

THE UNHEARD VOICE OF IMMIGRANT MUSLIM WOMEN
IN THE UNITED STATES POST-9/11/2001

by

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ABSTRACT

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Immigrant Muslim women in the United States experience difficulties, as most immigrants do, with integration into a new society. In order to better depict the reality that these women are actually experiencing a lack of voice to demonstrate their difficulties and subsequently receive assistance, I utilize intersectionality feminist theory to differentiate categories where analyses can lead to improved assimilation and ease in integration for these women.

Specifically, the intersections of aspects such as religion, race, class, gender, and ethnicity are included as major points of concern in dissecting what it means to be an immigrant Muslim woman in the United States after 9/11 and how studying these intersections can lead to increased voice and improved conditions for those who are in need of it. Finally, I argue that the United States would benefit by using a system like the one Germany has utilized in integration assistance, which has seen positive results such as increased child care, English classes, and employment opportunities to women who otherwise may have been left in the shadows.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION
1.1 The Problem

Integration into a new society would be difficult for most; however, this process becomes especially challenging for Muslim women who are immigrating into a Western society. The primary factor in difficult integration is voice. Voice, or lack of voice, leads to diminished capacity for acquiring the assistance for which one is in need. The voice this group has managed to find is largely unheard by peers and outsiders, not necessarily literature, and what has been heard has been looked upon as being not what the average voice in this group would say for herself, and so is in danger of being dismissed. This group of immigrant Muslim women is a group of voices that is increasingly gaining higher educational levels and could be of benefit in assisting in efforts to improve what they believe is of most importance to them, both here in the U.S. and abroad. The advantages of hearing this voice clearly and sufficiently would be an increased awareness of at least: Issues in other countries; issues in the United States; a better overall rapport between Easterners and Westerners. Immigrant Muslims are not unlike other immigrants, who strive to make a comfortable life for themselves in their new country while maintaining as much native culture as possible.

Assimilation into the United States can be difficult depending upon other factors as well. These include a tribal mentality of home culture, a patriarchal mentality of home culture, slowed growth in home societal structure, economic factors in the Muslim parts of the world, among others. Together these circumstances result in a broad spectrum of immigrant Muslim female experience and lend themselves to an analysis of the intersections where identity is formed and re-formed through the assimilation process. "While Muslims and Americans have similar views on some issues, they voiced diverse remedies for bridging the gap." (Mogahed, "Muslims and

Americans: The Way Forward”) Taking the time to hear them may lead to surprises we did not realize were issues for them.

If the above-mentioned factors are aspects which cause this particular group of women to struggle with integrating into the United States, then identifying avenues for assistance for them to utilize in order to gain a greater voice in their society would be of benefit. We see Muslim women from many different countries who have not only successfully made the United States their home, but who have bravely stepped out of the box to help their striving fellow American Muslim women succeed. They have gained their voice and are using it to help others gain their voice. This process should open the door for us to explore avenues for improvement in policy and education.

Despite the fact that “A 2005 Gallup Poll of U.S. households found that “gender inequality” was among the top responses American women gave to the open-ended question, “What do you admire least about the Muslim or Islamic world?” (Mogahed, “Perspectives of Women in the Muslim World”), I am not so sure that the immigrant Muslim women would describe their situation in such a way. “Shifting the center’ means putting at the center of our thinking the experiences of groups who have formerly been excluded. Without doing so, many groups simply remain invisible” (Anderson and Collins 2). In addition, “learning about other groups helps you realize the partiality of your own perspective; furthermore, this is true for both dominant and subordinate groups...Second, having misleading and incorrect knowledge gives us a poor social analysis and leads to the formation of bad social policy – policy that then reproduces, rather than solves, social problems. Finally, knowledge is not just about content and information; it provides an orientation to the world” (Anderson and Collins 3). For these reasons and others, an analysis of the intersections important in their lives affect them is necessary in order to diminish the possibility for them to remain invisible.

September 11 presented new challenges for immigrant Muslims, especially women wearing a head covering and those who “looked” Arabic. “The events of September 11 simply re-exposed that ours is “a racial landscape where groups jockey to get out from the racist gaze of society and the racist policies of the state” (Karim 40). Assimilation into a new society is difficult and the events of 9/11 only amplified that difficulty for these immigrants. It is important to note that generally, Muslims entering the United States are previously educated and thus have better chance for ease in assimilation. Cindy Wooden, writing for the Catholic News Service, states that Sara Silvestri has noted some key points of importance: “Muslims apparently have greater ease integrating into U.S. society than into European countries, she said, but the difference is not so much the host country as the fact that most Muslim immigrants to the United States are professionals who moved for work or advanced studies or because they are political refugees seeking safety” (Wooden, “Keeping the Faith: Muslim Immigrants Integrate with Christians’ Help”). However, 9/11 became a time when Muslim identity in the United States was under immense pressure to reveal itself in a way unlike any time before and individual achievement was not stressed as much as the identity of the group as a whole.

It is commonly held that within a couple of years, an immigrant has assimilated to American culture. But what is to be considered as a model, especially after 9/11, for an immigrant Muslim woman in the United States? There are positive signs that they are well-educated, are generally living comfortable lives, and are happy. Barrett believes this equals success for Muslims in America (4). The women seem to do as well as the men in educational achievements and in careers. This looks like a representative picture but I am concerned that there are those who are absent from this picture, having been overlooked when we approach the issue at a macro level. A specific micro-level analysis of immigrant Muslim women today would reveal intersections previously invisible. For example: “What one sees today in American mosques and Muslim homes, in Islamic centers and on university campuses is nothing less

than a struggle for the soul of a religion.” (Barrett 13) Each one is trying to find their own place as a Muslim, immigrant, and woman in the United States.

Muslims have been immigrating to America for decades but we are only now seeing the fruits and the roots of their labor. This is because since 9/11, attention of Americans has been drawn to Muslims in a way they had not experienced before, and this has essentially forced them to carve out and explain pieces of their identity they may have previously ignored themselves. For immigrant Muslim women, the struggle between their culture, religion, and what they were experiencing in the United States presented the perfect opportunity for finding a voice. Abdo notes that he “discovered that September 11 has dramatically altered the way Muslims live in this country. These changes largely defy decades of history in a nation of immigrants, and they challenge the American ideal of diverse cultures linked by a shared attachment to common goals and dreams....They are combining a desire to embrace Islam with negotiating the rigors of daily life in modern America” (4).

Goodwin notes that Muslims understand Americans better than Americans understand the Islamic world but “We cannot assume, however, that because of their familiarity with the West, they think and behave like our mirror images” (25). Muslim immigrants cannot be expected to automatically adopt all aspects of American society. “Issues of faith, identity, and institution building become critical for immigrant communities seeking to establish themselves as part of the American mosaic. American Muslims today struggle with many of the same kinds of concerns that immigrant Christians and Jews faced earlier in American history” (Haddad, Smith, and Esposito 1). An instance of this would be differences in valuing individuals over groups versus valuing group over individuals. Additionally, “The American social and cultural environment is highly dynamic. It is constantly challenged from within as new social movements arise to question established cultural and moral norms and destabilize social equilibrium. It is also challenged from outside as new immigrants flood it, bringing with them

competing social, religious, and moral values” (Khan 177). McCloud believes that all find voice (159); however, finding a voice under those circumstances can be a difficult task for newcomers.

An intersectional approach to the inquiry of race, class, gender, religious, and other issues of importance to immigrant Muslim women will illuminate factors involved in social integration and identity formation, and will further our understanding of forces acting upon them and how they make decisions based on these factors. Feminist theories such as intersectionality “can be understood as a series of campaigns to eliminate women’s economic, political, and social subordination – campaigns, one might say, that specifically target the menializing contours of feminization” (Hawkesworth 26). For my purposes, an intercategorical approach, where multiple categories of distinction are cross-referenced, is most useful. In addition, Islamic Feminism describes how different structures “frame Muslim women’s lives, particularly religion” (Karim 17). This approach will allow for a deeper understanding of the intersections mentioned above and how Islam plays a role across the board.

Khan describes identity formation as a “complex process that allows for the intervention of both historical and material forces and human agency. In the specific case of the Muslim community in North America, one can clearly see that both historical forces and political agencies are shaping the emerging identity of American Muslims, the political forces both local and global in nature” (175). Understanding identities is critical and Khan states the reason as being that they determine the course of utilizing agency (175). This process has been ongoing for immigrant Muslims but seems to have accelerated after 9/11, when the Muslim community seemed to rise up in search of its identity. This rising up has been an opportunity for looking at the ways in which intersections of categories such as race, class, and gender affect immigrant Muslim women.

CHAPTER 2
INTERSECTIONALITY

2.1 Theory

Intersectionality is a term by Kimberly Crenshaw first used in 1989 and then gained strength in the 1990's when Patricia Hill Collins utilized it in black feminist writings. Intersectionality theory proposes looking at the intersections of factors such as race, class, and gender, and their effects on lives. Collins believes these factors are interlocking and "affect all aspects of human life; they simultaneously structure the experiences of all people in this society" (xi). In describing this interlocking matrix, terms such as double jeopardy and triple jeopardy are used to emphasize that multiple factors are being considered. Likewise, experiences based on one's race, class, and gender are stacked over time and intensity, Collins adds, and "seeing, race, class, and gender only in additive terms misses the social structural connections between them and the particular ways that different configurations of race, class, and gender affect group experience" (4). In addition, utilizing this approach allows for intergroup studies and intragroup comparisons in order to gain a more encompassing explanation of the effects of different intersections.

This intersectional approach to feminist studies is useful and important in our multicultural society because "developing inclusive thinking is more than just "understanding diversity" or valuing cultural pluralism" (Anderson and Collins 4). And in developing our understanding and looking at broader categories, social issues and political issues affecting different groups can be better understood. Since women's lives are affected by many different and sometimes conflicting forces, the outcomes are often misunderstood unless a more comprehensive approach to describing the possible forces and their affects on people.

Collins favored a structural approach to intersectionality but other approaches including anticategorical complexity, intracategorical complexity, and intercategorical complexity are described by McCall. Anticategorical complexity is described as being “based on a methodology that deconstructs analytical categories. Social life is considered too irreducibly complex – overflowing with multiple and fluid determinations of both subjects and structures – to make fixed categories...” (McCall 1773). Intracategorical complexity is used when focus is turned to “particular social groups at neglected points of intersection” (McCall 1774). Intercategorical complexity “requires that scholars provisionally adopt existing analytical categories to document relationships of inequality along multiple and conflicting dimensions” (McCall 1773). I have chosen to utilize the intercategorical complexity approach, as I believe that this approach would be the best choice in analyzing the effects of aspects such as race, class, and gender on a group with apparent inequalities in society, that is female Muslim immigrants to the United States post-9/11.

In the era of globalization, where societies are much more open to the world and interpretation, this phenomenon of globalization has even been described in feminist terms. Hawkesworth points out that globalization affects men and women differently (2). “In the midst of the intense social, economic, political, and technological fluidity characteristic of the contemporary world, each account of globalization tells a story of how things are and why things are as they are...they converge on one point: the near total absence of any reference to women or to feminism.” (Hawkesworth, 3). Furthermore, Hawkesworth argues that leaving women out of the picture of globalization suggests that globalization affects all people the same, there are no gendered power relations at play in globalization, and that ultimately globalization is not a women’s issue (3). This oversight results in mistakes regarding the role of women in a globalized society. Regarding Muslim’s place in globalization, Abdul-Ghafur states: “I believe that Islam is in the midst of global transformation. This transformation is being led largely by

Muslims in the West because we have certain academic freedoms along with freedom of speech and freedom to worship” (3).

2.2 Approach

Each different race, class, gender, religion, and nationality, along with the intersections of these categories, will result in different experiences for women. These experiences will likely be much different in immigrant Muslim women than in Native American women. Therefore, the forces upon them will be different in degrees and categories depending on their location within the different domains of power. Even within the group of Muslim immigrant women in the United States post-9/11, there are distinct differences. For example, the experiences of a woman who came to the U.S. as a refugee or seeking political asylum will be much different from the experiences of an upper-class woman from a prominent Muslim family who came to the U.S. to obtain higher education. And, being that their life experiences fall into such diverse categories, their experiences after arriving in the United States will presumably be different as well. In turn, these women will react to these different circumstances differently and women in similar circumstances will react in different ways.

Over time, these women will also move in and out of many different categories of class, education, and even race. I will discuss the issue of race in more detail below; however, it is worth mentioning that the race one claims before coming to the United States can alter after their arrival, and this is more apparent after 9/11 as evidenced by racial concerns due to attacks on people who looked Arabic but may or may not have been Muslim or the women who took off their hijab. Race is only on issue at play in examples like these because a woman with a hijab (Islamic head covering) may be from a class which allows her to be better understood by her peers, such as a woman in highly-educated circles. On the other hand, that same woman 10 years earlier may have been subject to different categories of distinction due to the fact that she may have not been privileged to the high level of education and in turn peers who are more

educated regarding her status in society. This is an example of how women can move across categories over time. "Multiple 'subject positions' define women's experiences of both inequality and power and also provide a window into how they move across boundaries. Cole recognizes this distinction when stating "That which US women have in common must always be viewed in relation to the particularities of the group, for even when we narrow our focus to one particular group of women it is possible for differences within that group to challenge the primacy of what is shared in common" (149).

A woman is not subject to the categories in which she is placed according to race, class, gender, etc. Rather, she is given a voice from which to speak. "A focus on intersectionality does not erase group categories or undermine the mobilizing power of group identities. Instead, it complicates notions of hierarchical group relations by emphasizing that individual subject positions create overlap among ethnic identities not ordinarily linked." (Karim 91) When these voices come together, a sense of belonging is achieved within the group. "Through a collective identity, individuals imagine an ethnic niche as well as a set of values and norms, real and/or imagined, that mark their ethnic community. (Karim 92) This group-forming ability along with the voice that results from it are critical to those assimilating to a new culture.

For those analyzing the structures acting upon these women, other factors have to be taken into account. For example, cultural norms of the home society must be accounted into the equation. Hawkesworth notes an instance of this: "Within many parts of the world, the demarcation of public and private spheres, which informs the notion of work outside the home, is far less clear-cut than Western feminists might presume." (128) Southern feminists are aware of this construct even within those born in the United States. "Feminists of the South have insisted that modernization cannot be understood apart from centuries of colonization, economic exploitation, and environmental degradation, which produce markedly uneven development within the South as well as between North and South. Meaningful liberations,

then, must take into account the needs and interests of very different very different kinds of women marked by membership in particular class, caste, ethnic, national, race, and religious groups.” (Hawkesworth 127)

It is important to remember that though this theory places subjects into categories, and some want to resist categorical distinction on their own bases, these women are still agents and therefore are acting and making decisions of their own free-will. However, Anderson and Collins note that “Social institutions exert a powerful influence on our everyday lives. They are also powerful channels for societal penalties and privileges. The type of work you do, the structure of your family, the kind of education you receive, and how you are treated by the state are all shaped by the institutional structure of society. Because institutions are patterned by race, class, and gender, their effect is different, depending on whom you are.” (Anderson and Collins 191)

One gendered institution is the family. In most cultures, the role of the female in the institution of family has been associated with home life. Women are expected to care for the children, providing happiness and love to the family. “This ideal identified women with the private world of the family and men with the public sphere of work. Family ideology, of course, only projected an ideal, since we know that few families actually fit the presumed ideal; nonetheless, the ideology of the family provided a standard against which all families were judged” (Anderson and Collins, 193). Noting the genderizing of space and institutions, Karim argues that “Patriarchal configurations of space, that is, the dichotomy between public and private, locate women in private places and men in public places...It is important to note that women...challenge but also embrace gender lines in ways that contrast with mainstream feminist ideologies. Because of their unique ethnic experiences, Muslim women often find justice in gender lines that push men to stand as primary leaders, accountable to their families and communities.” (Karim 233) In other words, helping Muslim women to find their voice does

not involve de-genderizing these spaces and institutions as they are often embraced by the women in them but rather helping them to find a voice and perspective from which to speak..

A different angle to approach the issue of race, class, and gender on institutions is from an individual perspective. The United States is a highly individualized society. We are told to be all that we can be, to climb that ladder of success, and to achieve all we can alone. "The individualist framework of the dominant culture sees race, class, and gender as attributes of individuals, instead of seeing them as embedded in institutional structures" (Anderson and Collins 194) While it is true that race, class, gender, and other categories into which we place people do impact people on an individual level, approaching intersectionality on an individual basis "...overlooks their profoundly embedded position in the structure of American institutions...Moving historically marginalized groups to the center of analysis clarifies the importance of social institutions as links between individual experience and larger structures of race, class, and gender." (Anderson and Collins 194) Therefore, again, both individual and group experiences need to be included.

A recent study of Muslim identity in the United States in the 21st century found that "On the one hand, Muslims here repeatedly have told him they are happy to live in a country where they are free to practice their faith...Many American Muslims still worry about "Islamophobia" and feel the need for more interfaith dialogues, Ahmed said. (Karkabi "Professor Leads Team to Research Muslim Identity in the U.S.") In other words, these people need a voice. Utilizing both empirical evidence and intercategory intersectionality theory to analyze and gain a better understanding of the effects race, class, and gender on Muslim immigrant women in the United States post-9/11 will allow for a broad analysis of the effects. Anderson and Collins argue that "Using a race-, class-, and gender-inclusive framework to analyze social issues is significant in at least three ways. First, themes that emerge as social issues (for example, concern with the environment, homelessness, AIDS, sexuality, and immigration) are products of social

institutions and institutions themselves are framed by race, class, and gender politics, what counts as a social issue reflects these institutional politics.” (350).

2.3 Voice

It has been noted that many Muslim women are doing well in the United States. They admit to being happy and have attained high levels of education and lifestyle over other immigrant groups. However, I would argue that even among those in this category, there is a lack of voice. Due to this lack of voice, these women who have achieved the “all you can be” American attitude are restricted in their ability to voice their concerns. Karim states that these women are a “chorus of voices” (96) but I would state the phenomenon as a lack of chorus of voices that should be heard. Instead of having the stories of these immigrant Muslim women documented as with many other groups, there is a hole in the group of stories representing the voice of these women. Karim argues “Muslim women’s voices therefore serve as a primary source of Islamic knowledge and Muslim experience. I chose women to tell the stories of the American ummah so as to elevate their voices in the production of knowledge about Islam and Muslim communities, areas otherwise dominated by men” (3-18).

Abdo tells a story of a Muslim woman, Rehan, who started to wear the hijab after September 11. Her reason was “an expression of Muslim solidarity in the face of the widespread criticism of Islam in the United States” (30). After starting to wear the hijab, Rehan noticed that she was a minority, which she had not noticed before. The issue of voice for these women is noticed by Ali, who asserts that “without the emancipation of Muslim women, the socially disadvantageous position of Muslims will persist in Western countries as well as the entire world. I see a direct link between the poor situation of Muslim women, on the one hand, and the lagging behind of Muslims in education and the job market, their high rate of juvenile delinquency, and their heavy reliance on social services on the other. In reality, the upbringing of Muslim girls denies them personal independence and their own sense of responsibility,

values that are essential for getting ahead in a Western country” (Ali *The Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam* 4). In my own experience, this is changing. Even being on a college campus in the United States today, one sees Muslim girls acting as independent agents with responsibility for themselves. However, comparing Muslim immigrant women to other groups of immigrant women shows that grassroots efforts for change, demonstrating voices of these groups, is lesser among the Muslim group. Ali offers another reason for the need of these voices to be heard, which is “that Muslim women are scarcely listened to, and they need a woman to speak out on their behalf. Their official spokespersons are nearly all men” (Ali *The Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam* 5). Despite the fact that there are many mosques, activities centers, and Muslim Associations throughout the United States, again, those with the power of voice tend to be men, and tend to marginalize the need for women to have their own voices regarding their own issues of importance.

In one explanation of why the lack of voice occurs, Ali offers this account:

“After marriage the mistrust of women only intensifies – now that the bride has been deflowered, her husband’s fear takes on even greater proportions – he has just punctured his unique means of checking whether his wife has been to bed with another man. The only way of preventing her from cheating on him is to deny her access to the outside world as much as possible. She must have his permission, or his company, for every step she takes outside the door. (Ali *The Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam* 24)

This phenomenon is what Ali coins the “virgins’ cage” (26). In addition to leading to lack of voice, and in this case agency, for women, Ali points out further consequences for other

members of the family, including those women who are less educated being limited in how much they can teach their children (26). For the young girls in the virgin's cage scenario, she sees no opportunity for change and no outlet for voicing a desire for change. "The virgins' cage is, in fact, a double cage. Women and girls are locked up in the inner cage, but surrounding this is a larger cage in which the entire Islamic culture has been imprisoned" (Ali *The Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam* 26). Furthermore, Ali goes on, "With any luck, those who immigrated as children will become educated at a later age, but as long as the traditional sexual morality remains their parents' guiding principle for raising them, their socioeconomic progress will be difficult, if not impossible." (Ali *The Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam* 26)

In an article titled "Finding My Religion: After 9/11, Miller gives the story of Azadeh, a girl who grew up in San Francisco but also spent some years in Iran. After September 11, she decided it was time to begin wearing a hijab and bring her religion out in the open to those around her. Many Muslim women decided to start wearing a hijab after 9/11. In addition to this demonstration of voice for their religion, many also attended and spoke on panel meetings around the country at churches, universities, and political events. This is an interesting dynamic in which the women were able to not only demonstrate voice regarding their religion, but also voice regarding their nationality and probably issues of race, class, and gender as well. Here is a portion of the interview:

"I want to ask you about your veil. You decided to put it on after 9/11. What was the reason?" "I was learning a lot about Islam around that time and becoming more religious. It (the decision to wear a veil) didn't entirely happen because of 9/11, but that certainly gave me a push. Too many women are afraid to wear one because they were worried about discrimination, and it hurt

me to see that. I mean, if you're wearing it for God, don't you trust God is going to protect you? Weren't people surprised to see you in a veil? It's a pretty drastic change from what most women your age are wearing." "Actually, I got more respect! Guys stopped honking at me when I walked by their cars. People started opening doors for me. At work, people were just curious; they wanted to know more about it – why I wore it." (Miller "Finding My Religion: After 9/11, Azadeh Zainab Sharif Started Wearing the Hijab")

2.4 Islamic Feminism

Yet another avenue for deconstructing what it means to be a female Muslim immigrant, perhaps the most important, is Islamic feminism. Karim describes that "Islamic feminist's account for the ways in which multiple structures frame Muslim women's lives, particularly religion" (Karim 17). Utilizing this angle of inquiry is critical in understanding the core ideologies of different Muslim groups and individuals. Without a proper understanding of the core beliefs, group/culture/country beliefs, and even individual beliefs, an analysis will be lacking fundamental elements of the picture. Therefore, by utilizing both intersectionality and Islamic feminism, we can begin to see a clearer picture of the locations of these women due to intersections of their race, class, gender, religion, ethnicity, etc.

On their journeys through obtaining a voice for themselves, whether it be political issues, gender issues, race issues, or any other area, Muslim women work within the Islamic discourse. Islam teaches them to put their faith first and to always be mindful of their religion. So before race, class, gender, or any other category these women may fall under, they are always Muslim first. Subsequently, Muslims see other Muslims as Muslim first. This hierarchy of categories in which people fall has been a driving force behind identity formation and

integration in the United States. We see examples of this in the populations of mosques in the U.S. being predominantly one race or culture. Even though they are all practicing Islam, the people seem to naturally choose to gather where there are others who fall into as many of the same categories. “As Muslim women move along ethnic communities, they often practice agency with accommodation. That is, they deliberately and thoughtfully embody agency and choice even as they accept long-standing expectations and norms within their ethnic Muslim group, norms related to gender but also class and race.” (Karim 94)

There are some important points to be made regarding the use of Islamic feminism alongside intersectionality in this manner. First, Muslim women who are using their voice for some purpose are not necessarily always engaging in feminist thought. Likewise, they are not all concerned otherwise with feminist movements. However, they “nonetheless demonstrate important forms of women’s agency that resonate with Islamic feminist practice” (Armstrong vii). The second point, which Armstrong also makes, is that Islamic feminism is not a fixed identity but rather a self-positioning, which can change, and is “asserted alongside other speaking positions, such as Muslim, American, black, Asian, and middle class. In this way, we use the term Islamic feminism not to impose a label of identity upon those who refuse it by simply as a way of identifying what it appears particular actors think they do” (Armstrong vii). Karim describes this moving in and out of “sublayers” as overlapping “both Muslim and non-Muslim spaces. As a result, the boundaries...are slippery and fluid” (Karim 60).

While intersectionality theory has been primarily concerned with race, class, and gender, Islamic feminism crosses a broad spectrum of issues women deal with in different aspects and at different times of their lives. “The centrality of Muslim women’s voices not only fosters the female production of knowledge but also reinforces the value of Muslim women’s voices for all community issues. Their thoughts and practices emerge beyond the usual issues of dress and female segregation to their experiences as religious and ethnic minorities in the

United States” (Armstrong vii). Keeping these points at the forefront of our minds in our analyses is important. In addition, the use of an intersectional approach along with an Islamic feminist approach will result in a superior product. “Encompassing definitions of feminism have the advantage of inclusivity, demonstrating the expansiveness of feminist projects and mapping common features of women’s transformative practices, which may not be immediately apparent to activists themselves. (Hawkesworth 27)

In describing a group of women from diverse backgrounds, of different races and classes, Karim notes that the concerns they voiced were both of a religious and non-religious nature. “They were talking about what it meant to be Muslim in America after September 11, 2001. Race came up as much as religion did, as they constantly referred to their status as both religious and ethnic minorities in a majority-white society.” (Karim 1) Though the categories of race, class, gender, and ethnicity do exist within groups, some common ground can be identified, and these are examples of the intersections where we find an identity of Muslim, female, “x” or “non-x” race, “x” or “non-x” class, etc. The women’s concerns also show that the American Muslim population is not one finite entity but rather a web of intersecting parts. And existing within this web is this group of women attesting to similar concerns and utilizing their own voice rather than the tradition of Muslim men usually taking on the role of public speaker. “Through the narratives of Muslim women, we see how individual identities challenge notions of a fixed ethnic identity. Their speaking positions include African American, South Asian, Muslim, and middle class. Muslim women’s positions intersect to influence how they cross ethnic lines. Their shared Muslim identity is a primary speaking position that enables an alliance among women of the two ethnic groups.” (Karim 92)

However, it would be unfair not to mention the fact that while Muslim women are finding their voices more and more, there are concerns and movements toward a larger, more comprehensive voice of women to speak on their own behalf. While we note that men are

primarily the speakers of Muslim groups, this phenomenon has infiltrated the males as well in that the women historically without voice have also been less educated. “This in turn puts men themselves at a disadvantage when pursuing education, employment, and social development. Because of the disproportionately strong emphasis on “manliness” in the Muslim upbringing and because of the physical and mental separation of the sexes, men hardly have the opportunity to develop the communication skills necessary for living harmoniously” (Ali *The Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam* 3). Furthermore, Ali demonstrates a point which is seldom noticed and deserves to be quoted in its entirety: “Ironically, the repression of women is maintained to a large extent by other women...educated women often have difficulty relinquishing ideas that have instilled in them since childhood. In the traditionally oriented Muslim communities, it is often the mothers who keep their daughters under their thumbs and the mothers-in-law who make the lives of their daughters-in-law unbearable. Cousins and aunts gossip endlessly about one another and about others. The effect of this social control is that Muslim women maintain their own repression.” (Ali *The Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam* 3)

2.5 Selected Examples

In order to better depict these intersections and their roots, comparisons of examples both from within the United States and from other countries will be helpful. In addition to my own experiences and observations, I will include sections from Goodwin’s *Price of Honor: Muslim Women Lift the Veil of Silence on the Islamic World*, along with a few other examples from other sources. Juxtaposing the experiences of Muslim women from different countries and backgrounds should allow for clarification of how the intersections of religion with race, class, gender, and national origin affect identity and the decisions the women ultimately make regarding life choices.

The first involves a woman of Pakistani origin, who was not an immigrant herself but of immigrant parents. Her story is not unique and I use it to demonstrate the standard view of both Muslims and non-Muslims towards what they think happens in Muslim families. She explains that “My two girlfriends and I grew up believing that we were priceless vases that could easily shatter, thus shattering our family’s reputation. We believed that would happen simply because we were women and acts of self-control were beyond us. Thus, we believed that that we were victims to our femaleness” (Ali *Living Islam Out Loud: American Muslim Women Speak* 25). As customary for Pakistani tradition, the boys were expected to get a college education in order to support a family and the girls were expected to become a future wife, with all the qualities expected of a Pakistani wife. Her marriage was arranged to a man from Pakistan. She explains her feelings about not being able to attend college and made to marry as “stunting our spiritual and intellectual and emotional growth. Sadly, because we girls had internalized our parents’ fear of our ovaries were not power for self-determination, we gladly gave up our freedom and entered into these arranged marriages with a sense of relief, and even, a duty to Allah” (Ali *Living Islam Out Loud: American Muslim Women Speak* 25). She goes on to reiterate that the men were not U.S. citizens, and needed their wives for citizenship, only to live out their own dreams in the United States. “Our parents plucked these men out of their homelands for this very reason: The daughter’s purity should match her groom’s...Our community’s values and interpretations of Islam are what came to inhabit and control us, while our fathers wrote our destinies.” (Ali *Living Islam Out Loud: American Muslim Women Speak* 25). Though this particular woman’s experiences are of the more expected form, we shall see that experiences overall are very diverse and possibly even surprising to someone not intimately familiar with both Islamic practices and cultural norms from different Muslim countries and how these backgrounds manifest themselves in the United States.

Next we turn to the story of a Muslim woman who is also struggling with her identity in the “hyphenated life as a Palestinian-American Muslim woman” (Omar 55). She goes on to admit that she realized “how many self-imposed struggles I have had to overcome, and also that I have always been my own worst enemy. I imposed upon myself cultural and religious norms that I inherited from my family and community.” Just as in the previous story, we see a woman from yet a different culture experiencing the same kind of identity crisis. “Though unspoken, I internalized the message that being a quite and demur girl was the path to being a respectable and pure woman, and that by the time I finished college I should have a husband. And thus I entered a vicious cycle of making mistake after mistake, trying to prove that I was something I was not.” (Omar 55) Though this woman was allowed to go to college, she was nevertheless expected to marry promptly and fulfill her ultimate destination as a Muslim wife and mother.

Third is an Arabic woman who tells her story of identity reformation and realization after a divorce. Muslim women are expected to never divorce and there is a taboo even against divorce in Islamic cultures. She states that she was hesitant even to submit her story for publication because of this taboo against speaking about relationships to others, especially regarding her divorce. However, she did find her voice and was able to finally allow her story to be told because “because I know many women are willing to live unbearable lives just to avoid such a stigma” (Omar 66). In order to help other women find their voice, she goes on to explain that, just as the previous two women, she had identity crises due to the “absolute values that I chose to live by over the years stemmed the misinterpretation and misapplication of both my religion and my culture, which admittedly at times are not in synch” (Omar 66). This story is repeated over and over again, especially among immigrants who have achieved higher education levels and come to realize that they can somehow balance their Muslim identities with their American identities, identities as wives, mothers, and activists. “While I have suffered, I

have learned many lessons and pray that they will be instructive to other young Muslim women. Most importantly, I realize the need to be true to and accepting of myself. My background as an American Muslim of Arab descent is an asset, and once balanced, it is the most powerful part of my identity. To deny one aspect of my character, instead of weaving together the different fabrics of my heritage and experiences, is to suppress the potential woman I can be.” (Omar 66)

Now I will turn to stories of Muslim women who have not immigrated to other countries in order to more clearly delineate some commonalities and differences between those who have immigrated to the United States and those who have not. These stories from Goodwin reach Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, United Arab Emirates, Palestine, Kuwait, Saudi, and Yemen. In the subsequent chapter, I will also touch on a few other countries, including some South Asian women’s viewpoints.

Starting with Pakistan, Goodwin takes note of the same phenomenon as seen above, where at least education level, marital status, and gender intersect to almost dictate women’s lives. Goodwin believes that Pakistani women lack knowledge about their rights and a “lack of recourse once these rights are abused” (68). Twenty years ago, abusing the rights of women was rare and, if it happened, it was dealt with promptly both legally and socially but today, Goodwin argues, there is no such thing as respect for women and abuse of their rights is on the rise (70). Women who have been privileged to a Western education are exposed to different ways of life and different values from those of her home country. This can both help and hinder her, depending on what she is trying to say or do, as she is likely to reject or alter cultural ways in order to satisfy her new craving for the ways she experienced life while in the West.

One example from Pakistan demonstrates the intersections of religion, culture, and gender, some similar and some opposite of what we see with immigrant Muslim women in the United States. A male doctor secretly tells that his sister is divorced but that the family tries to keep the fact from surfacing due to the fact that divorce is shameful on the family and also that

a Pakistani man would never be expected to marry a divorced woman. Her husband had wanted to marry a second wife and with her refusal, her husband merely divorced her and married the other woman anyway. This woman has a high level of education yet she is a shame to her mother and she never goes out of the house because of her situation (Goodwin 67). So, included in the making of her new identity were factors of religion, culture, race, and gender, at least. Her religion brought about the views on her being a divorced woman and basically rendering her helpless in her mother's home even as an educated woman. Her culture furthers her helplessness through the reinforcing of placing blame and shame on divorced women. Her gender intersects with her culture and religion to even further render her a helpless, voiceless woman. Like the immigrant woman, this woman faces challenges because of the situation she is in and the forces of structures around her.

Goodwin believes that "The most unfortunate enemy that women, and men, have in the Islamic world is ignorance: ignorant people facing forces intent on using the religion for political reasons, reasons of power." (Goodwin 74) She offers a view from Afghanistan that most people would not normally see of it when they watch the news broadcasts that are on television and the internet since the start of the war on terror. Though what is shown about the Afghani women is not untrue, most of what is seen is that the women are oppressed by men, made to stay home, and are expected to keep quiet about anything they have an opinion on. When the takeover of Kabul took place in 1992, women were made to stop working, stop attending school, and required to cover themselves completely. "Yet this was a country whose constitution in 1964, which women helped author, guaranteed that both women and men, without discrimination and privilege, have equal rights and obligations before the law...the country's female population has been granted suffrage at that time, but the new government immediately declared that only men could participate in future elections....Extremists among the leaders demanded that women should no longer work." (Goodwin 83) The women who live in rural locations and had never

had education were unable to read anything for themselves, much less the Quran. Therefore, they submitted to the new rules as if they had no choice or voice in the matter. "And for these women perhaps it is easier than for those who are educated to accept the role their society has imposed on them, often because they are unaware of any other existence" (Goodwin 93). However, recently women are regaining their voice in Afghanistan. Many have gone back to work, are participating in politics, and are sending their daughters to school.

Not much is heard in the West lately from or about Iran. Iran was ahead of feminist movements during the first half of the twentieth century, giving women rights and powers unheard of in most Islamic countries up to that point. The Family and Protection Acts of 1965 and 1975, "legislation that had substantially improved conditions for women regarding marriage, divorce, and child custody were abolished, and abortion was declared illegal. At the same time, female followers of Khomeini voluntarily began wearing the veil" (Goodwin 109). This is a common trend seen in the Islamic world during the last third of the twentieth century and first part of the twenty-first century. A rise in Islamic fundamentalism has taken place and spread rapidly from Saudi Arabia to other countries by way of groups claiming to be returning Islam and its followers to what they believe as the right ways to practice Islam. This can be readily seen in the rise in hijab-wearing and even full body burqas becoming norms in many countries. Although covering the head was typical of ancient Arabic societies who lived in mainly desert lands, the head coverings have become longer, thicker, harder to see through, and even mandatory in countries like Afghanistan.

The United Arab Emirates is called the playground of the gulf. The gulf countries are notoriously rich from their oil reserves and this is where many Arabs go for vacation or to spend extracurricular time. Most families from the gulf countries are rich. They send their children to the United States and Europe for education before returning home to benefit their own country with their new skills. One such woman says that she tried to keep a balance in her life while in

the United States between newfound freedoms, familial and societal approval, and what is expected of her as a Muslim. "I long ago learned that culture can dictate many things; it can even overrule religion in this part of the world...If I hadn't had my faith I don't think I would have survived in the West. It helped me to say no to drugs when everybody around me was using them, or putting me down because I refused to date." (Goodwin 136) It seems that while some things changed for her as far as her outlook and freedoms, she was conscious about keeping her identity as a Muslim first, reiterating the fact that while many aspects of her identity are affecting her, the Muslim part comes first..

"In Islamic countries, where substantial portions of the population are still illiterate, change, particularly for women, is invariably instigated from the top, the educated elite, instead of from grassroots as it usually is in the West." (Goodwin 163) Kuwait is one instance of this top down reform as is Saudi Arabia. The women who are lowest in class do not have a chance to voice their opinions and frustrations but the women of higher classes seem to be able to have their voice heard more easily, even if it is still a struggle in a male-dominated government. Located in Saudi Arabia are two of the holiest places for Muslims. This gives them an advantage in dictating what Islam prescribes for its people. As noted previously, fundamentalist groups started in Saudi and quickly were able to spread to other Muslim countries due to enormous resources the country holds in its oil reserves and the prosperity of the people of the fundamentalist groups. These groups were able to offer assistance to those in need in the countries they were attempting to reform, and this eased the spread of their fundamental beliefs. Although, Saudi women themselves are in a unique situation. They typically enjoy financial freedom. Therefore, despite their restrictions on participating in politics and are even not allowed to drive, they tend to spend their time shopping in malls that are segregated for families and women only. Single men in Saudi Arabia are not allowed in public places where women may be. The segregation results in the fact that if women gain the confidence to speak,

it is either to other helpless women or to their family members, neither of which are likely to take the women's concerns to others who may be able to help them. Yussa, a Muslim woman from Palestine, tells her point of view on the matter and one possible reason these women adhere as strictly as they do: "The world thinks that Islam is full of fanatic Muslims...I will tell you frankly, the veil is their last hope, the hope that religion will save them. They know that nothing else will. They realize that U.N. resolutions are only implemented against Arabs and Muslim states: Iraq, Libya, and the Palestinians. When you lose everything, there is only religion left to turn to." (Goodwin 293)

Yemen is a country just south of Saudi Arabia. It is an ancient country with ancient traditions. Women in Yemen dress in black from head to toe and rarely speak loud enough to be heard. Like those women from neighboring Saudi, most of them do not drive. Yemen was closed off to the outside world until the last half century. The walls of the old city of Sana'a were closed to technology and the people were essentially stuck in the old ways. Yemen is a democracy yet has had the same president for decades. The women in Yemen are generally ignorant to the possibilities open to them as modern women as most have never left the country. Many rural people are not exposed to today's issues and conveniences. The combination of these factors renders the women of Yemen virtually voiceless. I spent a considerable amount of time with two large groups of Yemeni immigrants. My first experience with Islam and Arabic culture was through meeting a group of male student pilots through a mutual friend. Each encounter with these guys was fascinating. They told stories of current events that sounded to me like they were straight out of ancient times. When they spoke of their women, I was completely surprised to hear the way they lived their lives. This was around 1998.

In the months after September 11, I spent some time in Seattle and Tacoma, Washington. I attended celebrations and visited a mosque several times that was Yemeni-

predominant. To my surprise, even after immigration to the United States, the women were exactly the way my Yemeni friends in Texas had described them. These were not new immigrants but they held on tight to their home culture, many of them travelling back and forth to spend summers in Yemen and allow their children to attend school in the United States. During an Eid celebration (one of the two major Muslim holidays), I was invited to join the families for lunch. My experience was first walking to the back of the house to enter through a door where only women were to enter since it allowed for segregation of the men and women during the feast and because Yemeni women do not eat in front of men that are not in their family (like many other Arabic and Muslim countries). I was then escorted to a room where many women were sitting, waiting for the men to finish eating and leave the main living area so the women could enter. When it was time to eat, about 20 minutes later, I found myself in awe over the way that, even after presumed assimilation into the United States, they strictly enforced the Yemeni culture. Later that day, I wanted to take some pictures but was strongly advised against this as Yemeni women do not, under any circumstances, allow pictures of them to circulate where other men may see them. Abdo offers that "Yemeni arrivals are overwhelmingly young men who arrive with little or no education or job skills. Few intend to settle in American permanently, and many keep wives and families back home, visiting periodically and sending funds whenever possible. With no personal investment in a Western future, the Yemenis are strongly resistant to compromise with contemporary American life" (47).

To contrast with my observations of Muslims here in the United States, I will tell what I noticed was at play in some other countries I visited. I have been to Morocco twice. The first time was in 1999 and the second time I departed on September 11, 2001. My first trip to Morocco was absolutely a dream. I stayed with the most hospitable and thoughtful family, who ensured I was able to see all the tourist destinations and made sure I was seen and visited often by different women. Upon meeting with these women and visiting their homes, I noticed

that they were almost at a midpoint between what I had observed with the Yemeni ladies in Seattle and what we normally mean when we assert that a particular woman has found her voice. By that I mean that these women were of upper class, which allowed them more freedoms of voice, at least in the home, and they were generally college educated. Yet at the same time, they all had servants in their homes. The servants spoke with such a soft voice that I never understood a word they said despite understanding a relatively good amount of Arabic. I saw the servants as being almost in the same situation as the Yemeni women in Seattle, without voice or with voice but without familial, societal, and cultural approval. I often wondered what the ladies of the house thought about the status of the servants but I never asked.

The second trip to Morocco was on the day the world changed for millions of Muslims around the world. Upon exiting the airport, the first news I received was: "They blew up the White House!!" This was coming from a son in the same family who was in his last year of law school, so I believed what he said. Immediately I noticed myself feeling panic and wanting to get the news in English anywhere I could manage it. I decided to go to an internet café and look for news of what was happening back home. In the hours that followed the collapse of the World Trade Center, there was much speculation and we were hearing different stories throughout the days. On my way to the internet café, we passed a Jewish synagogue. There were already army personnel outside the synagogue to protect it against possible attack in the predominantly Muslim country. Despite all the worries, everything was fine and I found that my host family seemed to be more worried about my feelings as to what was going on back home rather than their own situation. Looking back, I realize they did not know they were going to be in a "situation" called the War on Terror where Muslims will be required to defend their religion against those who want to claim it has faults that led to the attacks on September 11. Though the flights were suspended for days, they managed to get me on a flight home early so that I could relax at home in familiar surroundings. From this trip I learned that no matter the situation

a woman is in, no matter what part of the world, issues and events affect women differently and there are previously uncharted territories in women's issues.

I spent the summer of 2008 in Holland. I was able to observe immigrant Muslims to a Western society, mainly from Turkey, and how their experiences contrasted with those of immigrant Muslims to the U.S. I found that although the women had about the same assimilation issues as those in the United States, their avenues for both assimilation and cultural adhesion were different. In my opinion, the women in Holland seemed to be happier, despite their class and other factors being much the same as those in the United States. I have to question whether this is due to the fact that September 11 happened here in the U.S. and not in Europe. In addition, Turkish women do not cover their heads as much as Muslim women do in the United States. Again, I have to question whether or not wearing a hijab brings about situations which leave the women in the United States feeling different than the happy Turks in Holland.

After these experiences and some others like them, I found myself wanting the children of these women, mainly the girls, to be allowed to choose what aspects of culture they wanted to follow, regardless of if they were following Islam completely. Since that time, I have written extensively about Muslim women's feminist struggles, identity formation processes, and the future of Muslims in the United States. However, I would like to note that these stories are not indicative or fully encompassing of the women either in the United States or in other countries. At the university, I recognize both United States culture and Arabic culture in the groups of Muslim girls I see. These recent immigrants have reaped the benefits of the struggles of those before them, who were instrumental in forming a Muslim-American identity so that their children and later immigrants can find a familiar place with familiar views to work from. In addition, the education level of Muslims in the United States is above average for the country as a whole, and this in turn gives them a voice and point of view from which to speak.

CHAPTER 3

IDENTITY OF AN IMMIGRANT MUSLIM WOMAN

3.1 American Muslim History

Given the previously mentioned structure of the Islamic portion of identity trumping other categories in identity formation, an overview of some important points in the history of Muslim people and their migration to the United States will help shed light on both intersectional and Islamic feminist discourses. Feminist ideas are not new to Islam. Rights movements have taken place for centuries in several Islamic countries. When Islam first began, there were women participating in public roles, utilizing their voice as they needed, and women were included in the decision-making process. Aisha, a major Quranic character, demonstrates that from the beginning, women were leaders in these types of movements. “Even as a teenager, because of her closeness to the Prophet, she was frequently asked to interpret versus of the Koran and religious traditions, or to rule on Islamic Law. She became the most prominent of all of Mohammad’s wives, and was considered a major authority on Islam and an adviser to Muslims.” (Goodwin 41)

At the same time, Islam is a strictly gendered institution. It is thought that the reason for this stems from tribal eras, when women were the property of their fathers, husbands, and other men in their family/tribe. Ali believes “The essence of a woman is reduced to her hymen. Her veil functions as a constant reminder to the outside world of this stifling morality that makes Muslim men the owners of women and obliges them to prevent their mothers, sisters, aunts, sisters-in-law, cousins, nieces, and wives from having sexual contact.” (Ali *Living Islam Out*

Loud: American Muslim Women Speak xi). It follows that with the spread of Islam went the spread of Arabic culture to the new area. And since Islam teaches its followers to submit to the will of Allah (God), newcomers to the religion, not knowing the difference between culture and formal religion, mainly due to under education, often adopt aspects of Arabic culture. This is seen even today when converts to Islam adopt Arab culture, dress, and other sections of Arabic life as a way to further their conversion, possibly not knowing what is Islamic and what is Arabic.

Muslims have immigrated to the United States in several waves. The first large wave consisted of slaves from West Africa starting in the 18th century. Most of these Muslims went to the South and were forced into Christianity along with their slave status. This resulted in the virtual loss of their native religion, culture, and, in the end, their identity as they had previously known it. The outcome of this was the loss of an Islamic-American identity and the reconstruction of their identities as what they endured, slave life. In 1913, the Noble Drew Ali founded the Moorish Science Temple in Newark, New Jersey, promoting Islam as the true religion of African Americans. From this, the Nation of Islam was formed by Wallace D. Ford and became a prominent sect of Islam within the U.S.

The next wave of Muslims was a result of the Ottoman Empire collapse and lasted up until the start of WWI. Many Arabs who immigrated to the United States during this time were actually Christian but there were a significant number of Muslims as well. These Muslims tended to segregate themselves from other Muslims into communities and mosques according to national origin. Preserving their culture was important and the idea of one single American-Muslim identity consisting of a diverse array of Muslims from around the world was not a priority. These different groups also tended to reside scattered around the country and this allowed them to practice Islam in ways familiar to them without the interference of competing ideologies and practices.

The third wave occurred with the change in United States immigration laws in 1965, which allowed for easier entrance to those from Muslim countries. Where previously Islam in the U.S. consisted primarily of the Nation of Islam, the numbers of Arabic Muslims increased dramatically and this changed the face of what Americans thought of as a Muslim, now picturing Arabic Muslims as the norm. These new immigrants began building many more mosques, Islamic centers, and Islamic schools across the country. Universities also became a prime source for Muslims to network, as Muslim Student Associations started appearing at more campuses. This allowed young Muslim students to acquire an extended family in the United States after travelling, many times across the world alone, to go to college. At the same time, African American Muslims began leaving the Nation of Islam and creating their own places of worship mainly under the Sunni (most common) sect of Islam. Just as the face of what a Muslim is had changed to the country, the identity that went with American Muslim identity was beginning to shift. "With the decline of organized African American Islam, the post-1965 generation has stepped in to offer the best hope to resolve once and for all what it means to be a Muslim in America" (Abdo 9)

For my purposes, the fourth wave will be considered to be those immigrants either entering the United States after 9/11 and/or those immigrants which had yet to assimilate prior to 9/11 and thus feeling the effects on Muslims in America post-9/11 in much the same ways as the new immigrants beginning the assimilation process. Presumably, this wave will be at some level of identity reformation during the post-9/11 era. Surprisingly, despite the atmosphere of the War on Terror, this wave is optimistic about their lives in the United States. "In 2004 the polling firm Zogby International found that 51 percent of its national sample said that it was "a good time to a Muslim in America." (Barrett 280) Another survey from 2004 "found that American Muslims had reacted to September 11 and its aftermath by asserting their own unique social and political identity. Almost 70 percent told the researchers that being a Muslim was an

important factor in their voting decisions, and 86 percent said it was important for Muslims to participate in politics.” (Abdo 83).

Immigrant Muslims total about three-fourths of the total Muslim population in the United States, with the other one-fourth being children of immigrants and other native-born Muslims. Of that seventy-five percent, approximately one-third are from the Middle East and Africa and two-thirds are from South Asia. It is the fastest growing religion in the United States. Prior to 9/11, the growth was due to both immigration and second-generation Muslims, as well as people converting to Islam. Despite the decline in Muslim immigration immediately post-9/11, the growth continued, mostly due to conversion. In addition to its fast growth, Islam “by some estimates, has already outpaced Judaism as the country’s second faith. (Abdo 5) Two other points regarding the make-up of the Muslim population in the U.S. may surprise some. The first is that Arabs in the United States are actually Christian and not Muslim. The second is that most Muslims are not Arab, but rather South Asian, which make up thirty-four percent of the total Twenty-six percent are Arabic and twenty percent are from other countries (Barrett 6).

Regarding the social make-up of American Muslims, “the majority of American Muslims are employed in technical, white-collar, and professional fields. An astounding 59 percent of Muslim adults in the United States have college degrees. That compares with only 27 percent of all American adults” (Barrett 9). Abdo adds that three-fourths of adult Muslims are under fifty years old (63). In addition, Barrett offers that “Four out of five Muslim workers earn at least twenty-five thousand dollars a year; more than half earn fifty thousand or more” (9), and believes these numbers along with participating in politics indicates “a minority population successfully integrating into the larger society.” (9) Post-9/11 Muslims are more involved in politics, but still within a framework of Islam. “Religion represents a significant element in the daily lives of America’s Muslims. Georgetown researchers found that half of Muslim Americans make the five daily prayers regularly...Of those surveyed, 82 percent said both the role of Islam

and spirituality in general were “very important” to their lives, with another 12 percent saying they were “somewhat important” (Abdo 83).

There has also been a change in the last decade in the type of immigrant that is entering the U.S. The Arab, African, and Asian countries are becoming increasingly better educated and, with globalization, are more aware of issues around the world and how they may be affected. A. Ali believes this is a positive reform taking place and states her feelings are based on things “like the local elections in Saudi Arabia (although women were excluded from these elections, at least the elections were held); the successful elections in Iraq and Afghanistan (where a secular government has taken over after the Taliban); the demonstrations against the terror of the Islamic Party by journalists and academics in Morocco; and the promising agreements between Sharon and Abbas about the future of Israel and Palestine” (Ali *The Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam* xvi).

Whether educated in the United States or elsewhere, American Muslim women can be said to be educated and earning equally with men in the workforce. A Gallup Center for Muslim Studies poll showed that

“Muslim American women and the religious group as a whole are second only to Jewish Americans in terms of educational attainment. Forty percent of Muslims have a bachelor’s or graduate degree, compared with 61 percent of Jews and 29 percent of the US population as a whole. US Muslim women stand out, both compared to their global counterparts and women from other religious groups in the United States, in that they are statistically as likely as their male counterparts to have earned a university degree or higher. Forty-two percent of Muslim women had degrees compared with 39 percent of Muslim men in the United States. Jewish women trailed Jewish men by six percentage points in their higher-education achievement realm, and for the US

population as a whole, 29 percent of women and 30 percent of men had bachelor's degrees or better. The study also showed that Muslim American women tend to earn the same as men, both at the low and high ends of the income scale, giving the religious group the highest degree of economic gender parity...While 41 percent of American Muslims said they are "thriving," only 23 percent in France and a mere seven percent in Britain said the same" (Zeitvogel "Anti-Muslim Myths Shattered in US Study).

Despite misconceptions about Muslims and Muslim women, at least some immigrant Muslim women can be said to be assimilating well. However, there are still those who have yet to find their voice and are struggling with their renewing identity. By studying the forces acting upon different immigrant Muslim women in different ways, we can delineate intersections of interest and avenues for possible assistance. In the next sections, I will explore the intersections of religion, race, class, gender, and appearance as they relate to identity formation and how they impact the voices of immigrant Muslim women.

3.2 American Muslim Identity

Identity formation is a life-long process. It is a complicated process and the constant remodeling of ones identity to fit into and due to life situations is often challenging. For example, children tend to go through phases of claiming different identity types in the process of trying to find the one that suits them best. This is the same process immigrants go through when trying to decide between the many options available to them in their new country. Karim argues "In the United States, immigrant Muslim identities are characterized by their economic assimilation into America's capitalist system, along with their resistance to Western imperialism. Immigrant Muslims have directed their political energy more on ending war, poverty, and other crises facing their Muslim homelands than on domestic injustices like racism and poverty in the

United States” (125). Karim also reminds us that being an American Muslim, in the broad sense encompasses African American and immigrant struggles (4). I would add that American Muslim identities are also characterized by other factors, including mainly their religion, but also including race and gender. “For American Muslims, these times are exciting ones in which the boundaries of what it means to be a Muslim – in terms of identity, specific forms of practice or nonpractice, sectarian affiliation or nonaffiliation, and attitudes about major social issues, including gender roles – is expanding before our eyes. We live in a time where an unbeliever of Muslim heritage feels the need to call herself or himself a Muslim, in the way Sartre said, “In the face of anti-Semitism, I am a Jew.” (Eltantawi 169)

As noted previously, immigrant Muslims have been historically more involved with issues facing their home country. In the twentieth century, it was widely believed that for immigrants “there was no need to craft an American Muslim identity – that we could simply apply the Qur’an and the Sunnah (traditions of the Prophet Muhammad) to our lives. That is simplistic and unrealistic.” (Abdul-Ghafur 1). 9/11 changed the minds of many who previously lived fairly well but also lived mainly quiet lives to the world outside their immediate communities. Muslim activist groups emerged almost immediately to answer the questions being asked of them, “who exactly are these Muslims living amongst us?” Many sides and voices arose to discuss this issue, which resulted in further modification of the identity of American Muslims. Abdul-Ghafur holds that currently “We in the United States are creating a distinctly American Muslim culture. American Muslim women are choosing a path that honors our Islamic faith and our American heritage” (2).

However, 9/11 has changed what it means to be a Muslim in the United States. Despite ones gender, race, or class, being a Muslim in America during the War on Terror has been an entirely new experience for both Muslims and non-Muslim. Abdo argues that “Being African American instead of immigrant certainly has rewards. In the face of the post-9/11

backlash, it is better to be an African American Muslim than an immigrant Muslim. It is better, in other words, to be recognized as American than as South Asian or Arab” (9). Abdo also agrees with Prashad that even South Asians distance themselves from other Muslims to maintain their model-minority status and that distinct identity formation is now imperative (9). Identifying key points to address in reaction to 9/11 was no easy task for American Muslims. Following Islam includes that every part of life will be carried out in an Islamic way. One major difference for American Muslims, more evident following 9/11, was the reconciliation of the fact that separation of church and state means that two separate entities are to be considered rather than the all-encompassing version of many Muslim countries. In countries that follow Sharia (Islamic Law) in government, the citizens do not experience this additional factor.

Among the American Muslim community, the mosques are often led by an Imam (religious leader) who has been trained in classic Islamic teachings. Abdo believes these “uncles” rarely find meaning in their teachings within a twenty-first century framework and goes on to say “when they are not putting worshippers to sleep with verse, these imams are telling them that much of American culture is haram, forbidden in Islam. As Muslim communities expand in London, Hamburg, Paris, and San Francisco, the same questions arise: How do Muslims remain loyal to their beliefs amid the cultural processes in the West...? (22) In response, it is questioned whether or not these “uncles” are able to perform their duty to counsel modern Muslims in an Islamic way that also accounts for modern-day concerns. “Their parents practiced a faith heavy with ritual, tradition, and Islamic schools, that would provide opportunities to acquire a formal religious education. But their children are seeking not only faith but religious knowledge” (Abdo 22). As more Muslim Student Associations appeared at college campuses, young Muslims have found others who were also looking for their path as modern American Muslims. Abdo believes “They needed a different approach from that of their parents. Their Islam would be free of national and ethnic identification...These sentiments are

so common that the Zaytuna sheikhs call these young Muslims the rejectionist generation” (29). Barrett states that immigrant Muslims have isolated themselves and agrees with About El Fadl that “They build Islamic centers, organize camps and conferences, and pretend that the mainstream does not exist. Although Islamic centers are necessary for generating a basic sense of community and identity, they are rarely a serious avenue for knowledge or discourse on Islam. As to the camps, conventions, and conferences, all too often they are no more than pep rallies or cheerleading events.” (82) Whether the location is a Muslim Student Association, a mosque, or other Muslim gathering, it remains that immigrant Muslims women are now more than ever in the process of specifying exactly what their place will be in this country.

To better characterize the diversity of Muslims in the United States, A. Ali differentiates between three distinct categories, which may be useful in this examination, as follows:

“The first is a silent minority that doesn’t live according to the prescriptions of Islam and clearly understands that the future rests with individualism. These people silently take leave of Islam. They work hard and, when they can afford it, they move to better neighborhoods; they send their children to university and don’t get mixed up in the current heated discussion in the West about Islam. A second group feels greatly hurt by external criticism of their faith and takes it personally. For generations these Muslims have accepted that the blame for their distress lies outside themselves and outside the Koran and the Prophet Muhammad. Finally there are progressive Muslims. This group consists of individuals who say, ‘Let’s examine ourselves and try to figure out what’s wrong.’ They want to take the cage apart piece by piece and enable more

people to escape it” (Ali *The Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam* 30).

Depending upon which of these three categories a woman falls under, she will be subject to different interpretations of what it means to be American, Muslim, female, x-class, and x-race. The intersections of these and other variables are the recipe for her identity.

Precious Rasheeda Muhammad notes that she was unable to find herself in history books, asking “Where were the in-depth stories of American Muslims? Where were the detailed histories, the women’s views, the studies of difficult intercultural exchanges, the accounts of activists and the coming-of-age stories that put a human face on a religion’s adherents, effectively not leaving them vulnerable and alone in times of crisis? How can anyone understand your plights if they do not know who you are? (37) She goes on to tell that as an adult, she found “distinctions based on race, ethnicity, gender, class, and issues of authority...Whereas we should have bonded over that which we all believed and is certain in Islam, instead we were divided by that which is conjectural and has changed throughout the history of our faith over time, place, class, and culture.” (42-43).

Accounts of American Muslims lives has increased since 9/11 as it has been noticed in the midst of the identity crisis that the American Muslim experience had been previously been left virtually unaccounted for in literature. Abdo feels that “because America was focused on Muslims living nearly everywhere else but at home – in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Pakistan – the story of their changing lives had been left untold” (4).

3.3 Intersections Upon Them

The process of changing a part of our identity can be a difficult one. Muslim girls are taught a certain identity and what culturally and religiously are acceptable ingredients to include into the making of that identity. If deviation from that criterion occurs, she will encounter

resistance not only from her community but also from herself. She has branded her identity into her psyche so that change can seem next to impossible. “A practicing Muslim who tries to become an integrated member of Western society is in a difficult position. A Muslim immigrant in the West is confronted with a world turned upside down” (Haddad, Smith, and Esposito 15). Khalida Saed in *Living Islam Out Loud: American Muslim Women Speak* tells of her experience:

As long as I can remember I have teetered on the edge of something. I have not always been an American. Sometimes I wasn't a Muslim. I never wanted to be a lesbian. But I have never had any doubt that I didn't belong fully in any of these identities. I teetered on the edge of belonging to the lesbian community and being invincible within it, on the edges of being American and Iranian, and on the edge of Islam. I have been juggling several identities all of my life, and it never occurred to me to complain at first. It seemed that the less I complained, the less people would notice that I wasn't fully part of their community – and community is the reason for everything I do. (Saed 86)

This testimony reiterates that multiple, possibly conflicting parts of ourselves (our identity) can be competing for recognition at any moment and we are constantly struggling with which to gravitate towards.

Religion and Immigration has offered three things believed to be instrumental in crafting American Muslim identity. “First is the shift in the understanding of America from a melting pot to a multicultural milieu, which has helped American Muslims maintain their particularities. Second is the historical force of Islamic resurgence, which has energized American Muslims to build mosques, Islamic centers, and schools. Third is the creative thought and activism of the American Muslim elite, who have educated the Muslim community in new ways to think about

the West and Islam, helping construct a liberal Muslim self that affirms both its Islamic and its American history.” (Haddad, Smith, and Esposito 15) Ingrid Mattson includes “level of education, proficiency in English, level of access to modern communication technology, exposure to American military might in the home country, and the different ways in which Muslims are influenced by the messages of their home governments” (Haddad, Smith, and Esposito 15). Again, depending upon where a woman lies on the spectrum of categories, the above three items remain three among a vast array of others.

3.4 Race, Class, and Gender

Multicultural, multiracial, multilingual, all ways of saying your identity intersects at multiple points simultaneously within a category of distinction. Labeling this multiplicity of intersections as a group rather than dissecting each of them separately leaves out the possibility for understanding how race, class, gender, religion, appearance, language, etc affect individuals within society. “Race, class, and gender are often discussed in terms of cultural difference, but they are also part of the institutional framework of society. A structural analysis studies the intersections of race, class, and gender within institutions and within individual’s experiences in those institutions” (Anderson and Collins 69). While I do not plan to study these intersections via a structural approach, it is evident that there are those who see these intersections through structured lenses. The web encompassing the total identity of a person guides the decisions they make and, in turn, the decisions they make modify the web of total identity. Karim notes “As inequalities are manifested differently in different ethnic Muslim spaces, they also lead to distinct American Muslim discourses within these spaces” (55). The different discourses among different ethnicities lead to choices, which will further our understanding. Barrett is not so optimistic: “Muslims face critical choices as they struggle for the soul of their faith in the United States. It is impossible to predict which attitudes and ideas

will prevail” (277). However, I believe with enough discourse, we can begin to make predictions and take steps to assist people and groups based on their individual needs.

For devout Muslims, religion is the primary category of intersection. We can predict at least some of the decisions that will be made based on an Islamic approach. Defining the formulas of race, class, gender, and other categorical intersections involved in the immigrant-Muslim-American-woman identity post-9/11, however, provides an opportunity for further delineation and understanding in areas of importance that may have been previously overlooked. Again, Barrett offers a less than optimistic view: “But there are subthemes to this story that are less reassuring...Muslims in the United States represent an intricate mixture of creeds and cultures: immigrant and native-born, devout and secular, moderate and radical, integrated and isolated” (Barrett 5). The subthemes are the intersections we wish to bring to light, highlighting the differences and expanding on their relevance to a more inclusive overall picture. “To address our commonalities without dealing with our differences is to misunderstand and distort that which separates as well as that which binds us as women.” (Cole 148)

Karim focuses on the formation of the American Muslim “ummah” (brotherhood/sisterhood) and offers that in addition to race, class, and gender, other factors in “configurations of difference” include residence, national origins, religious background, ethnic history, and generation (37). As to whether a unified American Muslim ummah will succeed, Karim states “And how realistic is this ideal of Muslim brotherhood and sisterhood in the United States, whose Muslim population is made of very distinct ethnic groups, where most of the converts are people for whom racial discrimination is a fundamental part of their existence in the United States, and where race divides not only the largest religious institution in America, that is, the church, but also its neighborhoods and schools?” (3) While I will not devote a large amount of time to the other intersections Karim and others have noted, they are equally deserving and important in the formation of the American Muslim identity.

3.4.1 Race

9/11 brought about a change in the direction of many towards not only a more unified American Muslim ummah, but also in Muslim national identity. This movement included Muslims from many backgrounds and sects, however, the unified American Muslim ummah that was expected by some fell short. One reason for this is “The events of September 11, although a major event in the history of American Islam, were only one part of a set of ethnic histories making up the American Muslim experience. A common Muslim ground remains challenged by our differing ethnic histories” (Karim 9). Our ethnic histories intersect with our race to influence our decisions and movements.

In exploring racial phenomena, it is important to note that while the use of “multiracial” does diminish capacity for specificity in explanation of what all it encompasses, it does in itself represent a category of racial distinction equal to any other category of race, and should be represented as such when necessary. Immigrant Muslim women are multicultural in a broad sense but to understand the underlying planes, a deconstruction of the multiculturalism is necessary, and one part of that deconstruction will be to treat multiculturalism as its own sub-category due to the features it presents to the agent.

In addition, while focusing on one portion of a set, in this case immigrant Muslim women to the United States in the 21st century, the areas around the specified portion will be revealed. Specifically, contrasting this group’s experiences with those of African American Muslims and the relations between the two can color gray areas. *American Muslim Women* seeks to “explore how in the American Muslim community, or the American ummah, African Americans and South Asians both construct and cross ethnic boundaries, and how women in particular move outside their ethnic Muslim spaces and interact with other Muslim ethnic groups” (Karim 4). Again, the result of such analyses allow for progression of the discourse on immigrant Muslim women, which will lead to ease in integration.

National origin is closely related to race and is a key aspect here because of “the unequal power relations that determine what it means to be native-born American instead of immigrant American...intersections of race, class, and national origin that make possible the notion of a model minority. In other words, high income and education allow the immigrant status to be preferable of that of America’s native poor or America’s most racially oppressed group. (Karim 40) This is supported by the fact that income and education levels are higher than national average among immigrant Muslims and this has afforded them higher class, societal, and professional positions.

Also related to national origin is religious background. Karim believes that one’s religious background “signifies power and privilege that pertains to one’s identity as a native-born American versus an immigrant and also how that identity acquired meaning as an index of one’s religious authority or authenticity. (41) One can see how national origin would play a role in a unified American ummah after an event such as 9/11. “Movement across ethnic boundaries requires negotiating both one’s own ethnic identity and the ethnic identities of others” (Karim 90).

It could be presumed that race affects Muslim women in much the same ways as it affects other women given differences in variables and results, but still in the same formation strategy. However, immigrant Muslim women are unique in that they are accustomed to defining their own assimilation based on other factors, with racial assimilation arguably either not a priority or because “inability to understand structural racism is so common among immigrants, whether Asian, Latino, or West Indian, that one ethnic studies scholar referred to it as the “immigrant ideology,” in which immigrants see themselves as “middle-class people” who have as many chances to succeed as whites do” (Karim 32). We are reminded to take caution against misconceptions when labeling these women as successfully assimilated or not yet assimilated because “Many people think that race is like ethnicity and that the failure of people

of color to shed their cultures and assimilate into the mainstream as White ethnic groups have purportedly done represents an unwillingness to embrace American national identity” (Anderson and Collins 354). Immigrant Muslim women take pride in their cultural differences and tend to maintain them even after they consider themselves fully assimilated into American society.

As we try to understand and describe the relations between the different categories of race and national origin, immigration to the United States continues. New categories are constructed (as noted above with “multicultural”) and Karim believes this reduces immigrants to “arbitrary racial and ethnic groupings. Immigrants, primarily European, coming to the United States before 1965, were classified by nationality, even though they did not define themselves in such broad terms before arriving in the United States. Here, however, the distinction that shaped their identities in their native lands, such as class, language, and region, were subsumed under a common nationality or ethnicity. Then with the post-1965 waves of immigration, ethnic categories broadened to include groups marked by increasingly greater differences, groups that did not even share national borders” (27). Immigrant Muslim women navigate these fluid boundaries “But to ignore the significance of race in a society where racial groups have distinct historical and contemporary experiences is to deny the reality of their group experience” (Anderson and Collins 61).

The relationship between immigrant Muslims and African American Muslims is important in understanding the ways in which immigrants both construct their new identity as Americans and also how the relationship between the two groups affects assimilation of the immigrants. For example, immigrants may be seen as following a truer version of Islam while the African American may be seen as engaging in imitation. This in turn affects the communities and has resulted in segregation of the groups within the larger American Muslim community. Karim holds that “the attitude of immigrant women is more like this: “Yes, you are Muslim, you are welcome here, but you are African American (2). At the same time that African

Americans criticize immigrants, many disregard and even resist immigrants' efforts to raise awareness of their own struggles as nonwhites" (34). This tension is resultant at least in part due to socioeconomic factors and shapes the way in which they interact and is explained further as:

"In the case of religious background, immigrant history is privileged over American identity in two ways. The first is how the American Muslim identity translates into a *convert* Muslim identity, whereas immigrant identity translates into a *multigeneration* Muslim identity. African American converts readily complain about immigrants' condescending attitudes toward them when immigrants assume that they have more religious knowledge, including knowledge of the Arabic language. In addition, the children of converts, who are born into Muslim families, become frustrated when immigrants mistake them as converts just because they are African American. African American Muslims resist with assertions that they are better Muslims because their new Muslim status makes them more dedicated to the study and practice of Islam or because their conscious decision to be Muslim by choice makes them appreciate Islam more than do those born in the faith. Certainly, many immigrants do acknowledge and admire their dedication.

The second way that immigrant identity is privileged is in the way that American Muslim identity translates into "American Islam," a version of Islam that, in the view of many immigrants, can never be as authentic as the Islam practiced in the countries from which they came. While this view partly results from the newness of Islam in America, it primarily arises from the dichotomy

between Islam and the West that misrepresents Islam as inherently incompatible with Western values” (Karim 41).

Whether or not Islam is compatible with Western values, it is the fastest growing religion in the West and immigrants will continue to increase the presence of Islam in the United States. Therefore, a distinct Muslim identity is in the works but will nevertheless be endlessly changing.

As noted previously, race is intimately connected to ethnicity. Although ethnicity encompasses culture and values of a specific people, “ethnic identities racialized in relation to blackness and whiteness, with whiteness meaning genuine American-ness. Owing to class status, Asians are racialized as a model minority, not whites but better than blacks.” (Karim 35) This racializing is one of the items central to the core of the new identity the immigrants are forming, whether they realize it or not. If we wish to complete the story of American Muslim identity, race and ethnicity need to be recognized as one central part of that identity.

Ms. Muhammad shows the dichotomy in play as she tells of her experience as a minority Muslim woman among others who were raised differently because of race, national origin, culture, etc.

“In many of these circles it was considered inappropriate for a woman to recite the Qur’an publicly at all, let alone in unison with males, or to sit with male family members during religious celebrations, or to pray in a room that did not have a partition, or to hold positions of leadership in mixed-gender Muslim associations, and the list continued. The women who were teaching me these things were well educated. They approached the understanding of these roles for women with vigor and firm belief. It was I who felt oppressed, not they. No

matter how hard I tried to understand, I could not convert to this way of living. It did not sit right with my soul as a Muslim nor as a descendant of slaves.

I am from a people who have suffered greatly through the breakdown of the family line as the result of having chattel slavery forced on them. Segregation of the social space, in the manner in which it was being presented to me, went against the very grain of efforts to rebuild our communities and strengthen our family ties. For the first time in my Muslim life, I began to feel inferior and cursed to have been born a woman.” (Muhammad 46) “Sustained cultural relevance to distinct peoples, diverse places, and different times,” the esteemed scholar Dr. Umar F. Abd-Allah asserts, “underlay Islam’s long success as a global civilization.” Observing how Islam in China looked Chinese and how in Mali it looked African, he opine that for Islam to be successful in America, there was a need to develop a distinctly American Islam as well. Many Muslims are ignorant to the fact that this has already occurred in the African American Muslim community, which is constantly evolving too out of an authentic quest for “Islamic self-definition” with “sustained cultural relevance” to the distinct concerns and histories of the African American people. (Muhammad 47)

South Asian Muslim immigrant women enjoy a level of comfort, due to both education and race that other Muslim women may not as easily enjoy. Karim argues that they have not challenged their status in society as much as African American Muslims have due to their “model minority status or the unspoken distinction it creates between them and African Americans. Rather, many subscribe to this privileged status to set themselves apart from African Americans” (5). The majority of South Asians entered the United States already having obtained some level of higher education.

Since beneficiaries of the 1956 immigration act were primarily skilled, South Asians were admitted as immigrants at high numbers. "South Asian Muslims, the largest and most influential immigrant Muslim group in the United states, are a highly educated, affluent socioeconomic group." (Karim 38) Assimilation generally assuming loyalty to the new home country means that South Asians and other immigrant Muslims are left between conflicting intersections of their religion, race, and ethnicity on one side, and their new American identity on the other.

3.4.2 Class

Class distinctions are among the fiercest forces in American society. We are highly concerned with individual achievement. "Education and employment, rather than piety, are a measure of success. Western societies are not dominated by one single ideology, but have several ideologies that exist alongside one another...In the West, prosperity and misfortune are not the products of God's will, but of human action. Society can be shaped; you can influence your surroundings" (Ali *The Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam* 39). Being able to maneuver yourself up the ladder of success depends on many factors. "Class leverage explains how immigrants assimilate into white communities, and the ways that Asian and Latino immigrants must distance themselves from African Americans in order to acquire full "cultural citizenship" reflect the tragedy and centrality of race in America" (Karim 32). This is but one of the countless ways in which immigrants traverse the ladder and success is measured.

The American Muslim population is segregated in some ways by class just as it is by race. Depending upon which class one belongs to, opportunities may present themselves which otherwise would have not been options in another class category. Class also affects immigrants in that associations with other Muslims may be limited depending on one's class category, where opportunities to network with those from a different class category are rare.

This can be seen in mosques, Islamic schools, and Muslim Student Associations across the country. One will usually attend a mosque nearby, and nearby is more often than not one which is in your class category. Children who attend Islamic schools in the United States are from higher class parents who can afford to pay the tuition, thereby constraining social contact to others in their own class of society. Subsequently, Muslim Student Associations can end up consisting of those in higher class categories as well. When consolidation of two ethnic groups happens in Muslim communities, it is usually South Asians and Arabs who will end up sharing space. "These findings indicate that immigrants of different backgrounds are more likely to worship together than are immigrants and African Americans. Not only do African Americans generally worship separately from immigrants, but their mosques are usually the least ethnically diverse. Mosques that are truly diverse, that is, composed of multiple ethnic groups, evenly represented, constitute only 5 percent of all American mosques." (Karim 7)

Because one's class dictates location of residence and employment, the affiliations of that person can be limited or limitless. A Muslim who is in a higher class may be more able to communicate with the home country, thereby increasing their presence in the globalization process. On the other hand, those of a lower class may be limited in their resources. Along with this goes the fact that some cities are more global than others. New York City is more global than rural Idaho. Resource availability and the more global the surroundings will allow for greater expansion in not only ummah but self-identity. In the West, "Relationships between people and their interactions are governed by laws and rules, which were drawn up by people, not divine forces, and can be changed, adopted, or replaced by new ones. All people are the same in the face of the law, even those whose lifestyles differ from that of the majority" (Ali *The Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam* 39).

3.4.3 Gender

The study of gender phenomena is the reason we have arrived at intersectional approaches to describing them. “Dr. Zaki Badawi, head of the Muslim College in London, believes “To understand the Islamic world, one needs to decode the way that society perceives women” (Goodwin 27). For Muslim women, each aspect of their lives is to be within Islamic belief. From a gendered approach, experiences of women can be seen to be a “socially constructed experience, not a biological imperative...gender refers to the systematic structuring of relationships between women and men in social institutions” (Anderson and Collins, 67). Gender is learned but needs to be seen within the larger picture of societal relationships. It is present in every aspect of both men and women’s lives and affects us in our decisions. However, gender affects men and women and in different ways. Gender also affects women of different classes, races, and other categories of distinction in different ways.

There are Muslim women who claim to not be affected by gender issues. These may be women of higher class status who enjoy freedom of voice and action. These may also be women who believe that Islam prescribes them a life which they are to lead and they believe this so whole-heartedly that to claim it as gender injustice would be offensive. This is sometimes seen as a problem for the furthering of Muslim women’s movements. A. Ali notes: “Feminists focus on sexism and the inferior position of women in Islamic society. Not only do these problems deprive the Islamic world of half their population’s talents and energy; they disadvantage their own children by leaving them in the care of illiterate, downtrodden mothers” (51).

In order to show how Gender can impact women, I want to include the next passage from *Globalization & Feminist Activism* which I believe demonstrates the importance of studying its implications.

“In an important and influential essay, Joan Scott (1986, 1067) defined gender as a concept involving two interrelated by analytically distinct parts: “Gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power.” In explicating gender as a constitutive element of social relationships, Scott emphasized that gender operates in multiple fields, including culturally available symbols, normative concepts, social institutions and organizations, and subjective identities (1067-1068). Attuned to the structuring power of gender in these various domains, feminist scholars investigate in concrete circumstances how inequalities between men and women are produced, reproduced, contested, and transformed over time. According to Scott (1070), gender is a useful category of analysis precisely because it “provides a way to decode meaning,” and to illuminate how gender hierarchies are created, preserved, and changed through the complex interaction of norms, symbols, interpersonal relations, social practices, and religious, economic, and political institutions.

Using gender as an analytical tool, feminist scholars have illuminated power relations between men and women, as well as mechanisms of advantage and disadvantage structured by race, ethnicity, nationality, and sexuality that create and sustain interpersonal and social hierarchies. Within a feminist analytical framework, gender power involves a set of asymmetrical relations permeating international regimes, state systems, financial and economic processes, development policies, institutional structures, symbol systems, and interpersonal relations... Culturally varying constructions of gender shape expectations about what is appropriate for men and women to

do, structuring divisions of labor and social space, and constraining the opportunities, choices, and actions available to particular men and women. In this way, gender is integrally related to inequalities, which become embedded in institutions and structures that operate independently of individual volition and intention. (Hawkesworth 10)

The relationships between gender intersections and other point of intersect are imperative to our understanding of the changing American society. Without these advancements, new female immigrant Muslims to the United States will continue to endure hardships in assimilation.

Other categories of feminist inquiry include the feminization of migration feminization and globalization, as noted by Hawkesworth (14, 22). "Some 60 million women, drawn predominantly from poor nations, constitute a mobile labor force criss-crossing the globe in search of livelihoods...In the current era of globalization, the sheer number of women migrants, the very long distances they travel, and their migration without family members are distinctive, however" (Hawkesworth 14). Migration and globalization are looked at on both levels of movement and "loss of physical security, political rights, and rights of bodily integrity" (Hawkesworth 22). These relatively new areas of intersection are revealing areas which can be helpful in describing identity formation and assimilation. For example, Hawkesworth notes that seventy percent of the poor in the world are women and are thus categorized as a feminist category" (23). American women's involvement in increased decision-making across the country has helped to soften the experience for immigrants and create new categories for inquiry into the feminist struggles.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

Race, Class, and Gender begins by asking “Who has been excluded from what is known and how might we see the world differently if we were to acknowledge and value the experiences and thoughts of those who have been excluded? Many groups whose experiences have been vital in the formation of American society and culture have been silenced in the construction of knowledge about this society” (Anderson and Collins 1). This results in silenced groups and an incomplete view of those groups. In combating this silencing, an analysis of immigrant Muslim women’s identities, including the intersections of religion, race, class, gender, ethnicity, etc, is required which will show how these women are in unique positions and how their assimilation experience affects their American identity.

On the “Journal” news report on KERA World from May 17, 2010, Muslim immigration to Germany was the focus. It was noted that this group consists of 8% of the total population and that offering them outlets for utilizing their voice became necessary. The government has implemented programs to assist the immigrant families in integration, including offering community daycare, classes for mothers to help teach their children, and are looking at ways to lower the 15% that are unemployed. What has been implemented thus far has had positive results and I believe we can look at Germany’s model for guidance in assisting immigrant Muslims to the United States during integration.

There are many routes from which to start understanding the trends. For example, Karim asserts, “ethnic groups acquire social power based on unspoken race and class hierarchies...Immigrants to the United States ascribe to these hierarchies. In their quest for social acceptance, immigrants seek cultural citizenship in white communities and white schools more often than they do in black communities and black schools” (231). Barrett declares that

“Publicly acknowledging this psychic burden and showing some empathy would improve relationships with Muslims of all stripes and begin to counter accusations that Americans seek to persecute followers of Islam” (281). Coming together to create a more expansive discourse on the struggles of immigrant women in integration will most likely result in programs such as those Germany is utilizing.

We can also see how this process has played out thus far in Europe: “It is striking that in the West, Muslim men are overrepresented in prisons and Muslim women are overrepresented in shelters for abused women and the social-assistance system. Many Muslims fare poorly in school and in the job market. They only rarely take advantage of the opportunities offered in education and employment, and they do not sufficiently benefit from the freedoms that were unavailable in their countries of origin” (Ali *The Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam* 18).

The next steps are inevitable, in my opinion, because, although there was a slow in Muslim immigration after 9/11, the recent years have seen those numbers rise again. Elliot offers that “In 2005, more people from Muslim countries became legal permanent United States residents – nearly 96,000 – than in any year in the previous two decades (“More Muslims Arrive in U.S., After 9/11 Dip”). Elliot further states that Islamic leaders believe these post-9/11 immigrants are in better shape today because Islamic centers have more resources available, such as English classes. Due to more availability of resources, we begin to see a shift in immigrant Muslim women being seen as having no voice to those actively participating in the identity formation of Muslims in the United States. To find those women who have found their voice, just look in almost any industry today and use these women as examples in what is possible for them.

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