Globalization and the Politicization of Muslim Women: Consequences for Domestic Violence in the Netherlands and the United States

Mishal Khan

I: Introduction

Globalization as a theoretical lens guides us toward a greater understanding of some of the most turbulent transformations that are taking place in the world today. Anthony Giddens provides a compelling definition of this phenomenon, framing it as "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa."[i] Nothing demonstrates this more sharply than the impact of global events on those Muslim populations residing in what can be broadly defined as the "Western" world. This ironically termed "reverse colonization"[ii] entails an unprecedented number of people from Muslim countries migrating to the Global North, laying the foundation for a myriad of challenging negotiations and novel circumstances. However, there are a number of concurrent transformations that are taking place within Muslim populations that have become the subject of increased scrutiny. The rise of radical Islam, the enhanced religiosity of Muslim youth, and the increased wearing of headscarves by women are all aspects of a global Islam that has attracted the widespread attention of policymakers, scholars, and ordinary citizens alike.

   This study sheds light on one of the most contentious issues that arises time and time again in any discussion of Islam. Undeniably, no conversation is complete without invariably citing the role of women--the fly in the ointment, if you will. As one scholar recounts, "today the 'woman question' is a battleground both inside and outside the Muslim world. That is, the woman question raises the sharpest criticism of Islam and Muslim societies from the outside and is at the same time one of the most hotly debated areas within Islamic and Islamist circles."[iii] The contemporary globalized world yields circumstances that have forced Muslims and non-Muslims alike to address the question with increased urgency. While the dissemination of women's rights norms and rhetoric has prompted a confused mix of engagement and rejection across the Muslim world, it is compelling to examine how this encounter plays out in populations residing within the West. How have American and European Muslim women become politicized in this conversation about global Islam? What battles are being fought by Muslim women themselves? What discourses must be navigated in order for them to overcome their difficulties? If there is a "clash of values"[iv] occurring right now, Muslim women are situated squarely in the midst of it. This essay will argue that the impact of the politicization of Muslim women both *limits and extends* their ability to confront abuse and rights issues within the Muslim community, focusing on domestic violence. I argue that this politicization has direct consequences for the normative impacts of women's rights and feminist rhetoric in both the Netherlands and the United States, the two countries chosen as case studies. This research is motivated by a personal stake in the questions that are addressed. As a Muslim woman, understanding that it is crucial to be critical of the many different agendas and complexities that pervade any conversation about Muslims in the world today will be key in deciding where I can conscientiously position myself in the debate, and therefore carry out my life's work.

The essay proceeds in seven sections. The next section will discuss Islam and globalization. The third will explain how Muslim women are politicized, drawing on key authors in order to shed light on the restricting discourses that dominate the political situation of women. The fourth will situate domestic violence in the overarching theoretical exploration, demonstrating a real issue in the Muslim community that needs to be addressed. The fifth will introduce the case studies, depicting the particular experiences of Muslim immigrants in the contexts of the Netherlands and the United States. The sixth will draw on all the previous sections to show the impact of the politicization of Muslim women in both countries on attempts to deal with domestic violence. The seventh section adds some concluding remarks and summarizes what this study has attempted to show. The eventual goal of this study is to call for more introspection when dealing with problems pertaining to Muslim women, but also *that we must in fact deal with them* if we are to be true to our commitment to multiculturalism and human rights.

II: Islam and Globalization

With more than a billion followers worldwide and in every corner of the globe, it is imperative that Islam be understood as a global religion. Contrary to the belief that both *Dar al Islam* and the *Dar al Gharb*[v] can be neatly divided into two separately bounded areas, in fact one-third of all Muslims live in minority situations.[vi] The contemporary reality is that Islam is undoubtedly a *Western* religion. For the first time in history, however, this has not occurred as a result of "military conquests or mass conversions, but as a consequence of the rapid and voluntary displacement of millions of people looking for jobs in Europe or a better life in the United States."[vii] In addition, this generation bears witness to an era of globalization that is undoubtedly unique in its dizzying speed and ability to affect every corner of the planet. Even though Islamic empires have historically spanned the globe, never before have Muslims been able to connect and engage with each other with so much ease, rendering the contemporary immigrant experience unique. To once more draw on the words of Anthony Giddens:

> Immigration has changed in nature in a world of instantaneous communication …there were always diasporas, but they take on a more direct and continuous form. Migrants and cultural minorities can interpret their local experience in terms of events happening elsewhere in the world. Nowhere is this situation clearer than in the case of Muslim minorities. 'Islam and the West' is the key motif of the moment, and with good reason.[viii]

To neglect this dimension, therefore, is to limit one's understanding of the Muslim immigrant reality. In the scholarly realm, the trend has been to understand the integration of populations based on country-specific circumstances. Jamila Abid Lise, however, points out that the effects of "world-wide" events have been mostly de-emphasized.[ix] Undeniably, factors such as economic opportunities, democratic participation, and the absence of discriminatory practices are an important part of the equation. However, Jack Goody tells us that human beings are essentially "symbolic animals"[x] and that this fact shapes our encounter with the world. Therefore it is impossible to ignore the powerful resonance of events that take place in far off places. The debate over the Dutch cartoons of the Holy Prophet depicted in *Jyllands Posten* is a simple demonstration of this fact as it took place on a global level, having global repercussions.[xi] Globalization has therefore redrawn the conversation around Islam as well as amongst Muslims

to the extent that it is impossible to ignore the need to recognize the fundamental changes that are sweeping across the Muslim world.

A. Identity and Deterritorialized Islam

Muslims living in the West have a specific set of experiences that define how their identities are formed in relation to their religion and their culture. As immigrant Muslims become further and further removed from the cultures of their home countries, Islam becomes a way to express a form of transnational belonging that transcends culture.[xii] Identity formation is not solely an internal fixed reality, but should be seen as a result of external categorizations that focus exclusively on "Othering" Muslims. Consequently, it is not solely a question of how Muslims see themselves, but how they are seen by others. As Olivier Roy asserts, "each Muslim is accountable for being a Muslim. To publicly state self identity has become almost a civic duty for Muslims."[xiii] This sentiment was prevalent in conversations and interactions with people in the course of this study.

Once again this can be attributed to global events that were bubbling to the surface well before the events of September 11, 2001. Writing in 1997, Gilles Kepel was already able to identify the growth of Islamic consciousness in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution in 1979, the veil affair in France, and the fall of the Berlin Wall, when Islam became the "new 'evil empire,' embodying the demonized figure of the barbaric Other."[xiv] This tendency has been exacerbated in the European context where the difficulty of integration has prompted a further retreat into a stricter approach to an Islamic identity. However, Jack Goody asserts:

> I have suggested that one of the interesting features about Islam in Europe is that the immigrant situation has itself often led to greater islamization, by no means always fundamentalist but including some radical elements…But (the birth of Islam in Europe) must not be taken too negatively. There are also positive features about Islam and their own traditions of which the immigrant situation makes people aware. There is pride as well as the reaction to the perceived rejection.[xv]

This pride is the grounds upon which new attempts to formulate what being a Western Muslim will mean in the future. Therefore, the rejection that many Muslims experience actually drives a deeper engagement with Islam. In addition, the "deterritoralization" of Islam ultimately removes religion from the stranglehold of culture and also politics. Roy points out that while the Islamist agenda purports to militate in favour of religion, often in reality "Islam" inevitably disappears underneath political agendas.[xvi] As such, "re-Islamisation is part of this process of acculturation, rather than being a reaction against it. It is a way of appropriating this process, of experiencing it in terms of self-affirmation, but also of instrumentalising it to 'purify' Islam."[xvii] In this way the immigrant experience is the site on which new attempts to engage debates about Islam can take place, opening frontiers for new discussions on religion and identity. Utilizing the vantage point provided by their unique position, Western Muslims can contribute to our understanding of Islam as a global reality.

III: Politicizing Muslim Women

The next question concerns the politicized position that Muslim women occupy in the conversation about globalized Islam. This section first discusses the colonial legacy of feminism, showing how this historical interaction sets the stage for the position of Muslim women in the colonial experience. I then go on to relate an example of the role that women play in Islamist politics. Finally, I provide a brief introduction to the modern debate on Islam and Feminism.

A. Colonial Legacies

> When the Muslim countries were defeated and occupied by the West, the colonizers used all available means to persuade the defeated Muslims of their inferiority in order to justify foreign occupation. Muslims were dismissed as promiscuous, and many crocodile tears were shed over the terrible fate of Muslim women....[xviii]

Images and convictions concerning Islam's "dehumanizing" treatment of women have persisted for centuries. However, this sentiment emerges as the "centerpiece of the western narrative of Islam"[xix] in the 19th century during the colonial encounter. In this era, the role of women became the primary grounds upon which to legitimate colonial rule. Europeans were convinced that the way Muslims treated their women ranked Muslims close to the bottom of the civilizational hierarchy, making colonial domination not simply justifiable, but necessary. Laila Ahmed points out the bitter irony that even while European men were attempting to quell the growing demands of increasingly vocal feminist voices at home, that same feminist rhetoric was "redirected… in the service of colonialism, toward Other man and the cultures of Other men. It was here and in the combining of the languages of colonialism and feminism that the fusion between the issues of women and culture was created."[xx] Missionaries, intellectuals, and colonial officials all became active participants in advancing the attack on Islamic culture, causing many men to become more resistant to any change in the status of women. Thus women were given over to viewing "any changes in her condition as concessions to the colonizer. Women's emancipation was readily identified as succumbing to western influence."[xxi] Ahmed clarifies that her purpose is neither to excuse the way that Muslim men treat women, nor to deny the fact that women are sometimes mistreated. Rather, she aims to situate historically the Western discourse around Muslim women and to emphasize how this conversation has always had political consequences. It is important to recall these historical roots because this debate, far from being resolved, rages on today.

B. Women in Islamist Agendas

In a detailed study of the Islamist women of Hamas, Islah Jad argues that Muslim women became crucial to Hamas' political strategy. Women were brought under the umbrella of the organization and granted new freedoms in an effort to gain the support of a wider constituency of the Palestinian population. Though these women are "university graduates, professional women, and intellectuals," they still position themselves within an Islamist framework by also emphasizing their roles as "mother and caregiver."[xxii] This role, which cuts across different articulations of the proper role of women in Islam, was notable in the way that it formed in direct opposition to the secular "universalist" discourse used by women in non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Women still veiled, still maintained their overt devotion to Islam, and

continued to adhere to the symbolic acts that come with that identity. In this way, women "became a strategic concern for the Palestinian movement, this time under the banner of Islam."[xxiii] Jad essentially demonstrates how Islamist women were pointedly reformulated in an attempt by Hamas to actively include women in their overall political campaign, demanding that they be both "model mothers and obedient wives, but also model political activists."[xxiv] What emerges as part of Hamas' new gender ideology is the "new Islamic woman," a fundamental ally in the war against secular feminism. The growth in numbers and hence visibility became an instrumental part of the claim of political legitimacy.

This is merely one instance demonstrating the increasing role that women play in Islamist politics. Alev Cinar points to another instance, when women played a crucial role in post-Kemalist Turkey.[xxv] This groundbreaking study outlines the way that women's clothing became weapons in the war between the secularists and the Islamic parties in Turkey. Headscarves and other symbolic demonstrations of devotion to Islam thus transforms into a political statement. In this way, women's bodies are often the battleground upon which political ideologies vie for legitimacy. In addition, it is evident that the colonizers' obsession with Muslim women has made them a crucial vehicle through which debates about Islam play out.

C. Islamic Feminism

Valentine Moghadem argues that scholars writing about women in Islam fall into one of two camps. One seeks possibilities for improving women's status within Islam; the other lies in the opposite camp, arguing vehemently that feminism is inherently incompatible with Islam.[xxvi] Bronwyn Winter suggests a dichotomy along the same lines by dividing the two approaches to Islamic feminism into either apologist or "theologocentric" frameworks. [xxvii] The former claims that Islam has simply been interpreted incorrectly, and the latter maintains that Islam is a hegemonic structure responsible for all the social ills that befall Muslim women. To be a Muslim and to be concerned about the life of other Muslim women requires taking a position on this debate.

When discussing Muslim women, Winter points out that, "the ideological fascination and demonization inherent in 'world-behind the veil' Orientalist fantasies continue to inform the terms in which the current preoccupation with Islam in general, and Islamism in particular, is couched in western countries."[xxviii] Therefore, feminists talking about Islam and so-called Islamic feminists must both be well aware of this legacy. In addition, taking a position on feminist discourse entails taking a position by default on broader questions of secularism, modernity, and Islam. In other words, it has political implications. This is also true of women's rights. Lila Abu-Lughod articulates her personal uneasiness when the conversation surrounding Muslim women in the aftermath of the invasion of Afghanistan carried it with it overtones of Western self-righteousness over their "other sisters" in Afghanistan:

> My discomfort led me to reflect on why, as feminists in or from the West, or simply as people who have concerns about women's lives, we need to be wary of this response to the events and aftermath of September 11, 2001, I want to point out the minefields—a metaphor that is sadly too apt for a country like Afghanistan, with the world's highest number of mines per capita—of this obsession with the plight of Muslim women.[xxix]

Abu-Lughod is warning against glossing over the political agenda underlying such a framing of the discourse. Furthermore, the patronizing tone of U.S. First Lady Laura Bush in this campaign strongly resonates with colonial legacies. This leaves us with the classic feminist dilemma. With this in mind, Bronwyn Winter acknowledges just how loaded with meaning and contested are discourses about Muslim women. She insists, though, that, "this does not mean, however, that (what goes on in the Muslim community) should not be critically examined *at all*."[xxx] It is this position to which my article subscribes. In other words, notwithstanding the many valid critiques of feminist discourses, the fact remains that Muslim women (like other populations) do face dire problems that must be dealt with. However, given the politicized position of Muslim women, facing these problems demands hard work and the willingness to be critical about whom our "bedfellows"[xxxi] are in discussing these issues. Furthermore, we must be mindful that feminist agendas, first and foremost, must retain respect for cultural difference.

IV: Domestic Violence

Domestic violence lies at the very heart of the tensions that have been created by the multilayered web of political discourses surrounding Muslim women. The definition of domestic violence used for the purposes of this project is "a pattern of assault and coercive behaviors, including physical, sexual, psychological, and spiritual attacks and economic coercion that adults or adolescents use against their intimate partners."[xxxii] Section seven will delve into the way that the discourses surrounding Muslim women play out in the realm of domestic violence in two different contexts. First, a short note on the methods and limitations of the analyses applied to the case studies is warranted. It should be emphasized that the purpose of this investigation is not to make a comparative study of the occurrences of domestic violence in Muslim and non-Muslim communities or to empirically disprove stereotypes. Rather, it is to place domestic violence at the core of the tension in the feminist project. Domestic violence is an issue faced by Muslim women that cuts to the heart of basic human rights. Similar arguments can be made about female genital mutilation or honour killings. Furthermore, it was beyond my resources to do an in-depth analysis of the many women that have to confront issues of domestic violence. It was also neither possible nor desirable to detail the strategies used by organizations working on the issue in both countries. However, I rely on interviews conducted with members of organizations as well as research done by other scholars and researchers. I also draw on interviews conducted with Dutch and American Muslim women occupying various positions, as well as with women who simply agreed to share their reflections with me. The result is a theoretical conclusion about the constraining and the empowering potentials of the situation of Muslim women in these two separate contexts.

A. Domestic Violence and Religion

While populist politicians and the public are always fond of ready-made analyses, scholars have been quick to cast aspersions on the culturalist approach, which states that Islam is the issue.[xxxiii] Unfortunately, this tendency still persists, as the two case studies will demonstrate. For this reason, efforts to combat domestic violence by espousing universalist rhetoric and feminist principles unwittingly set into motion complex dynamics in the community. However, reformulating the theoretical approach to domestic violence is already being discussed by scholars in the field:

The goal is to reject simplistic analyses of the role of culture in domestic violence. Although culture may be used to justify violence against women, there is a danger of presenting the role of culture in domestic violence as a purely negative force. All too often, the fact that cultural practices and beliefs can serve as protective factors for battered women….is ignored or denied.[xxxiv]

Domestic violence is thus one of the many responses to the question that was asked at the outset: What battles are being fought by Muslim women themselves? The obstacles that they face perhaps may have some parallels with those confronted by women of other marginalized groups, such as the African-American community. However, the difference may be that Muslim women face the growing restraints of religious conservatism that has been on the rise in the last few decades and that has resurfaced with renewed vigour in the 21st century. In a study regarding the position of domestic violence in the South Asian Muslim community in the United States, it is pointed out that, "the religious community condemns any woman who seeks legal protection from an abusive spouse. Rather, her actions are considered as disloyal to the husband and the family."[xxxv]

While there are grounds to believe that religious institutions and cultural practices restrain women from speaking out about domestic violence, it is also crucial to understand the strengthening role that religion can play. A study carried out by Dr. Hassouneh Phillips argues that women who are victims of domestic violence and abuse have a tendency to turn towards religion as "their relationship with God provides them with an important means of coping with ongoing violence."[xxxvi] Therefore, there is a mix of strength as well as vulnerability to be derived from religion for victims of domestic violence. However, accepting the premise that Islam is playing a much larger role in the lives of Muslim communities as a whole has implications for the manner in which sensitive issues such as domestic violence should be approached. It means that that if feminist discourses and women's rights rhetoric continue to be enmeshed with "Islamophobic" attitudes, they will not be effective.

V. Case Studies

A. The Netherlands

The Netherlands is an odd choice for a case study, you may think. It is a country too far away to be of interest to Americans, too small to be of much importance to Europeans, and it is a country famous for its tolerance. Yet it turned out to be the best possible choice. It was in the Netherlands that the politics of multiculturalism erupted.[xxxvii]

The decision to focus on the Netherlands was initially made due to practical considerations. However, it did not take long to realize that the Netherlands makes a fascinating study of the future of Muslims in the West. Some of the largest questions surrounding the Muslim immigrant experience in Europe are unfolding on Dutch soil. The last ten years have been marked by explosive events, such as the murder of the filmmaker Theo Van Gogh, the popularity of Geert Wilders, and the controversial rhetoric of Ayaan Hirsi Ali. With a large population of Muslims living in the Netherlands, the idea that there is a clash of civilizations or a collision of values is gaining increasing currency among both the Dutch and the non-Dutch populations.[xxxviii]

This section is divided into two parts. At the outset it is important to recount some foundational information about the Netherlands and the history of immigrants and their integration. This will be followed by a discussion of the political rhetoric around Muslim women, focusing on Ayaan Hirsi Ali. What should emerge is a clearer understanding of the political backdrop against which Muslim women engage with issues in their community, such as domestic violence.

1. Islam in the Netherlands

The Netherlands is the home to approximately 850,000 Muslims.[xxxix] This group consists mainly of immigrants from Morocco and Turkey, but there are smaller populations of Somalis, Afghanis, and more recently immigrants from Iraq. The largest proportion of this population live in Rotterdam and Amsterdam. The discourse on immigration in the Netherlands is mostly dominated by the arrival of the so-called guest workers in response to the post-war growth of the economy and the need to enlarge the workforce.[xl] However, since many members of this wave of immigrants decided to remain in the Netherlands, the arrival of wives and families further boosted immigration rates. As a result, during the 1980s, the Dutch government adopted a concrete policy to integrate immigrants, realizing that the accommodation of immigrants would be a long-term national endeavour. During this time, the Dutch government adopted a multiculturalist position, promoting and upholding the separate ethnic communities to which immigrants belonged. Many imams were imported to the Netherlands and vetted for their orthodoxy rather than their understanding of Dutch culture, rendering them "simultaneously erudite and ignorant."[xli] This situation has been critiqued for being the reason why Muslims failed to become mainstream members of Dutch society:

> It was in the light of these changes that the cultural background of the migrants from Islamic countries were pictured as even more problematic for their integration into Dutch society. The low economic position and social isolation of these Islamic migrants made them the underclass citizens of Dutch society. As the underdog in Dutch society the stereotypes related to this position are no surprise at all: uneducated so dumb, uncivilized and thus criminal and so dangerous.[xlii]

The demand for tougher immigration policies was strong. Furthermore, the negative sentiments directed against economically marginalized Muslims became the basis for the rising popularity of right-wing parties. Statements expressing deep-rooted resentment for the Muslim immigrant population became commonplace and gave a political channel to some of the prejudices that members of the Dutch population had thus far kept silent. In the early 1990s, Frederik Bolkestein, the leader of the Liberal Party (VVD), began to point out the negative social impacts of the large immigrant population. He was one of the first politicians to emphasize the view that there is an inherent incompatibility between Islamic and Western values.[xliii] However, it was the radically anti-multicultural rhetoric adopted by Pim Fortuyn that truly prompted many in Dutch society to become more vocal about their opposition to the growth of the Muslim immigrant population. Fortuyn was known for denouncing Islam's "backward culture" and even wrote a book entitled *Against the Islamisation of our Culture*.[xliv] Though he had no established political party to support him, Pim Fortuyn took the lead in the election polls.[xlv] If he was able to create a sensation in life, his message is still alive and well after his death, which was the result of the first political assassination in four hundred years in the Netherlands. His message has been

almost seamlessly continued by political figures that dominate Dutch politics today like Geert Wilders and Ayaan Hirsi Ali.

   As the situation currently stands, there is an ongoing national debate as to the factual basis behind the claim that Muslims are not integrated into the cultural fabric of the Netherlands. As one report states, "the debate concerning Muslims has mostly been based on image-forming and perceptions that hardly have a connection–if any–with the actual reality. The created and perceived image does not mirror the actual social situation of Muslims in the Netherlands."[xlvi] The question appears to have turned into what exactly integration is supposed to entail. This is a research topic in its own right, but for the purposes of this basic overview of the contemporary political climate, suffice it to say that it is a politically sensitive issue. The conversation about Islam and Muslim immigrants is fierce on both sides of the debate and there are signs that the situation will take a turn for the worse in the future. In a recent development, Geert Wilders' Populist Party for Freedom was highly successful in the recent European Parliamentary elections. A survey published in June 2009 discovered that more than half of Dutch Muslims expressed a desire to emigrate as a result of this victory. In light of this potentially negative outcome, the future of Muslims in the Netherlands should be paid close attention in the years to come.

2. Women and Value Clashes

The position of women in the Muslim world in contrast to Dutch women is constantly cited as an example of fundamental differences. Many Dutch people see Muslim women to be as much the victims of radical Muslim men as they are. In other words, "there is a consensus in Dutch Society, that Muslims do not treat women or children as they should treat them; more exactly, they treat them as they should *not* treat them."[xlvii] Approximately nine out of ten native Dutch people believe that Muslim men dominate their women.[xlviii] The headscarf, of course, represents a physical manifestation of this clash of values. In fact, Philip Jenkins points out that it is "a key marker of religious and cultural difference."[xlix] Objectively, there can be many different reasons why women choose to express their faith in this way, but these are seldom mentioned.

   The position of Muslim women was propelled into the spotlight by the release of the film *Submission* by Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Theo Van Gogh. Ayaan Hirsi Ali appeared on television for the first time in August 2004 on *Zomergasten*[l] in the wake of a great amount of public interest. The film is essentially a graphic commentary on domestic violence in Muslim communities, with the protagonists asserting that such acts are justified by the Qur'an. It has been critiqued for being "first and foremost striking in its unimaginative resonance with the visual imagery of Orientalism… the spoken texts refer to a more academic form of Orientalism that sees people's lives as determined by Islam."[li] Contrary to Hirsi Ali's expectations, few Muslim organizations in the Netherlands responded with any vehemence to the film at first. There was also a very limited reaction from the target group, Muslim women themselves.[lii] The response eventually arrived in the form of the assassination of Theo Van Gogh, at which point the film became the subject of fierce debate. The widespread outrage and the direct threats posed to her life pushed Ayaan Hirsi Ali into hiding. She is no longer active in the Dutch political scene, but still remains a key figure in any discussion of women's rights issues in the Netherlands today.

   Hirsi Ali frequently cites examples from her upbringing in a strictly religious Somali family as part of her campaign against the repression of women in Islam. She is famous for declarations such as "to be a Muslim woman is to be born for the pleasure of men,"[liii] and had censured

Islam's "gender apartheid." In 2003, she joined the right-wing People's Party of Freedom and Democracy (VVD) and subsequently became a member of Parliament.[liv] She began to be even more vocal in her opposition to the treatment of women in Islam, focusing her broadsides more plainly on Islam itself, making statements such as "Muhammad is, by our Western standards, a perverse man."[lv] This uncritical rhetoric that attacks Islam and purports to stand up for the rights of Muslim women all in one breath is precisely the form of dialogue that this essay takes a position against.

It should be noted that Hirsi Ali failed to take into account a number of considerations when she was carrying out her campaign. For one thing, Muslim women are often part of a marginalized economic group. A simple statistic demonstrates that the average annual income for Native Dutch households is €20,000, compared to €13,000 for Moroccan households and €13,600 for Turkish households.[lvi] Furthermore, only 36 percent of Muslim women participate in the labour market in the Netherlands. This means that oftentimes immigrant women do not have access to education and opportunities that would allow them to counter these types of stereotypes. Interestingly, there are definitely some signs that Muslim women are becoming more active in speaking out about their opinions of Islam and their position in relation to it.[lvii] Unfortunately these voices are still few and far between, and the message that there are many different types of Muslim women living in the Netherlands is a quiet one.

B. The United States

> The national conversation about Muslim Americans went from a whisper to a roar as the United States attempted to protect itself and heal after the horrific terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Suddenly, a group that had long been overlooked became a subject of scrutiny. However, viewing the diverse Muslim American community primarily through the prism of national security would be an unfortunate oversimplification of a great American story.[lviii]

There are approximately 1.8 million Muslims living in the United States today.[lix] Unlike the Netherlands, the Muslim population in the United States is comprised of a multitude of different ethnic identities almost as diverse as the global Muslim population itself. Before the events of September eleventh there was very little attempt to speak about immigrant populations in terms of religion, leaving a wide gap in the literature about Muslims in America.[lx] As research on this diverse group of people has increased to counter popular misperceptions and cater to a growing number of questions about Muslims, there are many positive things that can ascertained about the history of Muslim immigrants in the United States.

In a research project highlighting the role of religious identities in the United States and Europe, Foner and Alba explain that "the bulk of (their) article shows a far more favorable environment for immigrant religion in the United States than Western Europe."[lxi] The comparative analysis employed here will have a similar outcome. To explain why Muslims in America are better off than in the Netherlands is beyond the scope of this project, as it delves into larger issues of integration policy, immigrant history, and so on. However, it should suffice to point out that the United States is not as polarized between Muslims and non-Muslims as is the case in the Netherlands. The next portion of the study will recount the history of Muslims in America, and move on to a discussion of the discourse around Muslim women in particular and the unique role they occupy.

1. Muslims in America

Since the events of September 11, 2001, Muslims in the United States have been the targets of Islamophobic attacks. To use a recently coined term used in a survey by the Gallup Center for Muslim Studies, many have been exposed to some degree of "post 9/11 trauma."[lxii] There is also a significant issue of anti-Muslim discrimination "complicated as it is by the historical relationship between Muslim societies and the West," which has become especially pronounced after September 11.[lxiii] Furthermore, there has been a large increase in the harassment of Muslims and Arabs, and violent crimes have been committed against their persons and property. This group has gone from being almost invisible to one of the most interesting groups in the United States, in a negative way. The election of President Barack Obama has prompted cautious optimism amongst the Muslim community about the future. Even though his speech in Cairo has been critiqued for being primarily a symbolic gesture, perhaps it can be viewed as a small step toward diffusing antagonistic attitudes towards Muslims.

While Muslims are increasingly acknowledged as part of America's future, information about Islam's history in the United States is not widely known. Islam in America can be traced as far back as the arrival of slaves from West Africa.[lxiv] The next wave of Muslim immigrants came in the late 19th century, mostly from Arab countries, followed closely by large groups from South Asia settling on the West Coast. The next wave was made up of thousands of university students from the Muslim world, imported as part of anti-Soviet Union policies. It was during this time that the Nation of Islam (NOI) came into being.[lxv] Continuous flows of immigration from Muslim countries up until today means that the Muslim population in America is now a patchwork of different identities.

One key difference to note about Muslims in America is the fact that they are generally financially better off than their Dutch counterparts. One newspaper article reports:

> 'They are better off than the average U.S. citizen,' notes Philippa Strum of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington. Almost 60 percent are college educated, 52 percent have an income of $50,000 or more and 82 percent of those eligible say they are registered to vote. In contrast, 'Muslims in Europe belong to the underclass of Europe.'[lxvi]

Ian Baruma points out how "immigrants appear to fare better in the harsher system of the United States, where there is less temptation to milk the state for the benefits it provides. The necessity to fend for oneself encourages a kind of tough integration."[lxvii] This competition for access to the labour market has forced different groups into shared spaces, extending the possibilities for interaction and connection with people from different backgrounds. Furthermore, in the United States the immigrant population is not dominated by one religious group, because the majority of immigrants are in fact Christian.[lxviii] In this way, anti-immigration rhetoric is usually targeted at populations from Latin America rather than exclusively focused on Muslims. None of this is to suggest that Islamophobic comments and debates do not rage on in the United States: there are and there will continue to be blatantly anti-Islamic voices. However, the key difference is that public prejudices are not converted into national party slogans, nor are they the grounds for deeply problematic cleavages within society.

2. Muslim Women in America

While the United States was never a colonial power in the Muslim world, by virtue of its shared heritage with Western Europe, many stereotypes about Muslim women continue to persist.[lxix] These images are highlighted even more by the increased presence of the United States in the Muslim world. The media has "found the images of Muslim women in Afghanistan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and other countries irresistible, and photographers delight in showering the American public with shots of women in all-enveloping Burqas."[lxx]

   Recently, American Muslims have had to situate themselves somewhere along the broad spectrum of opinions about the United States' involvement in the Middle East. Many people have been extremely critical of the fact that the invasion of Afghanistan was legitimized in the name of the rights of Afghani women.[lxxi] Abu-Lughod asks us to be critical of joining "Laura Bush's self-congratulation about the rejoicing of Afghan women liberated by American troops,"[lxxii] as it is quite apparent that there were political interests served by emphasizing their lower status. Even so, it is interesting to note that while it can be argued that Afghani Muslim women were politicized *by* the United States, Muslim women *within* America are actually given more space to contest and counter stereotypes about Muslim women. Slurs against Islam in the media include the usual assortment of charges detailing the submissive nature of Muslim women and commentary on Islam's oppressive gender views. However, Yvonne Haddad and colleagues suggest that when Muslim women are confronted with these stereotypes in the media, "one response is to assign these deliberate obfuscations to ill intent, while another is to believe that it is due to ignorance and seek to find ways to combat the distortion."[lxxiii] In this way, Muslim women are in a unique position to voice their concerns and beliefs. Muslim women are also going to great lengths to claim public space in America. Women are able to do this not only by virtue of their participation in the professional realm, but also by using the media and "publicly giving voice both to the pain that the community is experiencing and the kind of commitment they represent."[lxxiv] Thus, contrary to the situation as it exists in the Netherlands, there appears to be a trend of Muslim women *becoming political* rather than being politicized. This opens up vast spaces for change and progress in the Muslim community.

VI: Implications and Consequences: A Normative Exploration

Thus far this essay has shown how globalized Islam takes on new forms and creates new challenges and opportunities for Muslims living in the Western world. This final section will tie together all of the separate threads that have run through the article in an attempt to make a more profound statement about the impacts of the heightened politicization of Muslim women in the aftermath of 9/11. It should be clear by now that politicization refers to fact that actions taken and statements made by members of a specific class of people has implications beyond the expression of an individual choice. This is the power of globalization.

   The problems of the world are no longer just "out there" at a remote distance, but tend to be brought into the center of everyone's life. Global problems confront us personally, no matter how much we would like to switch them off. The decision of a young Muslim woman in London about whether to wear a headscarf in the streets, at school, or at college, can no longer be an innocent one. It is fraught with meanings and potential meanings…and everyone realizes and in some sense reacts to the significance in the wider world of this style of dress.[lxxv]

How is this significant to domestic violence? A response must focus on two fundamental questions as guidance in a given context: first, how polarized is the society in question, and second, what kinds of opportunities exist to counter stereotypes? By comparing the two case studies it can be said that they both represent differing degrees to which discourses around Muslim women can restrict dealing with domestic violence.

A. Consequences in the Netherlands

There are good reasons why Ayaan Hirsi Ali has received the cold shoulder from the Dutch public as well as from Muslim women, the very group of people she claims to be fighting for.[lxxvi] Baruma explains that even though Hirsi Ali raises some important issues, her strategy is counterproductive. Declaring that the "Muslim religion itself is the source of all evil, then you alienate the very people you need to have on your side"[lxxvii] and allow the moderate majority to play into the hands of the extremists. Nevertheless, domestic violence is a social problem that does indeed exist. Muslims make up only 5.5 percent of the Dutch population, but they account for more than half of the women in battered women's shelters.[lxxviii] However, the rhetoric employed by Hirsi Ali adds fuel to an already tense situation for immigrants by forcing Muslim women into the limelight and making them the centerpiece of the national debate, thereby politicizing them. After conducting a personal interview with Floris Vermeulen[lxxix] of the Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies, it became clear that the city of Amsterdam was polarized over the question of immigrants, and that Muslim women almost always refused to speak to Ayaan Hirsi Ali about their domestic violence issues. Polarization in society means that one's choices for recourse become limited. As one author on domestic violence writes, "If a woman is put in the position of having to choose, she will often choose her religious affiliation and community because it is familiar and a high priority in her life."[lxxx]

It is important to remember the role of growing religious conservatism within the Dutch population. A recent study on the radicalization of youth in Amsterdam cautions that "the negative treatment of Islam in a generalising manner leads to feelings of injustice which play an important role in individuals who radicalise."[lxxxi] This type of reactionary movement, which strengthens patriarchal norms and structures, is the last thing that Muslim women need. It feeds into the already existing polemic between the Dutch and the Muslim immigrants, and ignores the work of many Islamic feminists, such as Fatima Mernissi and Amina Wadud, who counter domestic violence by reinterpreting the Qur'an themselves. A women's rights activist who works at one of the largest shelters in Amsterdam asserted that Hirsi Ali's attitude "insults me and she makes my life as a feminist ten times harder because she forces me to be associated with anti-Muslim attacks."[lxxxii]

In this way, the language used to fight for the basic rights of women can actually *limit the fulfillment* of those rights, straining attempts to redress these serious issues in the Muslim community. Wearing a headscarf, declaring oneself a feminist, or even seeking help as a victim of domestic abuse thus becomes a political declaration. Each situates the individual on one side of the debate. This feeds into the essentialization of difference as much as it suppresses individual differences amongst Muslim women. Caught up in a web of predetermined discourses, Muslim women must therefore navigate sexism and Islamophobia both at the same time.

B. Consequences in the United States

Perhaps the reason Ayaan Hirsi Ali stands out so much in the Netherlands is because she represents a deviation from the Dutch tradition of withholding critiques of other cultures in the name of multiculturalism. In the United States, however, there is a large number of voices coming from within the Muslim community that are extremely critical of traditional interpretations of Islam. These include Asra Nomani and Amina Wadud. One is a former journalist and the other is a professor of Islamic Studies and both have been leaders in the effort to open Muslim prayers to women.[lxxxiii] These figures also have to confront heated opposition from Muslims who prefer to take a more traditional approach to Islam. However, the difference is that they argue within an Islamic framework, breaking the binary between monolithic categorizations that preach fundamental differences between "Islam" and the "West." Therefore, the analysis of domestic violence in the United States is of a rather different nature. While Islamophobic sentiments definitely persist in the popular media, and many Muslims are critical of U.S. foreign policy in Muslim countries, no voices can be singled out as having an overwhelming influence, the way that Ayaan Hirsi Ali does in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, Muslim women do suffer as a result of stereotypes and the prevalence of a feminist agenda that does not necessarily take into account realities in the community.

Like in the Netherlands, domestic violence is a prominent issue for women in the United States. An illustration from the current literature states:

> Muslim women in America look for and find limited help in government-sponsored programs like shelters for battered women, support groups, and legal and social services. However, they face strong opposition from their religious and cultural institutions in utilizing these services.[lxxxiv]

Yet, as mentioned before, Muslim women in America are much better equipped to participate in the discourse about Islam without being "inserted into predetermined discourses and practices that shape their agency and determine their strategies of resistance."[lxxxv] This is because many Muslim women are also going to great lengths to claim public space in America. Hadadd and colleagues assert that, "These women are changing the face of Islam as it is seen both from within the various Muslim communities in this country, and by those Americans who struggle with perennial images of Islamic women as oppressed and forced into seclusion"[lxxxvi]

In an interview with Fedwa Wazwaz,[lxxxvii] a member of the Islamic Resource Group of the University of Minnesota, she indicated that there was a hesitance to publish statistics about domestic violence because of the fear that stereotypes would be reinforced. However, she emphasized very forcefully that even though it was a difficult position to be in, at the end of the day, domestic violence was something that the public needed more education about. Furthermore, in an interview with Sakinah Mujahid,[lxxxviii] of Sisters Need a Place (SPARC) in Minneapolis, it became clear that she was first and foremost excited about the opportunities that September 11 had given Muslims to answer questions about their faith. Working at a domestic violence shelter for Muslim women, she is attuned to the images people have of Muslims, but she focuses more on supporting the women in need than on the stereotypes. She explained that the key was to educate people in the community about Islam, rather than to apologize for Muslims. In this way, contrary to the situation as it exists in the Netherlands, there appears to be a trend of Muslim women *becoming political* rather than being politicized. This opens up vast spaces for change and progress in the Muslim community that are not always available to Muslim women in the Netherlands, although this may be changing.

It appears, therefore, that Muslim women in the Netherlands and the United States must both engage with multiple and often constricting discourses. However, due to the fact that the Netherlands is more polarized, and the United States grants greater avenues for responding to criticisms, the result is different. In the Netherlands, Muslim women have a very difficult time contending with domestic violence in the face of tight-knit religious structures, rendering their position highly politicized. In the United States, Muslim women are much better able to become politically active. Therein lies a lesson for the Netherlands for the future. There are also positive signs that the new generation is willing to take on a similar kind of responsibility. As a final note, almost every Dutch Muslim woman interviewed for this project expressed a positive drive to succeed in the Netherlands. These conversations instilled some sense that Islam in both contexts is undergoing a positive transformation as a result of women having to constantly answer for what takes place in their community. Provocation and rejection, therefore, can have a positive impact on the manifestations of global Islam.

VII. Conclusion

This essay has highlighted the effects of the politicization of Muslim women in the era of globalization. The argument has also necessitated taking a position in relation to feminism, women's rights, and Islam. This position recognizes the very political history of the feminist movement, and remains critical of women's rights rhetoric even today. However, as a Muslim woman thinking about the greater relationship between Islam and the West, it is imperative to avoid letting wariness about the debate on women eclipse the fact that horrific practices, such as domestic violence and honour killings, do in fact go on in the Muslim community. In truth, my own convictions about Islam compel me to take a position on them. That being said, what emerges is a demonstration of the negative effects of politicizing Muslim women further, as in these polarized contexts. However, it is also a lesson that being forced into the spotlight can have positive results, allowing women to confront their own issues in a globalized world where boundaries are shifting and identities are being created and broken down every day. Whichever path these two nations take in regard to their Muslim populations in the future, the role of women in these debates will undoubtedly attract the attention of scholars, political leaders, and commentators in these often baffling but always fascinating times.

Program. Last but not least, many thanks to Professor Ahmed Samatar for spending January with us in Maastricht, and subjecting us to what I believe to be one of the most challenging and rewarding academic experiences at Macalester thus far.

Notes

[i] Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 64.

[ii] Pnina Werbner, "Stamping the Earth with the Name of Allah: Zikr and the Sacrilizing of Space among British Muslims," *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no.3 (August 1996): 334.

[iii] Holly Shissler, "Book Reviews," *Signs* (Autumn 2004): 241.

[iv] See Samuel Huntington 1993.

[v] These two terms are used to mean the home of the West and the home of Islam. This terminology has been deployed to point to the existence of separate political entities, the former being the land of the non-believers and the latter as the home of the *ummah*, where Islamic laws and regulations can be carried out with the consent of the population.

[vi] Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (London: Hurst & Co., 2002).

[vii] Ibid., p. 17.

[viii] Anthony Giddens, *Europe in the Global Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press. 2007), p. 130.

[ix] Lise Jamila Abid, "Muslims in Austria: Integration through Participation in Austrian Society," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 26, no.2 (2006): 264.

[x] Jack Goody, *Islam in Europe* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), p. 158.

[xi] Giddens 2007, p. 132. I was in Islamabad during that time and I can vividly recall my school being closed for the week because of the fear surrounding the security situation.

[xii] Roy 2002, p. 23.

[xiii] Ibid., p. 24.

[xiv] Gilles Kepel, *Allah in the West: Islamic Movements in America and Europe* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 2.

[xv] Goody 2004, p. 103.

[xvi] Roy 2002, p. 120.

xvii Ibid., p. 23.

xviii Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil. Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1987).

xix Laila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 150.

xx Ibid., p. 151.

xxi Nelson and Oleson, quoted in Kandiyoti 1987, p. 322.

xxii Islah Jad, "Between Women and Secularism," *On Shifting Ground: Muslim Women in the Global Era*, edited by Nouraie Simone (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2005), p. 178.

xxiii Ibid.

xxiv Ibid., p. 177.

xxv See Alev Cinar, *Modernity, Islam and Secularism in Turkey* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

xxvi Valentine M. Moghadem, "Islamic Feminism and its Discontents. Towards a Resolution of the Debate," *Signs* 27, no. 4 (Summer 2002): 1142.

xxvii Bronwyn Winter, "Fundamental Misunderstandings: Issues in Feminist Approaches to Islamism," *Journal of Women's History* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2001).

xxviii Ibid., p. 10.

xxix Lila Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and its Others," *American Anthropologist* 104, no.3 (2002): 784.

xxx Winter 2001, p. 13.

xxxi Abu-Lughod. p. 783.

xxxii Dean Hassouneh-Phillips, "Strength and Vulnerability: Spirituality in Abused American Muslim Women's Lives," *Issues in Mental Health Nursing* 24 (2003): 681.
xxxiii
xxxiii Roy 2002, p. 9.

xxxiv Natalie J. Sokoloff and Ida Dupont, "Domestic Violence at the Intersections of Race, Class and Gender: Challenges and Contributions to Understanding Violence against Marginalized Women in Diverse Communities," *Violence against Women* 11 (2005): 46.

xxxv Ruksana Ayyub, "Domestic Violence in the South Asian Muslim Immigrant Population in the United States," *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless* 9, no. 3 (2000): 242.

xxxvi Hassouneh-Phillips 2003, p. 682.

xxxvii Paul M. Sniderman and L. Hagendoorn, *When Ways of Life Collide: Multiculturalism and its Discontents in the Netherlands* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 17.

xxxviii Ibid.

xxxix "The Position of Muslims in the Netherlands: Facts and Figures," *Forum Factbook* (Utrecht, the Netherlands: Institute for Multicultural Development, 2008).

xl Halleh Ghorashi, "Ayaan Hirsi Ali: Daring or Dogmatic? Debates on Multiculturalism and Emancipation in the Netherlands," *Focaal-European Journal of Anthropology* (2003): 164.

xli Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2008, p. 19.

xlii Ghorashi 2003, p. 165.

xliii Ibid., p. 164.

xliv *BBC News Online*, "Pim Fortuyn: The Far-Right Dutch Maverick" (7 March 2008), online at news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1857918.stm.

xlv Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2008, p. 20.

xlvi *Forum Factbook* 2008, "Preface."

xlvii Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2008, p. 23, emphasis in original.

xlviii Ibid.

xlix Philip Jenkins. *God's Continent: Christianity, Islam and Europe's Religious Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 97.

l Annelies Moors, "Submission, Debates on Islam in Europe." *International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM) Review* 15 (Spring 2005): 8.

li Ibid.

lii Ibid.

liii Deborah Scroggins, "The Dutch Muslim Culture War," *The Nation* (9 June 2005).

liv Moors 2005, p. 8.

lv Jenkins 2006, p. 190.

lvi Euro-Islam Info, "The Netherlands," *News and Analysis on Muslims in Europe and the United States* (2007), accessed online at euro-islam.info/country-profiles/the-netherlands.

lvii See "Lost Faces Foundation," "Nisa4Nisa," and "Stiching al Nisa." These are all community-run organizations that work specifically with Muslim women to meet their basic needs.

lviii Dalia Mogahed, "Muslim Americans: A National Portrait; An In-Depth Analysis of America's Most Diverse Religious Community," Gallup Center for Religious Studies, 2009.

lix "United States of America," *CIA World Factbook*, accessed online at cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/US.html.

lx Nancy Foner and R. Alba, "Immigrant Religion in the U.S. and Western Europe. Bridge or Barrier to Inclusion?" *International Migration Review* 42, no.2.(Summer 2008): 360.

lxi Ibid.

lxii Mogahed 2009, p. 15.

lxiii Yvonne Y. Haddad, J. Smith, and M. Moore, *Muslim Women in America*: *The Challenge of Islamic Identity Today* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 23.

lxiv Mogahed 2009, p. 18.

lxv Ibid.

lxvi Shada Islam, "Muslims and Two Continents," *The Korea Herald* (19 September 2007).

lxvii Ian Baruma, *Murder in Amsterdam: The Death of Theo Van Gogh and the Limits of Tolerance* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), p. 101.

lxviii Foner and Alba 2008, p. 361.

lxix Haddad et al. 2006, p. 23.

lxx Ibid., p. 31.

lxxi Lila Abu-Lughod 2002, p. 778.

lxxii Ibid.

lxxiii Haddad et al., p. 34.

lxxiv Ibid., p. 121.

lxxv Giddens 2007, p. 130.

lxxvi Gerald Traufetter, "Challenging Islam: The Odyssey of Ayaan Hirsi Ali," *Spiegel Online International* (2007).

lxxvii Ian Baruma, "Interview: Condemning Islam Per Se is Not Helpful," *Spiegel Online* (27 March 2008), accessed online at spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,543534,00.html.

lxxviii Scroggins 2005.

lxxix Floris Vermuelen of the Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies, interview by the author, 13 May 2009.

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lxxxi Marieke Slootman and J. Tillie, "Processes of Radicalization. Why Some Amsterdam Muslims become Radicals," University of Amsterdam: Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies (October 2006), p. 7.

lxxxii Ibid.

lxxxiii Ibid.

lxxxiv Ayyub 2003, p. 239.

lxxxv Shahnaz Khan, "Muslim Women: Negotiations in the Third Space," *The University of Chicago Press* 23, no. 2 (Winter 1998): 450.

lxxxvi Haddad et al.2006, p. 121.

lxxxvii Fedwa Wazwaz of the Islamic Resource Group, interview by the author, 23 May 2009.

lxxxviii Sakinah Mujahid of Sisters Need a Place (SNAP), interviewed by the author, Minneapolis, 13 May 2009.

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