and knowledge is continually re-produced in the colonised's aspiration to become like the coloniser: "while she may aspire to 'integrate' with 'American/ Canadian culture', she will never be 'of' this culture."⁹⁰ The 'idealized' Muslim woman, for Kassam, functions to reinforce hegemonic social relations.⁹¹ Kassam's argument is important in highlighting the pitfalls of Muslim women in fashion and consumerism.

⁸⁴ Nafisa Bakkar, "On the Representation of Muslims, Terms & Conditions Apply," in *It's not about the Burqa*, eds. Mariam Khan (Picador: London, 2019), 39-52; Bakkar is the founder and CEO of Amaliah.com, dedicated to amplifying the voices of Muslim women.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 43.

⁸⁶ Kassam, "Marketing an Imagined Muslim Woman: Muslim Girl Magazine and the Politics of Race, Gender and Representation", 543.

⁸⁷ Kassam, "Marketing an Imagined Muslim Woman: Muslim Girl Magazine and the Politics of Race, Gender and Representation", 541 and 543.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 551.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 543.

⁹⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse." In *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 85; Kassam, "Marketing an Imagined Muslim Woman: Muslim Girl Magazine and the Politics of Race, Gender and Representation", 558.

⁹¹ Kassam, "Marketing an Imagined Muslim Woman: Muslim Girl Magazine and the Politics of Race, Gender and Representation", 562.

1.4 MUSLIM COSMOPOLITANISM

Cosmopolitanism is commonly perceived to be in opposition to Islam, and as such fuels understandings of Islam as incompatible to Western society values. Yet Mara A. Liechtman and Emma Tarlo's work contradicts simple such understandings. Liechtman's ethnographic work looks at two Shi'i communities in Senegal, through understandings of history, colonialism, politics and others.⁹² Liechtman notes the need to move away from the judgemental conclusions of David Held and Kwame Anthony Appiah, which hold Muslims as "counter-cosmopolitans".⁹³ This counter was not just visible in action but also in appearance, with Kassam noting that to look Muslim or Middle Eastern was not a sign of cosmopolitanism.⁹⁴ Interestingly, Liechtman identifies cosmopolitanism as "a fundamental ethical conflict for Islam", but firstly that it is problematic to study Muslims through the nature of cosmopolitanism, as it produces a danger of liberal bias, reiterating dominant power relations.⁹⁵ Regardless Liechtman commits to challenging the idea that Islam is inherently counter-cosmopolitan, underlying its local and global dynamics in this particular case study. She finds that these two communities produce an alternative network, providing a "universalizing and differentiating identity that supersedes previous colonial categories of "race" and "ethnicity.""⁹⁶

Emma Tarlo builds upon this idea of cosmopolitanism within Islam through her exploration of three Muslim women in London. One woman is a textile artist, the other a stand up comedienne, and the last a councillor and advisor on Muslim affairs, who all show similarities in their "creative fashioning of new "Muslim looks"". ⁹⁷ This creativity in their clothing is not due to fashion, nor is it down to the need to portray political or cultural views, but rather it is out of

⁹² Mara A. Liechtman, "Shi'i Cosmopolitanisms in Africa : Lebanese Migration and Religious Conversion" in *Senegal. Public Cultures of the Middle East and North Africa*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 5.

⁹³ Ibid, 12.

⁹⁴ Kassam, "Marketing an Imagined Muslim Woman: Muslim Girl Magazine and the Politics of Race, Gender and Representation", 559.

⁹⁵ Liechtman, "Shi'i Cosmopolitanisms in Africa : Lebanese Migration and Religious Conversion", 8 and 13.

⁹⁶ Liechtman, "Shi'i Cosmopolitanisms in Africa : Lebanese Migration and Religious Conversion", 5.

⁹⁷ Tarlo, "Islamic Cosmopolitanism: The Sartorial Biographies of Three Muslim Women in London", 144.

their biographical experiences.⁹⁸ This biographical basis produces a global awareness, which sees these women engaging with both local and global forces, as such producing new forms of Islamic cosmopolitanism.⁹⁹ Tarlo achieves what Kassam advocates for, a movement away from 'positive' and 'negative' representations, by looking at their sartorial biographies and rejecting stereotypes of conventional oppositions.¹⁰⁰ Tarlo concludes that the increase of new Islamic fashions in Western metropolitan cities may "signal the emergence of new material expressions of Islamic cosmopolitanism". It is precisely through their ability to merge difference within their identity, through fashion, that the emergence of the cosmopolitan Muslim woman can be materialised. Interestingly Tarlo brings together an understanding of cosmopolitanism that emerges out of market engagement, through fashion.

CONCLUSION

Unfortunately I have not been able to cover all material in relation to these topics, but I have tried to shed light on some similar and contesting debates, moving beyond essentialised understandings. The work of Sunier is crucial in recognising the self-styling techniques of young Muslims, and draws similarities to the work of Sandıkçı and Ger, who present the personalisation and aestheticization of Muslim women in Turkey. Although much literature is conscious of the discourse around Muslim women's lack of agency, Tarlo is able to move beyond these conventional stereotypes, showing Muslim women as agential in their biographically inspired clothing choices. What is clear with all these works is that styling is founded in market engagement, as consumers and producers, which also allows for belonging and identity negotiation. The prevalence of this is increasing with the dominance of new media, which provides more opportunities for market engagement, and as such brings my focus into the virtual. These writings will not only prove crucial to situating the work of the Muslim

⁹⁸ Ibid, 144-145.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 145.

¹⁰⁰ Kassam, "Marketing an Imagined Muslim Woman: Muslim Girl Magazine and the Politics of Race, Gender and Representation", 563; Tarlo, "Islamic Cosmopolitanism: The Sartorial Biographies of Three Muslim Women in London", 145.

Sisterhood, but will also be important in my analysis chapter, in helping make sense of the collectives functioning.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL APPROACH

This Chapter will delve into the theories that will serve as a basis for my discussion and analysis of the creative collective 'Muslim Sisterhood'. I have chosen three theoretical concepts, Cosmopolitanism, Neoliberalism and Agency. For Cosmopolitanism I will begin with the work of Kwame Anthony Appiah, before moving swiftly on to the work of Myria Georgiou, who's concept of diasporic cosmopolitanism suits the work of Muslim Sisterhood. Exploring Neoliberalism, I will highlight the work of David Harvey, followed by other writers like Raewyn Connell and Susan Braedley. To end on, Angela McRobbie will provide another dimension to neoliberal understandings, looking at the adoption of feminism by corporate culture. Lastly, for agency, Judith Butler will be explored with the help of Moya Lloyd, along with Saba Mahmood to highlight agency in reference to (non-)revolutionary acts.

2.1 COSMOPOLITANISM

Cosmopolitanism has made a large impact on the political landscape, as documented by the BBC in 2005, in a news article titled "The rise of 'cosmopolitan' politics".¹⁰¹ In this article Jeremy Cliffe notes how the battle between left and right wing politics has dwindled, and in its place politicians are having to pander to either cosmopolitan voters or non-cosmopolitan voters. From theoretical to now political functioning, cosmopolitanism embodies a way of life where individuals are able to live together, with difference through coalescence. As Katherine Pratt-Ewing noted, Cosmopolitanism is a progressive subjectivity, appearing as the foundation of a "harmonious, globalized social order based on pluralism and tolerance".¹⁰²

Kwame Anthony Appiah's work is widely cited in topics of cosmopolitanism, and although his work concerns education, his theorisations of Cosmopolitanism are relevant to other discourses. Cosmopolitanism for Appiah is "universality plus difference", and begins with fallibilism.¹⁰³ The key to a cosmopolitan society succeeding through and with its diversity rests upon respect.¹⁰⁴ Touching upon

¹⁰¹ Jeremy Cliffe, "The Rise of 'Cosmopolitanism' Politics", *Bbc News*, March 24, 2015, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-32021853>

¹⁰² Katherine **Pratt Ewing**, "The Misrecognition of a Modern Islamist Organization Germany Faces 'Fundamentalism'," 53.

¹⁰³ Kwame Anthony Appiah, "6: Education for Global Citizenship," *Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* 107, no. 1 (2008): 92.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 88.

tolerance, he notes that we must not only be tolerant of difference, but instead be more humble, and recognise “that we may be mistaken, when we have looked carefully at the evidence and applied our highest mental capacities”.¹⁰⁵ This respect for cultures and care for tolerance and humility is important because people matter, and culture matters to people.¹⁰⁶ Interestingly it seems, cultures do not matter in themselves, but rather it is our attachment to them that gives them value. If then our attachment to cultures is what makes them valuable and respectable, then would it not be possible to say that difference also no value. Another issue that is clear within Appiah’s writing, is his coupling of Islam with fundamentalism, which he notes to be the prime enemy for cosmopolitanism, quoting Osama Bin Laden as proof.¹⁰⁷ Appiah makes an attempt to counter this attachment: “So it is heartening, at least for a cosmopolitan, that there are now many Muslim voices speaking for religious toleration and arguing for it from within the interpretative traditions of Islam”.¹⁰⁸ The use of “now”, along with “interpretative”, assumes that not only were Muslims before not aligning to the views of cosmopolitanism in respecting and tolerating others, but that they are perhaps the anomaly and that most Muslims are not inherently cosmopolitan. His reliance on locating cosmopolitanism as naturally outside the beliefs and values of Islam is reductive, but his ideas on respect and universality with difference are valuable. Inspired by the work of José Esteban Muñoz, I will not reduce his work to being essentially bad, but rather adapt and work with and through his work to formulate a deeper and more cohesive understanding of cosmopolitanism.¹⁰⁹

Using Appiah’s “universality plus difference” we will look at how a diaspora can be inherently cosmopolitan. In Myria Georgiou’s article *Diaspora and the Plurality of Its Cosmopolitan Imaginaries*, she identifies diasporic cosmopolitanism, with the idea of translation as a core act.¹¹⁰ Georgiou notes that diasporas are naturally perceived within oppositions, often being on the wrong side of them: “parochial versus worldly; nationalist versus cosmopolitan; homeland-oriented versus hostland-oriented”.¹¹¹ These binaries are not only limiting but are also redundant. Georgiou instead puts forward that the diasporic

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 93.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 88.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 95 and 96.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 98.

¹⁰⁹ José Esteban Muñoz, “Disidentifications : Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics,” in *Cultural Studies of the Americas* (V. 2. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 9.

¹¹⁰ Myria Georgiou, “Diaspora and the Plurality of Its Cosmopolitan Imaginaries,” in *The Handbook of Diasporas, Media, and Culture. Global Handbooks in Media and Communication Research*, eds. Jessica Retis and Roza Tsagarousianou (NJ, USA: John Wiley & Sons, 2019), 63.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 64.

subject is often able to translate from themselves, to the majority, producing communication, and as such it is this connection between two differences that produces cosmopolitanism. It is their “double diasporic voice” that assists them in translating and communication, which are in fact “invaluable qualities of Western liberal imaginaries”.¹¹² Georgiou calls this diasporic cosmopolitanism, and notes its three conditions.¹¹³ The first is a recognition of the self as part of the larger world. The second is an awareness and recognition of others' presence as well as their claim to rights and resources that may differ from one's own. And the last is that diasporic cosmopolitanism is a concept that opens up the possibility to think practices and ethics of solidarity with both the familiar and unfamiliar. This approach and these three conditions will be crucial to understanding the activities and presence of the Muslim Sisterhood, countering commonly accepted ideas that “conflicts of identification create tragic dilemmas for diasporas”, but instead that their multitude of identification is universality plus difference.¹¹⁴ Thus naturally cosmopolitan.

2.2 NEOLIBERALISM

Neoliberalism has made its journey from a concept to a worldwide accepted reality. It functions in the political realm, but has also dictated how individuals live their lives, defining social good, and well-being. I will look here at the concept of Neoliberalism, entangling the work of David Harvey, Susan Braedley, Meg Luxton and Raewyn Connell to understand the impact of Neoliberalism on the individual. Angela McRobbie's work will be invaluable in charting the rise of “popular” feminism, noting the negative impact of Neoliberalism's competition. I hope her work will provide a different understanding of Neoliberalism, that brings to the forefront the commodification of difference.

David Harvey's *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* charts the historical advancement of Neoliberalism from a concept to political implementation. In short, Neoliberalism saw the rise

¹¹² Ibid, 68.

¹¹³ Ibid, 65.

¹¹⁴ Pnina Werbner, “Theorising Complex Diasporas: Purity and Hybridity in the South Asian Public Sphere in Britain,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 30, no. 5 (2004): 907.

of free market capitalism, working against state ownership.¹¹⁵ Although Harvey does not necessarily commit chapters or sections to neoliberal identity, his writing does highlight the pervasive impact Neoliberalism has on individuals. He notes the advancement of human well-being can be found in “liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills”, with social good maximized by “maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions”.¹¹⁶ The goal of Neoliberalism is to bring “all human action into the domain of the market”.¹¹⁷ It is precisely through this engagement with the market that we can obtain more individual freedom.¹¹⁸ Meg Luxton and Susan Braedley note that the market provides an escape from state control, participating in market competition, maximising individual freedom through choice.¹¹⁹ This neoliberal way of life has now become inescapable, what Harvey identified as common sense, and a fundamental way of understanding the world.¹²⁰ Raewyn Connell sees an endless cycle, where our obligation to live and work in a marketized world, means we ultimately find our pleasures and possibilities there.¹²¹ With these pleasures and possibilities being firmly cemented in market interaction, it is hard to see a reality without Neoliberalism. In addition new information technologies have propelled the capabilities of individuals to guide their decisions in the “global marketplace”.¹²² The internet's omnipresence and “time-space compression” gives users a false “illusion of control”, able to constantly seek out new commodities, which strengthens our dependence and entrapment in the market.¹²³

Harvey noted that difference was recognised as the enemy of neoliberal values, and

¹¹⁵ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uunl/reader.action?docID=422896>.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 2 and 3.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 3-4.

¹¹⁹ Susan Braedley and Meg Luxton, “Competing philosophies: Neoliberalism and the Challenges of Everyday Life,” in *Neoliberalism and Everyday Life*, eds. Meg Luxton and Susan Braedley (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 8 and 12.

¹²⁰ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 3.

¹²¹ Raewyn Connell, “Understanding Neoliberalism”, in *Neoliberalism and Everyday Life*, eds. Meg Luxton and Susan Braedley (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 28.

¹²² Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 3.

¹²³ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 4; Angela McRobbie, “Notes on the Perfect,” *Australian Feminist Studies* 30, no. 83 (March 2015): 16.

consequently justified the “War on Terror”.¹²⁴ However, to achieve its marketisation of all human action, Neoliberalism is inviting and welcoming to all. Luxton and Braedley note that neoliberal theory does not consider any difference as a barrier to full market participation, noting ethnic, racial or religious identity.¹²⁵ However, individuals do not necessarily start from the same starting line, as Harvey noted: “The neoliberal presumption of perfect information and a level playing field for competition appears as either innocently utopian or a deliberate obfuscation of processes that will lead to the concentration of wealth and, therefore, the restoration of class power.”¹²⁶ With this understanding, it would be logical to presume that any minority engagement within the market would only reaffirm power structures and hierarchies. Connell, however, argues the opposite, believing that Neoliberalism produces competitors, which can help shift the balance between dominant groups. In this, “new energy and new claimants to power and privilege” can show up.¹²⁷ Connell’s work aligns new energy in the market with positive change and strives for equality. Angela McRobbie’s work, with her identification of corporate feminism, complicates such a simple understanding.

Corporate culture, as Angela McRobbie identifies, presents itself as an ally to feminism. This in theory is not a terrible idea, who doesn’t want the world to embrace feminism. However, the feminism Neoliberalism has adopted and nurtured has led to the rise of “popular” feminism, what she calls Mainstream Feminism.¹²⁸ In this version, feminism is not collectivist, but individualist, producing categories, such as perfect and girl, to aspire to.¹²⁹ This has seen the rise of self-beratement, where girls are always comparing themselves and hating their bodies.¹³⁰ Due to Neoliberalism’s perverse individualism and privatisation of social problems,

¹²⁴ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 83.

¹²⁵ Braedley and Luxton, “Competing philosophies: Neoliberalism and the Challenges of Everyday Life”, 16

¹²⁶ Ibid, 68.

¹²⁷ Connell, “Understanding Neoliberalism”, 35.

¹²⁸ Angela McRobbie, *Feminism and the Politics of ‘Resilience’: Essays on Gender, Media and the End of Welfare* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2020), 43

¹²⁹ McRobbie, “Notes on the Perfect.”, 3 and 4.

¹³⁰ McRobbie, “Notes on the Perfect.”, 8.

girls internalise and blame themselves for their inability to meet idealised standards.¹³¹ What has enabled is what McRobbie highlights as the perils of “commodity feminism”, which she splits into four parts. The first is that consumer culture acts as a regime of truth. Secondly, there is an extraordinary prominence of women in consumer culture. Third, the making and shaping of new markets for very young girls. And lastly she identifies the rise of commercial forces on the role of authority and other institutions which have in the past presided over the lives and conduct of young women and girls.¹³² These perils ultimately have marked out “new modalities of gender performativity”, which girls must aspire to, in order to “count as girls”.¹³³ What initially was an acceptance of feminism in the mainstream has evolved into almost a new and improved system of oppression, which is somewhat more powerful with its submersion in the market. Perhaps the most ironic thing, is that corporate cultures precise adoption of feminism gives the illusion that the “politics of feminist struggles are no longer needed”.¹³⁴ The point of interest for this thesis then would be how does this apply to the commodification of difference, with those in the commercial domain capitalising on aligning themselves with diversity. Would this too produce a new “popular” diversity and inclusion, or is there a way to look at commodification as a stepping stone to achieving actual feminism and anti-racism goals.

It might be good to lightly touch upon the work of Meg Luxton and Raewyn Connell who signal a way to move through and with Neoliberalism’s inescapable competition and individualism. Collectivity and community, as Connell identifies, may be the only antidote to the “seductive but alienating possessive individualism” of Neoliberalism.¹³⁵ The reason for this is that Neoliberalism creates the selfish individual, whereas the community creates social responsibility, where a system of social values and obligations to others can counter this, even

¹³¹ Meg Luxton, “Doing Neoliberalism, Perverse Individualism in Personal Life,” in *Neoliberalism and Everyday Life*, (eds.) Meg Luxton and Susan Braedley (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 17; McRobbie, “Notes on the Perfect”, 10.

¹³² Angela McRobbie, “Young Women and Consumer Culture: An Intervention”, *Cultural Studies* 22, no. 5 (September 2008): 532.

¹³³ Ibid, 546.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 533.

¹³⁵ Luxton, “Doing Neoliberalism, Perverse Individualism in Personal Life”, 180; Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 69.

producing questions on the make-up of their society.¹³⁶ Commodification has its limits, and relationships such as those between a parent and a child can “powerfully resist the alienation that commodification requires”.¹³⁷ Connell notes that resistance to Neoliberalism can be achieved, but that collective practice is always required to turn this from a “possibility into a reality”.¹³⁸ Pnina Werbner explored this with her focus on cross-cultural consumption, noting that sharing culture can create “ties and the potential for transcendent coalitions and alliances which mitigate conflicts”.¹³⁹ It is precisely the welcoming of all, and the ability for new energy and new realities to be made through Neoliberalism that is of interest to this analysis, and the existence of *Muslim Sisterhood*.

2.3 AGENCY

Interestingly agency is a crucial aspect of Neoliberalism, with human fulfilment being founded in choice, made viable through participation in the market. Here I want to bring comparisons between Neoliberalism and a humanist understanding of agency, with ownership and free trade at its core, which have directed and constructed modern understandings of female agency. These understandings view female agency founded in resistance to patriarchy and as such activated and visible when attempting to subvert hegemonic norms. Arguing against liberal and neoliberal visions of agency I want to instead follow Mahmood, who views agency as a capacity for action, and for that to cater to one's own desires, without catering to external factors such as custom, tradition and so on.

Moya Lloyd gives a good foundation for understanding common conceptions on agency, tracing it back to humanist understandings of Hobbes, Rousseau and Locke.¹⁴⁰ In this seventeenth century conception, agency is intricately linked to the “idea of action”.¹⁴¹ In this, men's ability to

¹³⁶ Luxton, “Doing Neoliberalism, Perverse Individualism in Personal Life”, in *Neoliberalism and Everyday Life*, 180.

¹³⁷ Connell, “Understanding Neoliberalism”, 35.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 36.

¹³⁹ Pnina Werbner, “Theorising Complex Diasporas: Purity and Hybridity in the South Asian Public Sphere in Britain”, 900.

¹⁴⁰ Moya Lloyd, *Beyond Identity Politics: Feminism, Power and Politics* (London: SAGE, 2005), 92.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

live and enact their desires was seen in their possession of goods, a possessive understanding of human functioning which can be seen as comparative to that of neoliberal identity. This understanding of agency also extends to political intervention: “To overcome the operations of power is to act agentially”.¹⁴² Although this understanding was limited to men, feminists have appropriated these ideas. Moya looks into Seyla Benhabib’s criticism of Judith Butler, noting in short that Benhabib equates agency to “subjective capacities for choice of self-determination”.¹⁴³ The main difference between Benhabib and Butler, as identified by Moya, is that Benhabib does not see agency as functioning without a stable subject.¹⁴⁴ Whereas Butler notes that the stable subject is not required, and rather it is the instability that creates agency, with the possibility for effect from an action.¹⁴⁵ Agency for Butler is determined not on the success of the effect, but rather the intention, where there is a potentiality for discourses to be renewed.¹⁴⁶ How then does this understanding of agency apply when individuals are less revolutionary, and more docile? Would it then suffice to say that those who are not acting with intention, and not committed to renewing discourses are in fact lacking in agency. Saba Mahmood explores this, and provides a counter to those who couple docility with no agency.

Saba Mahmood conducted an ethnographic study in Egypt of an urban women’s mosque movement that is part of a larger Islamic revival in Cairo.¹⁴⁷ Within this Mahmood attempted to formulate a different approach to women in Islam, and common understandings of agency. Instead of focusing on the reductionism present in most of these discussions, Mahmood instead opens up a new entry point that explores the existence of agency and the self within a non-liberal movement. Similar to my previous points on Benhabib and Butler, Mahmood recognises that most feminist scholarship locates the “political and moral autonomy of the subject in the face of power”.¹⁴⁸ Mahmood notes that as a result, agency is largely thought of as the capacity

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 98.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 94.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 98.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 107.

¹⁴⁷ Saba Mahmood, “Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival,” *Cultural Anthropology* 16, no. 2 (2001): 202–36.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 203.

to subvert norms. Mahmood notes that this kind of approach to agency can be limiting when focusing on non-liberal female lives, and as such takes it upon herself to chart a more accurate understanding of agency. Mahmood thinks that agency is “not as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination, but as a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create”.¹⁴⁹ Mahmood notes that for an individual to be free, they must be acting on their own will, with consent, and as such even illiberal actions may also be included.¹⁵⁰ We must remember that illiberal is very much a situated understanding, and one that is located in western feminism in this particular context. Docility within this western feminist context is seen as submitting to patriarchal norms, whereas Mahmood finds more action in patience and docility in her research.¹⁵¹ The patience that Mahmood finds is one that requires more energy, not necessarily committed to progress, but rather towards continuity and stability. This understanding put forward by Mahmood attempts to not reduce “the heterogeneity of life to the rather flat narrative of succumbing to or resisting relations of domination”.¹⁵² Instead it attempts to commit to a more nuanced understanding of agency that is not a binary position. It is precisely this resistance to reductive, essentialist binaries that I want to avoid in my analysis of Muslim Sisterhood.

CONCLUSION

The theories and theorists explored here will be crucial for sense making in the Analysis chapter. Georgiou’s work, along with her three conditions will be fundamental in locating diasporic cosmopolitanism in the collective. Harvey is undoubtedly essential to understanding Neoliberalism, however the work of Braedley, Connell and Luxton will prove useful for understanding the more pervasive and competitive aspects of neoliberal identity. McRobbie’s work is unique in its understanding and theorisations of the “perfect” and its negative effects on feminism's expansion in its adoption by the commercial domain. Beyond that, the neoliberal understandings provide theorisations of agency that are grounded in possession, similar to

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 207.

¹⁵¹ Ibid 221.

¹⁵² Ibid, 222.

Enlightenment understandings. However, Mahmood presents an agency that is more respectful and understanding of Muslim woman, and undeniably will be fundamental to exploring the existence of the Muslim Sisterhood.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter will outline my methodology, detailing my preferred method of analysis; virtual ethnography. I will also elaborate on my positionality, noting it's importance, as well as the importance this will have in relation to my knowledge production. To end on, I will explore the site of my study, Instagram, giving some context as well as understanding to its functioning and use.

3.1 VIRTUAL ETHNOGRAPHY

Ethnography is an immersive method of study, which allows for the understanding of everyday practices.¹⁵³ Given the circumstances of 2020, and the pandemic currently dominating life in the Netherlands, among many other countries, virtual ethnography is much more preferred, and is easily carried out from the ease of my desktop.¹⁵⁴ Christine Hine touches upon the idea of a “lurker”, and how those completing a digital ethnography can often find themselves not responding to posts or engaging with the material.¹⁵⁵ For six months, from April 2020 up until October 2020 I conducted close virtual ethnography on the Muslim Sisterhood's Instagram page. Previous to this I also was a follower, and have seen a growth in their content and output. It is because of this, that I do not feel that I fit this definition of a lurker, being a long time follower and supporter of the Muslim Sisterhood's Instagram page. My engagement with their account, pre-studying them, contributes to my positioning as also an active participant, which I hope will evoke a “deeper sense of understanding of meaning creation”, instead of being a “detached and invisible analyst”.¹⁵⁶ It is precisely because of this, that I do not feel I am intruding in private spaces, like Koen Leurs, who had to navigate the politics of consent, in his

¹⁵³ Hine, *Virtual Ethnography*, page 4.

¹⁵⁴ Hine, *Virtual Ethnography*, page 22.

¹⁵⁵ Hine, *Virtual Ethnography*, page 24.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 23.

accessing of a forum.¹⁵⁷ Instead, I am accessing a very public page on Instagram, and even if the community was more private, by identifying as a Muslim womxn, I am counted in their community.

There are no set rules to follow to conduct “the perfect ethnography”, with Hine herself noting that she would often experience anxiety at not writing down the right things.¹⁵⁸ I made notes alongside reading academic articles, creating links and interpreting the content. My focuses were on the content of the photos, the captions accompanying them, the interaction of their audience, as well as the collaborations and connectivity that Instagram enabled. As a researcher, I allowed the material to speak and guide me, and let the themes for my analysis naturally appear through their recurrence and importance to the collective. This saw much of my work combine ethnography and textual analysis in an attempt for “sense-making”.¹⁵⁹ I also referred to Hine’s ten principles for virtual ethnography to give myself some structure.¹⁶⁰ Although all of her ten principles are key, here I decide to focus on points one, two, four and seven, as they are the most relevant and visible in my ethnography as well as my analysis. The first principle is sustained intensive engagement, which I committed to with spacing my ethnography over a few months' time, dedicated hours to writing field notes of my observations and experiences with the Instagram page. I also expanded my ethnography to take into account the collectives collaborations and the connections and meanings made there. Secondly, taking cyberspace not as a separate entity to context, and as such focusing on all aspects of the material as well as its positioning in the wider socio-cultural as well as historical context. My approach to cyberspace very much situates it in a political understanding, as visible in the focus on identity politics. The fourth principle to Hine that is crucial to my own study is bringing the field site into question, as such looking into “detail at the ways in which the technology is experienced in use”, breaking this down into the intended use of functions, as

¹⁵⁷ Leurs, *Digital Passages*, 90.

¹⁵⁸ Hine, *Virtual Ethnography*, page 66 and 22.

¹⁵⁹ Alan McKee, *Textual Analysis: A Beginner's Guide* (SAGE Publications, 2003), 17.

¹⁶⁰ Hine, *Virtual Ethnography*, page 62- 65.

well as their active usage.¹⁶¹ I will touch upon these both in the “This Site” section below and my analysis chapter. The seventh principle, that is crucial to my own is that virtual ethnography is partial, suiting the approach of feminist objectivity that I will explore more in the following section on positionality. My focus is on a very localised phenomenon, and as such I do not aspire to produce a holistic description of Muslim youth, Muslim youth on the internet, nor female Muslim youth on the internet.

3.2 POSITIONALITY

It is important to bring to note my own positionality, so as to ensure knowledge production is in line with feminist objectivity.¹⁶² Following the work of Donna Haraway with her concept Situated Knowledges, universality and objective knowledge do not exist, but rather knowledge production is influenced by the researchers positionality.¹⁶³ With this in mind, Haraway suggests that instead we should situate the researcher as a foreground to knowledge production, so as to produce responsible and more accurate knowledge. This comes from the understanding that individuals are influenced by their identity and positioning in the world, and therefore this will undoubtedly affect their functioning and understanding of the world, consequently their knowledge production. Therefore in order to produce more responsible knowledge, the researcher should be aware of the influences upon them, as such their positionality. This can be accomplished through reflexivity which Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber defines as: “a process whereby researchers recognize, examine, and understand how their social background, location, and assumptions affect their research practice.”¹⁶⁴

From birth to my early teenage years I would actively practice Islam, meeting Herding’s definition of a Muslim. Yet, beyond my teenage years, I took small steps away from an active

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 4.

¹⁶² Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective.” *Feminist Studies* 14(3): (1988), 581.

¹⁶³ Haraway, “Situated Knowledges.” 575-599.

¹⁶⁴ Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber, “Feminist Research: Exploring, Interrogating, and Transforming the Interconnections of Epistemology, Methodology, and Method,” in *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*, eds. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2011), 17.

role, and at one point removed myself entirely from the identification. With my own life lessons, and understanding of systems of oppression, I began to understand their weight and influence, and how the distance I put between me and my religion was most likely a result of that. I also became starkly aware of my white passing ability, regardless of my Arabic name. From this awareness, I chose to bring myself closer to Islam, and now practice aspects of the religion in order to ensure this identification can live on. This experience also has a large role in choosing the focus of this thesis, and displays my affective investment. In addition, this experience with Islam means I need no introduction into the habits of Muslims, nor the terms used on the Muslim Sisterhoods page (for instance mashAllah, alhamdulillah, or jazakAllah).¹⁶⁵ This means that I take the responsibility of researching Muslim youth very seriously. As Sughra Ahmed noted in 2009, young Muslims have complained of being over researched, and especially for the wrong reasons.¹⁶⁶ I think this may have been so, due to being watched and monitored as subjects, as opposed to agential beings. I hope that my active identification as a Muslim will not contribute to this, and instead provide a perspective that is more true and representative of the activities of a heterogenous Muslim community.

3.3 THE SITE

Instagram is the platform from which I conducted my virtual ethnographic field notes, and as Christine Hine notes under her fourth principle, the field is crucial in virtual ethnography.¹⁶⁷ Hine stresses that when considering the field, it is important to focus on the “flow and connectivity rather than the location as the organising principle”.¹⁶⁸ I hope to elaborate more on some aspects of the field, its functionality and use in this section, to give more context and

¹⁶⁵ Similar to the Muslim Sisterhood’s instagram page, I have chosen to capitalise the first letter of gods name; Allah, to show respect and honour.

¹⁶⁶ Sughra Ahmed, *Seen and Not Heard: Voices of Young British Muslim*, Markfield (UK: Islamic Foundation, Policy Research Centre, 2009) **quoted in** Reina Lewis, *Muslim Fashion: Contemporary Style Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 26.

¹⁶⁷ Hine, *Virtual Ethnography*, page 64.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

align Instagram's functioning with some aspects of Neoliberalism.

Instagram has been around since 2010, making it 4 years younger than Twitter, and 6 years younger than Facebook. What it brings to the social networking arena which differs largely from its older competitors is its heavy dependence on images. This dependence echoes the dominance and speed within which mass media has dominated. Each post on Instagram consists of an image with a caption, although this caption can extend to 2,200 characters, compared to Twitter's 280, the words are often secondary to the image. This dependence on images is a sensory overload, but also one that greatly benefits the neoliberal model of competition and consumerism, with each user aspiring to produce the perfect images.¹⁶⁹ On each user's profile clearly outlined at the top are; the amount of posts, the number of followers, and the number of people they're following (P,F,F). Beyond that each post has the number of likes users have given. This presence of numbers makes it almost impossible to escape competing, with higher numbers garnering more influence. Although there has been recent movement and demands to remove the number of likes from posts, and this is currently being trialled in a number of countries, the campaign's inability to really succeed with worldwide implementation clearly shows the user favour for numbers, and as such for competition.¹⁷⁰ Instagram in essence created modern day influencers, with their followers idolising and holding their opinions and actions as divinity. Angela McRobbie highlighted the more negative impacts, and the effects on mental health for girls aspiring to the "perfect".¹⁷¹ This entanglement of digital technology with neo-liberal competition offers an "illusion of control" but in reality, it has users chasing the next thing in popular culture, or the next trend, in a never-ending cycle.¹⁷² The innate competition in the application, along with its

¹⁶⁹ A quick search on google for the perfect Instagram photo brings up a large list of blogs and articles all professing to give you the skills and know-how to take the best picture, increase engagement, and sell your brand.

¹⁷⁰ Although exact information on this from Instagram is hard to locate, others have reported that Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Brazil Ireland, Japan, Italy and recently the United States are going like-free. Instead in these countries one person is noted as a liker, with "and others"; Brittanie Dregghorn, "Everything you need to know about Instagram hiding likes", *Business 2 Community*, Feb 12, 2020, <https://www.business2community.com/instagram/everything-you-need-to-know-about-instagram-hiding-likes-02283204#:~:text=While%20like%20counts%20won't,personal%2C%20creator%20or%20business%20page>.

¹⁷¹ McRobbie, "Notes on the Perfect." 3–20.

¹⁷² Ibid, 16.

uncontrollable effects are crucial to understanding the context of this analysis, and are aspects that cannot be ignored.

Beyond the numerical display of followers and likes, I also want to touch upon the features that allow for tagging. Users are able to add an “@” with another's username, both on the photo and within the caption, which gives others quick and instant access to those tagged profiles. What was initially used for tagging friends and creating connections, is now used predominantly to collaborate and credit individuals or accounts. As visible with creatives on Instagram, tagging and crediting others helps build their work, lifting them up and helping them to gain visibility. This very much builds on the community aspect of the Muslim Sisterhood. On the other hand, it also creates a hierarchy, where those featured and tagged are of repute, and as such those to look up to. It can also serve as a lucrative way to gain support and influence for those starting out or looking to gain more following, with the right tag by the right individual providing access to a whole other community. It is hard to separate the two effects of tagging, but what is clear is that they are both enmeshed in Neoliberalism's competition. Connectivity if to lift others or to reaffirm hierarchies nonetheless produces competition. Instagram, like Neoliberalism, welcomes all to compete, and with the right content and marketing methods you can gain a stable following.

This endless connectivity in Instagram is accompanied by the apps ability to target you with similar accounts. This can occur in the explore page, or through viewing profiles, which through the click of a small arrow next to the message button, displays similar accounts. Eli Pariser conceptualised this as the “filter bubble”, where although users receive personalised content, further ensuring their engagement with social media, they are unlikely to come across content that they do not agree with, creating “super bubbled” individuals.¹⁷³ This brings up the question of whether content that counters dominant hegemonic ideology has the power to counter hegemony beyond its bubble community.

¹⁷³ Zoe Schiffer, “‘Filter Bubble’ author Eli Pariser on why we need publicly owned social networks”, *The Verge*, November 12, 2019, <https://www.theverge.com/interface/2019/11/12/20959479/eli-pariser-civic-signals-filter-bubble-q-a>.

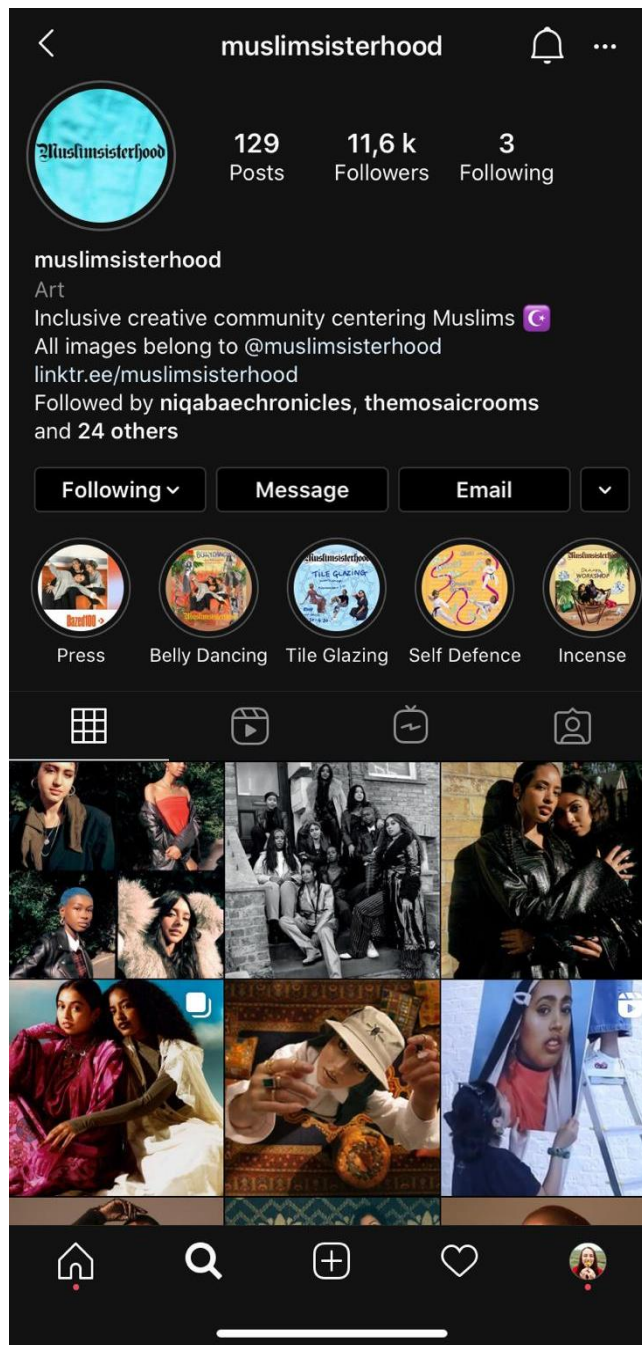


Figure 1: Instagram, @Muslimsisterhood profile as viewed on iOS app, last updated 24th October 2020.

Lastly I want to highlight one other aspect that I believe is crucial to understanding the use of Instagram as well as how it has adapted to meet the needs of a neoliberal market.¹⁷⁴ In 2019

¹⁷⁴ Harry McCracken, "How Instagram Changed—Before It Had To", *Fast Company*, March 20, 2017,

Instagram added the option of in-app shopping. Users no longer have to be redirected with “click on the link in the bio” in order to fulfil their consumer desires. Instead, now every image can fulfil a consumer's demand, doubling as an advert, with instant gratification. The personalisation already achieved by personalised content, and ads, which all help in the creation of bubbles is now being evolved further, into “your own personalized digital mall”.¹⁷⁵ Instagram commits to Harvey’s idea of social good, in attempting to bring all human action into the domain of the market.¹⁷⁶ As Harvey theorised, and as is visible in the in-app shopping feature, technology compresses the “rising density of market transaction in both space and time”, as such called “time-space compression”.¹⁷⁷ This neoliberal functionality within the app further contributes to possessive individualism and competition, with users chasing popularity, given options through that market to help achieve it.

Although the Muslim Sisterhood do not make use of all these functions, they are crucial to understanding the context within which their work sits in, bearing in mind they have no website and function solely through the presence of their Instagram account.

CONCLUSION

To summarise, I will be employing virtual ethnography, complimented by textual analysis to make sense of the collective’s Muslim identity negotiation. The site for this analysis will be solely based on Instagram, which I have presented as an inherently neoliberal social media application. In addition, I will rely on my own Muslim identification, as well as my previous engagement with the collective to provide more intricate understandings, as well as more ethical access, countering the position of Hine’s lurker.

<https://www.fastcompany.com/3068655/how-instagram-changed-before-it-had-to>.

¹⁷⁵ Arielle Padres, “Instagram's New Shopping Feature Makes It a Digital Mall”, *Wired*, March 19, 2019, <https://www.wired.com/story/instagram-in-app-shopping-feature/>.

¹⁷⁶ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 3.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 4.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS

My analysis in this chapter will be split into three themes. The first theme, “Collectivity to Cosmopolitanism”, will look at the ways in which diasporic cosmopolitanism emerges in the collective, using largely the work of Myria Georgiou and her conceptualisation of diasporic cosmopolitanism. In “Corporate Collaborations”, I will look more specifically at the Muslim Sisterhood’s collaboration with Nike, looking at the entanglement this has with Angela McRobbie’s work, as well as the location of agency. My last theme, “Street Fashion to High Fashion”, will focus on the constant projection and aspiration for high fashion, making sense of what impact this has on collectivity, and competition.

4.1 COLLECTIVITY COSMOPOLITANISM

The Muslim Sisterhood collective was created to fulfil the purpose of collectivity, as noted in their “bio”. A “bio” functions as a biography, where users write information about themselves, in order to communicate who they are. This “bio” consists of a maximum of 150 characters, and can be found on the main profile page, just below the posts, followers and following counter. This combination of the “bio” along with the numbers can be a powerful tool to gain influence on the app. The Muslim Sisterhood’s bio reads:

“Inclusive creative community centering Muslims 

All images belong to @Muslimsisterhood”¹⁷⁸

The collective here centre themselves, and clearly announce that they are not for large market consumption. Interesting when their functionality is embedded in an inherently competitive application, which not only promotes competition but rewards it, as evident in the counter above the bio that details the number of posts, followers and following. Their philosophy is

¹⁷⁸ Muslim Sisterhood (@muslimsisterhood), *Instagram Profile*, accessed October, 2020.
<https://www.instagram.com/muslimsisterhood/>

further emphasised in a caption on one of their posts where they outline their reasons for the collective's name: "Sisterhood means sticking together, uplifting each other, supporting each other genuinely and wholeheartedly. Looking out for each other, protecting each other, believing in each other. It's a beautiful thing".¹⁷⁹ The use of "sisterhood" is indicative of their support network, and the family-like ethics behind their collectivity. This collectivity also extends itself to inclusivity, as visible in their post for a Dkhoon workshop: "Keep your eyes peeled for our upcoming workshops taught and curated by Muslim womxn for Muslim womxn".¹⁸⁰ Their commitment to inclusivity can be perceived as countering hegemonic understandings of Islam, and is rather representative of an inherent cosmopolitan ethos found in this local practice and performance of Islam. Myria Georgiou notes three conditions for diasporic cosmopolitanism, and the first is appropriate here: "Firstly, as a collective or individual disposition of openness and recognition of the self as part of a wider world, not just the familiar community or nation".¹⁸¹ The collective are open to all, and recognise the familiar as well as the unfamiliar, a testament of their cosmopolitan ethics. This follows on to the second condition: "an awareness, if not recognition, of these others' claims to resources and rights that might be the same or different to one's own".¹⁸² Although some interpretations of Islam may not support transgender or non-binary women, the collective move beyond these differences and debates, committing to cosmopolitanism through and with difference. The choice of "sisterhood" is also a conscious decision which brings similarities to the term Muslim Brotherhood, which is usually assumed to be more fundamentalist, and as such a threat to cosmopolitanism in the eyes of Appiah.¹⁸³ In this attempt to consolidate perceptions on brotherhood/sisterhood, they also remind us of this difference in Muslim practices and the rights for difference which are inherent to cosmopolitanism. They commit to producing their

¹⁷⁹ Muslim Sisterhood (@muslimsisterhood), "Sisterhood means sticking together. . .," *Instagram Post*, April 22, 2018,

https://www.instagram.com/p/Bh4U1iyhRzz/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

¹⁸⁰ Muslim Sisterhood (@muslimsisterhood), "Some snaps from our amazing Dkhoon workshop with the queen of fragrance. . .," *Instagram Post*, October 8, 2019,

https://www.instagram.com/p/B3WoRa6g4qc/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

¹⁸¹ Georgiou, "Diaspora and the Plurality of its Cosmopolitan Imaginaries", 65.

¹⁸² Georgiou, "Diaspora and the Plurality of Its Cosmopolitan Imaginaries", 65.

¹⁸³ Kwame Anthony Appiah, "6: Education for Global Citizenship", 95.

own understanding of Islam, that balances “Art”; as noted in their account classification choice positioned above their bio, with identity negotiation. The awareness of difference, both that is functional with their identities as well as beyond, and their ability to respect these differences is inherently cosmopolitan, echoing the two first conditions of Georgiou’s diasporic cosmopolitanism.

Similarly, the collective’s cosmopolitanism can be recognised in another aspect of Georgiou’s work, in translation. Diaspora’s have the capacity to translate, between two languages, creating communication between themselves; the diasporic subject, and the majority.¹⁸⁴ Georgiou notes this “double diasporic voice” creates an interesting ambivalence, in their ability to be recognised by two diasporas.¹⁸⁵ What was usually theorised as lost between two sites, a double absence as Diminescu noted, is here reconfigured, and is more a dance between two sites, an increase in mobility.¹⁸⁶ This translation can be seen in the Muslim Sisterhood’s ability to work with inclusivity and difference. This kind of relationship with difference is positive, and moves beyond negative understandings of Islam and its intolerance with the west, and as such its fundamentalism.¹⁸⁷ It is precisely this combination of the diasporic voice in the “Western Representational lens”, that allows for this.¹⁸⁸ Georgiou goes as far to say that this kind of translation, through its commitment to cosmopolitanism, can challenge current racial order: “Thus, in this double visual articulation, translation is reflexively mobilized to contribute to a cosmopolitan imaginary that challenges the current racial order”.¹⁸⁹ I want to explore this challenge to current racial order through the collective’s ability to bring multiple identities together with a commonality. The collective posted a video, showing behind the scenes footage of their work.¹⁹⁰ In the video, the commentator explains: “before I’m female, before I’m Somali,

¹⁸⁴ Georgiou, “Diaspora and the Plurality of Its Cosmopolitan Imaginaries”, 68.

¹⁸⁵ Georgiou, “Diaspora and the Plurality of Its Cosmopolitan Imaginaries”, 68.

¹⁸⁶ Dana Diminescu, “Researching the Connected Migrant”, in *The Sage Handbooks of Media and Migration*, eds Kevin Smets et al, (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2020), 75; Dana Diminescu, “The Connected Migrant: An Epistemological Manifesto.” *Social Science Information* 47, no. 4 (December 2008): 567.

¹⁸⁷ Georgiou, “Diaspora and the Plurality of its Cosmopolitan Imaginaries”, 68.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 69.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 70.

¹⁹⁰ Muslim Sisterhood (@muslimsisterhood), “Muslim Sisterhood,” *Instagram Video*, July 21, 2019, https://www.instagram.com/tv/B0L8lTuA9cH/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

before I'm anything else; I am a Muslim". The use of "I am" as opposed to "I'm", employs formality to emphasise the importance of the Muslim identification. She confirms Reina's statement that in Britain there is a growing tendency for Muslims "to prioritize a faith identity over a national identity".¹⁹¹ The narrator also highlights the various identifications with the identity of a Muslim woman, and also within the collective. Kathy Davis, Halleh Ghorashi and Peer Smets note that spaces for commonality and communality can forge new friendships, and in fact produce more ways of connection through heterogeneity, even if there are issues which they do not agree on.¹⁹² It is precisely this common ground through heterogeneity that Islam, and similarly the collective here provide, translating between their differences. These differences are visible in the video, which displays the Muslim Sisterhood's diversity. We are taken back and forth between these visually contrasting ethnicities, and reminded of the true beauty and the cosmopolitan nature of Islam as practiced and performed by the Muslim Sisterhood. The awareness of their differences is reiterated by the founder who asks of others "to not be judgemental, because we're all on our own journey." The collective preach that there is no such thing as a "pure and universal Islam", noting difference within commonality, and difference in their community.¹⁹³ They are truly the embodiment of universality plus difference.¹⁹⁴ In the same video a different narrator notes that this unity does not come without its adversity: "There's beauty and challenges, and beauty in solidarity that come with that". Muslim Sisterhood manifest cosmopolitanism, by engaging in conversations which show, as Georgiou's third condition requires: "diasporic cosmopolitanism is a concept which opens up the possibility to think of practices and ethics of solidarity, not only with the familiar but also the unfamiliar."¹⁹⁵ Islam, opens up a space for a multitude of identifications, which uses translation between differences. This inherent practice of translation; as seen through the collectives inherent ability to combine differences as well as be open to differences and

¹⁹¹ Reina, *Muslim Fashion: Contemporary Style Cultures*, 47.

¹⁹² Kathy Davis, Halleh Ghorashi and Peer Smets, "Epilogue: Reflections on Belonging, Otherness and the Possibilities of Friendship." In *Contested Belonging : Spaces, Practices, Biographies*, eds. Kathy Davis, Halleh Ghorashi and Peer Smets, First ed. (Bingley. UK: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2018), 384.

¹⁹³ Shelina Kassam, "Marketing an Imagined Muslim Woman: Muslim Girl Magazine and the Politics of Race, Gender and Representation", 556.

¹⁹⁴ Appiah, "6: Education for Global Citizenship", 75.

¹⁹⁵ Georgiou, "Diaspora and the Plurality of its Cosmopolitan Imaginaries", 65.

inclusivity, paints Islam as heterogenous as well as cosmopolitan.



Figures 2 and 3: Instagram Post, @Muslimsisterhood, July 21, 2019, Stills from 0:15 and 0:18.

The collective negotiate multiplicity through and with their differences, enacting diasporic cosmopolitanism. Through this positive engagement with difference they are able to contribute to cosmopolitan imaginaries. Islam as a commonality allows for that, as well as their dedication

to practising inclusivity. They materialise a new vision of Muslim subjectivity. Yet, how does this collectivity play out, when their performance is entangled with fashion and as such produces Neoliberalism's individualism? Would these competitive and individual traits outweigh the impact of their collectivity, and its cosmopolitanism? Angela McRobbie will prove to be essential in understanding the commodification of identity and difference, and as such navigating the impact Neoliberalism has on the collectivity's cosmopolitanism.

4.2 CORPORATE COLLABORATIONS

The previous theme has mapped out how the Muslim Sisterhood display qualities of diasporic cosmopolitanism through their collectivity and inclusivity, producing a new vision of Muslim subjectivity. Yet how does this collectivity and community preside through corporate collaborations, and as such consumerism? As mentioned in the methodology, Instagram has evolved over the years, ingraining even more coercive powers of competition in its technology.¹⁹⁶ Tagging, can be used competitively but it also builds communities, with users sharing their followers and audiences with each other, establishing themselves more on the platform. Undoubtedly for the Muslim Sisterhood, tagging proves to be beneficial. Not only would they be able to reach more Muslim women, strengthening their collectivity, but they could also display their Muslim subjectivity as less localised and more common among other Muslims. However, if these collaborations are tied to neoliberal values such as competition and individualism, what impact does this have on their ability to carve this community? Additionally what does a marketisation of Muslim identity mean for this community, and the enactment of agency? In this theme, titled Corporate Collaborations, I will look at the collective's collaborative work, attempting to make sense of its purpose, and its impact.

The collective's collaboration with Nike (@nikelondon) and Trippin world (@trippin.world) may help explore these questions further. Nike requires no introduction, with its famous tick recognised all around the world. Trippin world on the other hand is fairly unknown, and presents itself as a relatively small diverse community, connecting cultures worldwide by

¹⁹⁶ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 68.

representing the voice of today's traveller. Already visible in this collaboration is the intent to cross borders and challenge normative representations, by bringing in difference and attributing value to it through marketisation. To tease the collaborative event, the Muslim Sisterhood shared a teaser video.¹⁹⁷ The video unveils the logos of Nike and Trippin world against the backdrop of what can be described as a western "modern" metropolis, recognisable as London from the London Underground logo. The Nike and Trippin World logos disappear, and the street changes into a rural eastern location, what could either be a deserted market place in North Africa or in the Middle East. With this new setting the logo of Muslim Sisterhood appears. These two worlds are clearly separated, and the Muslim Sisterhood are connected to the "Modern" Western metropolis, precisely because of their corporate collaboration. Neoliberalism here is the foundation upon which the "East" can intertwine with the "West", reinforcing the East-West dichotomy.¹⁹⁸ The open arms of Neoliberalism, however, are not so welcoming when we remember that its foundations are squarely built upon the advances of earlier "imperialist and colonial domination by the capitalist powers primarily of Europe and later North America over much of the world's population".¹⁹⁹ As Braedley and Luxton noted, this project of imperialism, colonialism and capitalism depended on "racism and racialization".²⁰⁰ So even when participating and competing in the market, the foundations of racism and racialisation still preside. Neoliberalism's seductive competition and individualisation echoes these colonial conquests, and here the Muslim Sisterhood, although invited to compete are reminded: "know your place".²⁰¹ If then competing in the neoliberal market reinforces power and dichotomies, what then does the collective gain, and what does this mean for their collectivity? Regardless of the fact that all are able to achieve power and

¹⁹⁷ Muslim Sisterhood (@Muslimsisterhood), "Sign up to our zine making & hijab customising workshop this Saturday! Link in our bio. .," *Instagram Video*, September 16, 2019, https://www.instagram.com/p/B2es0bXgYN4/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link; It is important to note that teasers are already embedded in market competition, as a tactic to arouse curiosity and interest from potential consumers.

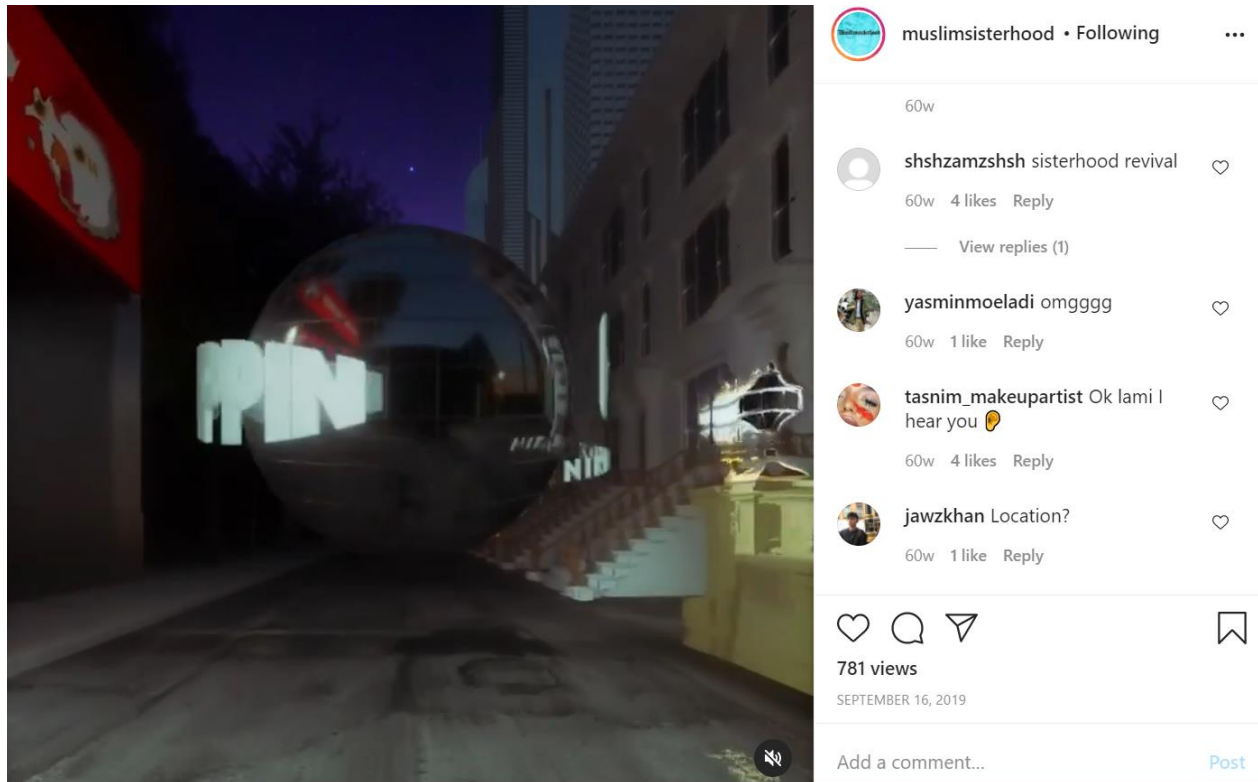
¹⁹⁸ The use of quotation marks here is a commitment to not reinforce these dichotomies, which are an outcome of colonial discourse, but rather to highlight their presence only as they appear in the video.

¹⁹⁹ Susan Braedley and Meg Luxton, "Competing philosophies: Neoliberalism and the Challenges of Everyday Life", 16.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

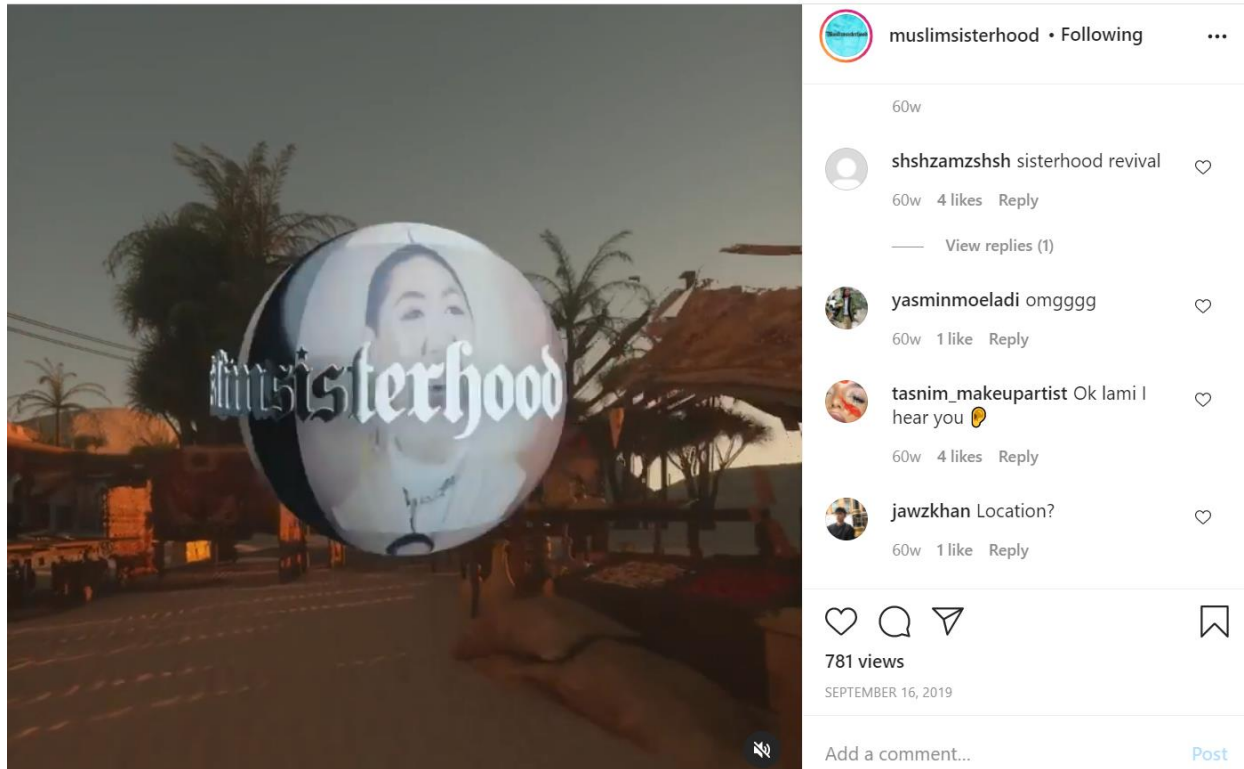
²⁰¹ Angela McRobbie, *Feminism and the Politics of 'Resilience': Essays on Gender, Media and the End of Welfare*, (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2020), 50.

wealth through competing, engagement with a fundamentally racist market must surely only reinforce inequalities, concentrating wealth, and restoring class power.²⁰² This begs the question whether diasporic collectivity within the market can ever function without a reduction and reaffirmation of essentialist identities. If so can this help push forward movements towards equality, or does the market's involvement undermine it?



Figures 4: Instagram Post, @Muslimsisterhood, September 16, 2019, Screenshot.

²⁰² David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uunl/reader.action?docID=422896>, 68



Figures 5: Instagram Post, @Muslimsisterhood, September 16, 2019, Screenshot.

I want to here move beyond the marketing of the collaboration and instead focus on the content. The caption that accompanies the video reads: “Sign up to our zine making & hijab customising workshop this Saturday! Link in our bio 💕”.²⁰³ The hijab here serves as a reminder of difference, but also a globally recognisable one which is instantly associated with Islam. Although the hijab has commonly produced anxiety and concern, market inclusions by larger corporations can counter this in normalising the Hijab’s presence in society. This can be thought about in reference to Özlem Sandıkçı and Güliz Ger’s mechanism of routinization, which can change the stigma status of a consumption practice, by creating a more comforting relationship consequently normalising it.²⁰⁴ Nike’s adoption and commitment to routinization also meets the desire for representation by the Muslim community, and has been a product they have sold since 2017. The value of collaboration here not only sits with Muslim Sisterhood who gain value

²⁰³ Muslim Sisterhood (@Muslimsisterhood), “Sign up to our zine making & hijab customising workshop this Saturday! Link in our bio. . ,” *Instagram Video*, September 16, 2019, https://www.instagram.com/p/B2es0bXgYN4/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link.

²⁰⁴ Sandıkçı and Ger, “Veiling in Style: How Does a Stigmatized Practice Become Fashionable?”, 31.

for their association with a large multinational corporation, but it also sits with Nike who continue to fuel their image of diversity. With the ever-growing market, it has become a crucial aspect of marketing and corporate success to ensure diversity is championed. This ability to bring battles against oppression into the market echoes the work of Angela McRobbie, who recognised the rise of “popular” feminism.²⁰⁵ As noted in the theoretical chapter, this new popular feminism produced “new modalities of gender performativity”, which gave the illusion that the battle for feminism had already been won.²⁰⁶ Similarly here, Nike presents itself as fighting the battles for equality, striving for inclusion and representation, and a leader of this in its commitment to selling hijabs. This accomplishment of representation feeds the demand for representation, and has those striving for equality celebrating small wins, and sometimes letting other much larger issues go unaddressed. Nafisa Bakkar, a founder of an online media platform amplifying the voices of Muslim woman, noted that these campaigns which provide representation are more comparable to tokenism, questioning what it does beyond “a temporary jolt of excitement or acceptance.”²⁰⁷ Corporation’s seduce minority groups, swooning them with representation, and distract them from problematic actions they engage with, a useful tactic for maintaining corporate capital power. The case study of the Uighur’s can plainly demonstrate this. Earlier this year it was reported that Nike uses forced labour of Uighurs in factories across China.²⁰⁸ These Uighurs, predominantly Muslim, are being persecuted as an ethnic minority, as well as being subjected to forced labour, they also undergo ideological training, as well as Mandarin training. What can be recognised as ethnic cleansing, with forced sterilisations, harks back to old colonial practices, where colonial powers would often wipe out their colonies’ culture. Fortunately for the collective, their collaboration with Nike pre-dates the Uighur links, so we cannot critique the work of the Muslim Sisterhood from this angle. However there has been no attempt to consolidate nor engage with these

²⁰⁵ Bbc News, “Apple and Nike urged to cut ‘China Uighur ties’,” July 23, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-53481253>.

²⁰⁶ McRobbie, “Young Women and Consumer Culture: An Intervention,” 546 and 533.

²⁰⁷ Bakkar, “On the Representation of Muslims, Terms & Conditions Apply”, 46.

²⁰⁸ Simina Mistreanu, “Study Links Nike, Adidas And Apple To Forced Uighur Labor”, *Forbes*, March 2, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/siminamistreanu/2020/03/02/study-links-nike-adidas-and-apple-to-forced-uighur-labor/?sh=6d35c50f1003>.

conversations post-Uighur links. The collective self-proclaimed functioning, as a community by Muslim womxn for Muslim womxn comes into question here, with their aspiration to compete being seen as more valuable than their needs to serve their community. What works as a gain in influence and power from a corporate collaboration, creates a trivialised desire for inclusion. A form of popular diversity and inclusion politics arises, in very similar light to McRobbie's popular feminism. The real gain is for Nike, who here capitalise by marketizing difference and the Muslim Identity, to promote their release of their new Nike Shox shoes, and appeal to more consumers. The lure to associate with such powers is too tempting, with the approval from such a large corporate power garnering immense value. The need to compete with and alongside these powers seems imperative, with the achievement of "individual freedom of choice" taking precedence over collective freedom, or collective strides.²⁰⁹

Beyond the tokenism in representation there is more to be said about the event being a "hijab customising workshop". Hosted by the collective, Nike Hijab's are provided to attendees to decorate and personalise according to their own desires. This aspect of customisation draws parallels to the work of Sandıkçı and Ger, who noted that "personalization" and "aestheticization" were key in transforming the hijab from a stigmatised practice, in Turkey, to a fashionable consumption choice.²¹⁰ In this the women did not see the hijab as constraining their selfhood, but that it was in fact "empowering and enabling them to become the women they aspire to be".²¹¹ It is precisely this customisation that allows for the presence of agency, with Muslims appropriating religious practices to suit their needs. Attendees were able to gain insight into this understanding of the hijab, seeing it not just as a religious requirement, but as a place to express individuality, and selfhood. This, however, produces an understanding of agency as being squarely founded in participation with the market, via choices in consumption. As Reina Lewis explored in relation to Inderpal Grewal: "Consumerist logic is, she argues,

²⁰⁹ Susan Bradley and Meg Luxton, "Competing philosophies: Neoliberalism and the Challenges of Everyday Life," in *Neoliberalism and Everyday Life*, (eds.) Meg Luxton and Susan Braedley, (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 3-21

²¹⁰ Özlem Sandıkçı and Güliz Ger, "Veiling in Style: How Does a Stigmatized Practice Become Fashionable?", *Journal of Consumer Research* 37, no. 1, (June 2010): 15-36;

²¹¹ *Ibid*, 30.

integral to the development of rights-based social movements that utilize a discourse of choice [. . .] whether for democracy, reproductive rights, or religious freedoms as evidence of agency, so that the right to consume becomes increasingly prevalent in the conceptualization and enactment of diverse modes of citizenship and belonging”.²¹² The Muslim Sisterhood, display their Muslim subjectivity as agential precisely because of their ability to customise and engage in consumerism. Concurrently, this invests in individualism, but also in collectivity with consumerism becoming, as Lewis noted, a prevalent mode of enacting belonging. In this, consumerism becomes a virtue, providing to be one of the more viable ways for diaspora’s to unite. As such, consumerism has become a normalised practice for belonging, but it also introduces competition as a normalised practice. This ongoing push and pull between community aspects, and individualistic aspects of consumerism is clear, and Meg Luxton adds to it. Luxton notes that community is an antidote to Neoliberalism.²¹³ How does this function when we see here that collectivity is in fact strengthened through Neoliberalism, and engagement with the market? Sandıkçı and Ger further emphasised this, noting that it is precisely through Islam’s ability to utilise the market and consumerism that it can establish its prominence, strength and collectivity.²¹⁴ Collectivity seems to arise through and with corporate entanglement, despite its individualisation. Perhaps then it would be appropriate to not situate collectivity as innately opposite to individualism. Instead we should perhaps view them in a dialectical relationship, where Neoliberalism can be strengthened from diasporic practices of belonging through consumerism, but also combatted through practices of belonging in consumerism.²¹⁵

²¹² Lewis, *Muslim Fashion : Contemporary Style Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015),117.

²¹³ Meg Luxton, “Doing Neoliberalism, Perverse Individualism in Personal Life”, 180.

²¹⁴ Ibid, 33.

²¹⁵ This approach is inspired by the work of Lisa Duggan and José Esteban Muñoz who saw Hope and Hopelessness as not oppositional but dialectical, Lisa Duggan & José Esteban Muñoz, “Hope and hopelessness: A dialogue, Women & Performance”, *A journal of feminist theory*, (2009): 280.

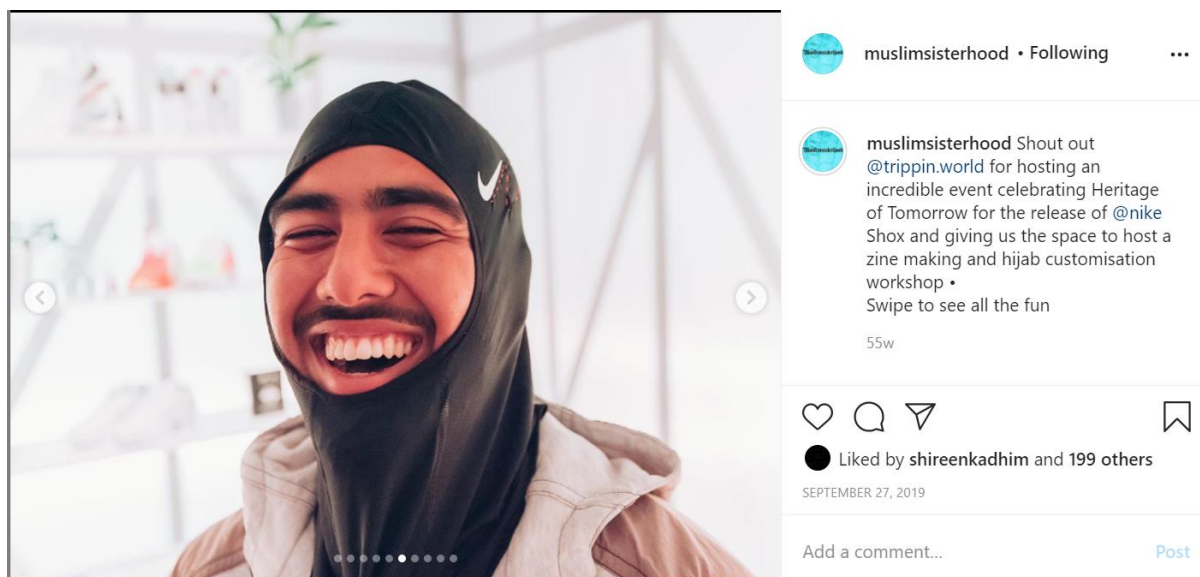


Figure 6: Instagram Post, @Muslimsisterhood, 27th September 2019, 6th photo.

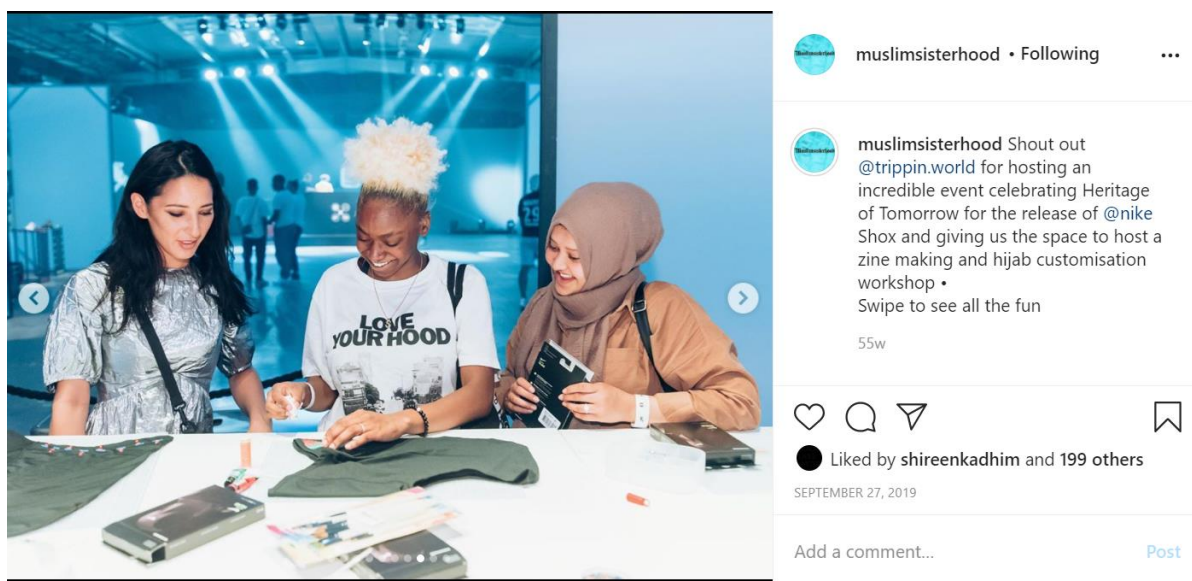


Figure 7: Instagram Post, @Muslimsisterhood, 27th September 2019, 8th photo.

This theme has most likely only delved into the surface of complex contradictions founded in the collective's engagement with the market. What is clear is that there is no one way of viewing their performativity and identity negotiation, and that this is a more valuable understanding which helps to refuse simplistic good versus bad discussions. What is clear is that

there are agential enactments entangled in consumerism, which although strengthens collectivity, it also strengthens the market, seeing the rise of “popular” diversity and inclusion. Identity commodification is key in making strides and gaining power. This strive for recognition and value in society, the competitive side of the collective is continuous in the work they do, especially in their nod to high fashion, which the following theme will explore more in depth against their more street stylisations.

4.3 STREET FASHION TO HIGH FASHION

With the last two themes exploring cosmopolitan and neoliberal entanglements, this theme will hope to chart the growth and direction of the collective. Recognisable in their journey, there are aspirations for elite recognition and acceptance, which sees the fight between aspects of community, in street fashion, that resist Neoliberalism, as well as aspects that commit to possessive individualism.

For the first part of this theme, I want to establish the styling of the collective as founded in street culture, which in and of itself is founded in the community. The collective’s commitment to street fashion is no more evident than in their Footlocker collaboration, where they shot and edited a video with narrators noting their aims and objectives.²¹⁶ In this video, although an advert for Nike, the collective proudly adorn Nike branded clothing, an emblem for the streets. The dominance of Nike is clear, with the narrator opening the video stating: “Sisterhood is that feeling when you meet someone and you have this shared solidarity with them and their issues”. Instantly after, the screen displays the Nike Shox logo. It would be easy here to interpret Nike as the market, and as such the enabler of Muslim identity, collectivity and belonging, as was noted in the theme above. However, here Nike serves as an emblem for street culture, with the collective’s solidarity founded in street styling. The visuals of the video

²¹⁶ Connell, “Understanding Neoliberalism”, 27; Footlocker Eu For Her (@Footlockereuforher) “Sisterhood = shared solidarity and creating opportunities for growth.” *Instagram video*, December 16, 2019, https://www.instagram.com/tv/B6JEMTaHJ_G/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link.

are fast, choppy, and articulate a real representation of London life, acting as a homage to the culture that birthed them. They proudly wear Nike puffer jackets, an item synonymous with street culture, bringing to mind stylisations of the 'Road man'.²¹⁷ They here represent, the everyday, the real people of London. This street culture can be seen as providing resistance to Neoliberalism. As identified by Raewyn Connell, there are four sources of Neoliberal resistance and change. Although not all are needed to enact resistance, their individual collaboration with collectivity is required to produce resistance to the neoliberal project. The fourth source noted is relevant here, and states that resistance can be achieved if Neoliberalism's "temporary solution of cultural tensions" is defied.²¹⁸ The collective do not hide their identities, with some girls wearing the Hijab, challenging normative representations. In addition, they highlight the economic status of those linked with street culture, as well as Muslims who report a lower than average income.²¹⁹ They create a space for their voices, where they "can thrive", contrary to society. As such they bring politics into the market, underlining the inequalities that pervade their life. Another source which Connell highlights that is also relevant here, is "mutual care and mutual responsibility", that can serve as "barriers to the expansion of competitive individualism".²²⁰ In the video the collective is seen together, side by side, and even at times hand in hand. There is a reliance on each other, as well as a love and care. This support and care for their community, can also be seen in their pride for the streets, as they walk in their "ends", and into a chicken shop.²²¹ Earlier shots posted on their profile, feature Muslim women outside of kebab shops or butchers, in corner shops or markets, and in one photo outside a local telephone shop. They attempt to bring their community forward with them, almost similar to the culture and aesthetic of Grime music videos, which show an investment in the community with the visual inclusion of the community.²²² Within street culture, success on the neoliberal market is to be celebrated by the whole community, because that success is truly,

²¹⁷ Marc Richardson, "Top Boys: What is Roadman and Grime Style?", *Grailed*, September 12, 2019 <https://www.grailed.com/drycleanonly/roadman-style>

²¹⁸ Connell, "Understanding Neoliberalism", 35.

²¹⁹ Reina, *Muslim Fashion*, 39.

²²⁰ Connell, "Understanding Neoliberalism", 36.

²²¹ Ends means area, and is a commonly used slang word in London.

²²² Skepta, "Skepta- Shutdown," Youtube, April 26, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MQOG5BkY2Bc>

too, owed to them. No doubt, there is an inscription of value, with street culture being packaged as a commodifiable object in this video.²²³ Yet these neoliberal gains are not for the individual, but are here to serve the community, both politically and through care and as such defy the alienating individualism of Neoliberalism. There is no doubt that this resistance is visible and present, with the application of Connell's understanding, which squarely finds street fashion and culture as an antidote.

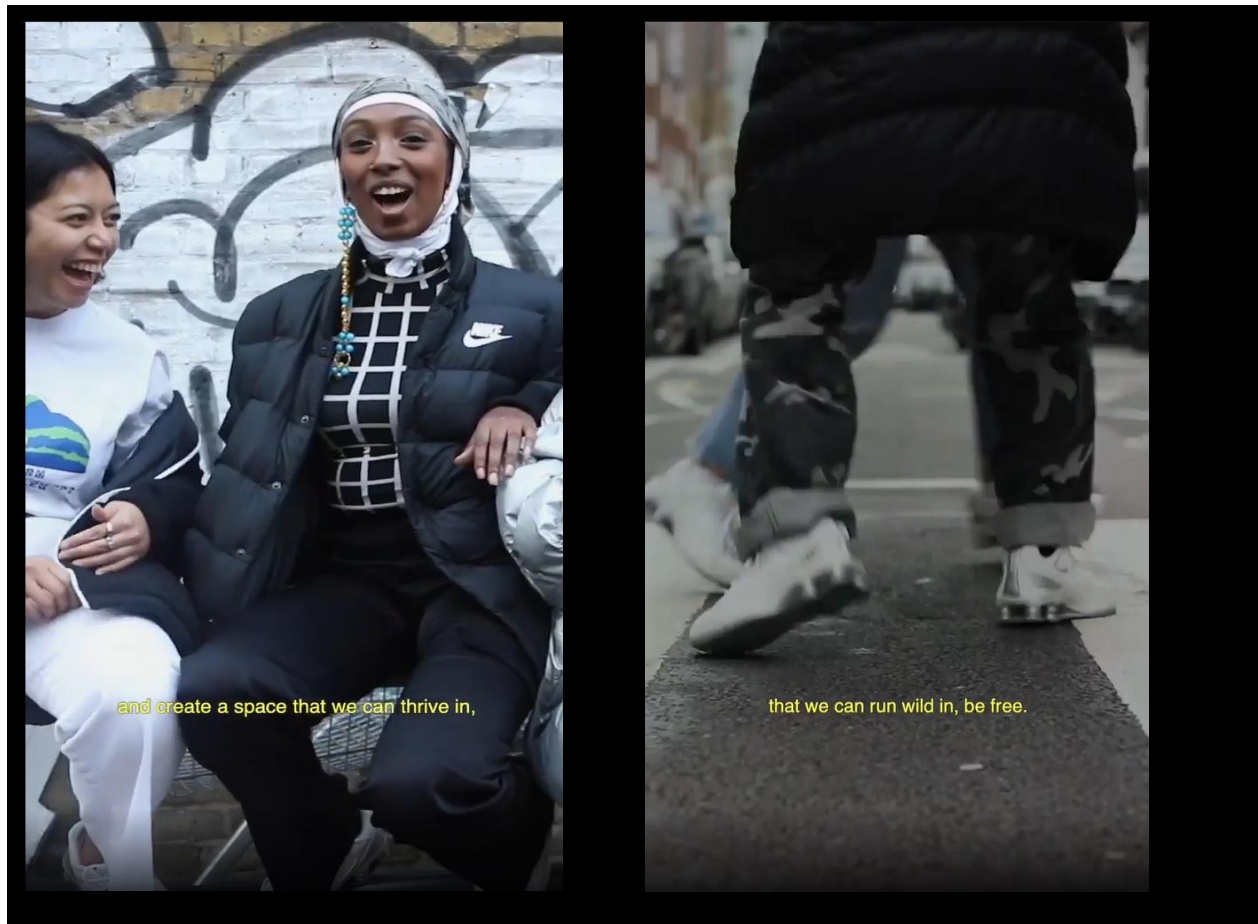


Figure 8: Instagram video, @footlockereuforher, December 16, 2019, stills from 00:34-00:35.

Although the collective produces two sources of resistance to Neoliberalism, with social inequalities and community as core aspects of their collective, they only are able to do so with street styling. This begs the question whether these resistive aspects can be taken forward

²²³ Connell, "Understanding Neoliberalism", 27.

when these street foundations are not so present? Here I want to delve into the collectives work with and towards High fashion, and its association with hierarchy. There are two images posted by the collective that display not only what the collective deems as valuable, but also what they want to align themselves with in order to achieve this value. In the first, a female is draped in Burberry clothing, standing against the backdrop of a supermarket aisle of fizzy drinks.²²⁴ In her hand she holds a pricing gun, what can only be read as a symbolic representation for the market. Instead of countering Neoliberalism and the dominance of the market and market interaction, here the collective accepts its omnipresence. They understand Neoliberalism as a hegemonic discourse, and choose to entangle and approach it as a “common-sense way [that] many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world”.²²⁵ The model here, as the collective, cradles the market, she holds it dearly, placing the collective's “pleasures and possibilities there”.²²⁶ These individualistic pleasures through the market are desired for their perceived ability to instil value, to raise you above others through higher living standards and wealth creation.²²⁷ This philosophy depends on the idea that winners should be rewarded for their hard work and dedication to competing.²²⁸ However, if you believe you will be rewarded for your efforts, then you also believe that those who do not put in effort to be recognised and valued according to society, should not be rewarded with higher living standards. In this view, the Muslim sisterhood justify economic inequalities, and leave their community behind, by seeking to attribute value to themselves, very conflicting when we compare their community entanglement when displaying street styling. This can also be seen in another post this time adopting another tactic to both recognise and align themselves with high fashion. The caption for this post read: “Our beautiful sis @hajfan_ Doing up Muslamic Twiggy vibes for @dailypaper🌸. . .”.²²⁹ Here the model poses, hand raised majestically, her face not

²²⁴ Muslim Sisterhood (@Muslimsisterhood), “Just some casual corner shop attire,” Instagram Post, February 4, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/B8JOUd3grCC/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link.

²²⁵ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 3.

²²⁶ Connell, “Understanding Neoliberalism”, 28.

²²⁷ Connell, “Understanding Neoliberalism”, 28, Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 64.

²²⁸ Connell, “Understanding Neoliberalism”, 27.

²²⁹ Muslim Sisterhood (@Muslimsisterhood), “Our beautiful sis @hajfan_ Doing up Muslamic Twiggy vibes for @dailypaper. . .,” Instagram Post, September 7, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/CE2S3rCIUhQ/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link.

smiling but poised with elegance. The caption clearly makes a nod to British fashion culture, with Twiggy, a model of the 60s, referenced. In the collective's attempt to bring in very British references, firstly Burberry and secondly Twiggy, it is clear that their perception of value is intrinsically white, and far from Muslim culture. Gone is any presence of cultural tensions and inequality, instead what is visible is an alignment with the values of high fashion. Problematic when we remember that the fashion industry is founded on colonialism, trailblazing Eurocentric beauty ideals, as well as responsible for the ongoing exploitation of Black and Brown factory workers.²³⁰ Regardless, the collective inscribe value from high fashion, reinstating hierarchies, what Shelina Kassam also noted in her findings on the idealised Muslim girl.²³¹ Kassam notes that the formation of the idealised Muslim Girl, who with her modern and liberal understanding of religion, is able to transcend problematic aspects of her identity.²³² Her practice of Islam presents her as antithetical to the fundamentalist.²³³ The collective aspire to be part of the elite, and in order to do so, it seems they must shed recognisable Muslim aspects, and assimilate. This compromise of Muslim values, sees also a neo-colonial aspect: "The individualized Muslim subject aspires to be part of the North American elite, and hence, does not attempt to disrupt the inequitable power relations of society".²³⁴ By assimilating, and forgetting their community, they also choose to value and reaffirm power relations. The collective as such, reproduce their inferiority, precisely through their aspirations, an echo of Bhabha's mimicry, where the collective produces "almost the same, but not quite".²³⁵ In addition, whilst mimicking high fashion, they present themselves as the perfect idealised Muslim woman, to be envied by others. As Angela McRobbie noted: "The perfect invites envy

²³⁰ Kalkidan Legesse, "Racism is at the heart of fast fashion – it's time for change", *The Guardian*, June 11, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/jun/11/racism-is-at-the-heart-of-fast-fashion-its-time-for-change>

²³¹ Kassam, "Marketing an Imagined Muslim Woman: Muslim Girl Magazine and the Politics of Race, Gender and Representation", 543- 64.

²³² Shelina Kassam, "Marketing an Imagined Muslim Woman: Muslim Girl Magazine and the Politics of Race, Gender and Representation", 555.

²³³ Shelina Kassam, "Marketing an Imagined Muslim Woman: Muslim Girl Magazine and the Politics of Race, Gender and Representation", 555.

²³⁴ Shelina Kassam, "Marketing an Imagined Muslim Woman: Muslim Girl Magazine and the Politics of Race, Gender and Representation", 552.

²³⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse." In *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 85-92.

and competition, while also providing role models for those lower down the social ladder”.²³⁶ This perfect, idealised Muslim is situated as the ultimate goal, who can be achieved through individualism by competing in the market through consumerism. In producing this desirable Muslim individual, the Collective distance themselves from other Muslims, resurrecting essentialist dichotomies that view Muslims as either Moderate or Terrorist. Yet even this moderate Muslim “will never be ‘of’ this culture”.²³⁷ Their strive to join the elite will never materialise.



Figure 9: Instagram Post, @Muslimsisterhood, 4th February 2020.

²³⁶ McRobbie, *Feminism and the Politics of 'Resilience'*, 50.

²³⁷ Kassam, “Marketing an Imagined Muslim Woman: Muslim Girl Magazine and the Politics of Race, Gender and Representation”, 558.

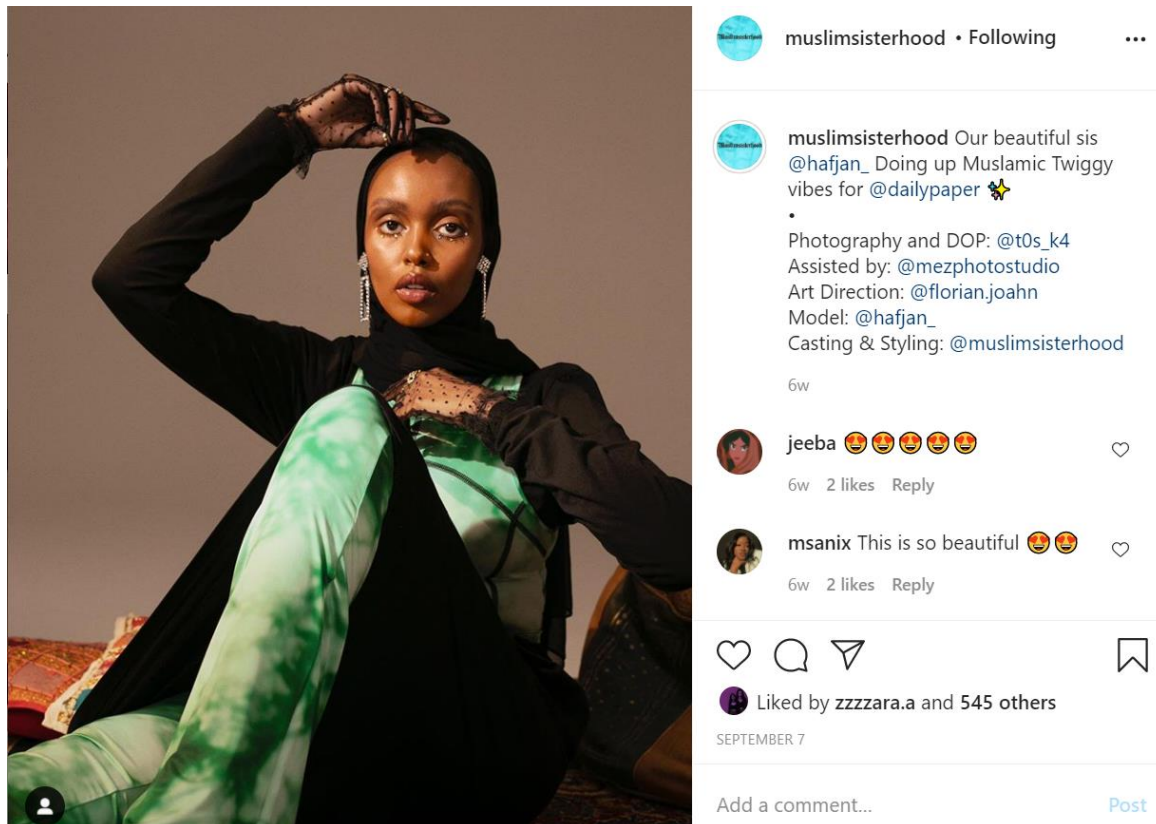


Figure 10: Instagram Post, @Muslimsisterhood, 11th September 2019.

It is clear that there are aspects of this collective's identity that are truly resistant to the alienating possessive individualism of Neoliberalism, and this is particularly visible in their street styling. Street culture depends on collectivity and community, and is politically charged with issues of the lower classes, as well as being usually made up of minority groups. The collective thrive on this, and it serves as the driving force behind their work. Taking forward these influences, they navigate neoliberal commodification of street style, displaying a caring community, and it is precisely this collectivity that defies the neoliberal project, and can signal a new existence and way to move forward beyond Neoliberalism. But these movements towards change can be seen as undermined in the aspirations for more market power, ultimately in seeking recognition of high fashion institutions. In doing this, the collective produce an idealised Muslim Woman, who is only so because of her ability to distinguish herself from the rest of her community. In doing this, we are reminded of the selfish aspects of the neoliberal project, that can corrupt anybody and everyone.

SUMMARY

In conclusion it is clear that the Muslim Sisterhood function as a collective precisely because of their ability to engage difference positively. Through diasporic cosmopolitanism, they are able to defy racial order by working with and through inclusivity in this new Muslim Subjectivity. Yet this dependence on community and care under the commonality of Islam are brought into question with corporate collaborations. Undoubtedly, there are successes and gains to be made with representation, but seeking validation from corporations has not only reaffirmed their superiority but also welcomed the commodification of difference. This commodification echoes colonial discourse, and serves as a reminder of societal hierarchies. However consumerism is becoming a predominant practice for both the practice of agency, and as such identity and belonging, therefore proving neoliberal engagement to be profitable and desirable for the Muslim community. Not only can market engagement strengthen the collective but it can also normalise the presence of Muslim's, and as such begin the process of destigmatisation. The work of the collective is founded in community, and flourishes in their engagement with street styling. This kind of stylisation within Neoliberalism can in fact serve as a resistance, prioritising community, and topics of inequality, countering its possessive individualism. Yet the collective also display another side to their street styling that counters this basis, and instead favours the producing of the idealised Muslim. Not only does this serve as a reminder of reductive dichotomies, but it also serves as a reminder that they, the collective, will never truly be a part of the elite.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Referring back to my research questions, through performativity and styling, I have tried to map out the Muslim Sisterhood's diasporic identity negotiation. With the surge of mass media, there is a growing need to address the existences and performances occurring in virtual worlds. This work aimed to make sense of Muslim identity negotiation in the virtual, employing virtual ethnography and textual analysis, engaging with the Muslim Sisterhood's Instagram account. Joining a long list of explorations on Muslim identity, this work has ensured a move away from essentialist reductive dichotomies, and as such has produced a more complex and heterogenous understanding. The view of Muslims as agential, as foregrounded by my focus on styling, has been crucial to achieving this, and was inspired by the works of Thijl Sunier and Emma Tarlo, who committed to producing a brighter picture.²³⁸ What has been unearthed, is a clear entanglement of Muslim identity negotiation, in and with the neoliberal market, producing conflicting and contesting visions. Subversive powers no doubt are visible, which commit to cosmopolitan imaginaries, resisting the individualism of Neoliberalism. But the collective also reaffirm their inferiority by engaging with the market, commodifying their identity, and as such also undermining strives for equality. What must be emphasised within these contestations, is that neoliberal engagement and consumption habits foster collectivity and belonging, and the Muslim Sisterhood strengthen their collectivity through this.

Before highlighting the limitations of the study, I think it is necessary to identify the key findings and contradictions mapped out in making sense of the Muslim Sisterhood. Firstly the collective are founded on their community, on inclusivity, and care, and as such provide resistance to Neoliberalism. Yet their constant engagement with the market views them as inherently competitive, individualistic, striving for value from institutions, and as such reaffirming their inferiority. In addition, engagement with the market and consumerism is a viable and preferable place for identity formation and for belonging. Not only are the collective showing

²³⁸ Thijl Sunier, "Styles of Religious Practice: Muslim Youth Cultures in Europe," in *Muslim Diaspora in the West: Negotiating Gender, Home and Belonging*, eds. Haideh Moghissi and Halleh Ghorashi, (Ashgate Gower, 2010); Emma Tarlo, "Islamic Cosmopolitanism: The Sartorial Biographies of Three Muslim Women in London", 143,72;

this, but they affirm their Muslim subjectivity because of it, truly showcasing Muslims as agential. Yet if we locate agency firmly in neoliberal consumption, what does this say for those engaging with identity negotiation outside of the market? The collective through corporate collaborations gain power, but the side effect of commodifying their identity also comes with “popular” attempts for diversity and inclusion. This unfortunately removes the need to hold corporations responsible or accountable, with the perception that equality politics have been resolved through small representation. Contradictions are clear, and this is inherent to Neoliberalism, as David Harvey noted.²³⁹ Yet, perhaps instead of recognising these as oppositions, it may be fairer to view them in a dialectical relationship. For instance, yes Neoliberalism strengthens individualism, but it also strengthens collectivity. So perhaps the truest way to understand the platform of the Muslim Sisterhood is to see a push and pull, a give and take, which still ultimately pushes Muslim identities to the foreground, challenging normative representations, and reductive understandings.

Not only is the work of the Muslim Sisterhood important to ensuring the visibility of Muslim identity, but they are also an example of a very localised phenomenon. No doubt, there are many more localised understandings to be delved into, and this is a necessity for future studies in order to ensure heterogeneity is coexistent with Muslim diaspora. Beyond that, my focus on such a localised phenomenon, produces more true and situated knowledge, and defies the capability to produce a holistic vision of anything.

This study focused on solely the field of Instagram, what is naturally a neoliberal social media application, fostering competition and individualism. As such, to have found that the collective functions with neoliberal values is not profound. It would be best for future studies to focus more so on whether this Neoliberalism and consumerism is also present in the practice of belonging and identity negotiation, outside of the application. Additionally my focus on the representative aspects of the collective meant that there were no interviews conducted. This may, however, contribute to another silencing of Muslim women, and should perhaps in future

²³⁹ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 69.

studies be countered in including their voices, and perhaps allowing them to drive knowledge production.

Although this study has refrained from making conclusions, I have tried to ensure that the Muslim diaspora have been engaged with a positive and heterogenous vision. I hope this thesis appeals to the creation of more agential Muslim Youth understandings, which are no doubt lacking, and which would ensure positive and affirmative visions of Muslim subjectivity.

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FIGURES

Figure 1:

Muslim Sisterhood (@Muslimsisterhood). Instagram Main Profile View, Instagram Profile: as viewed on iOS app, last accessed October 24, 2020.

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