Representation Otherwise: A Public Pedagogy Contesting Islamophobia through Popular Culture

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Abstract

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My dissertation argues for popular culture as a public pedagogy by analyzing internet series, stand-up comedy and music videos created in the US to subvert stereotypes. Popular culture is a powerful force in generating stereotypes, including those involved in Islamophobia; and film and media have long defined Muslims (along with Arabs, who are often conflated with Muslims) in terms of religion, gender and race, for instance by portraying Muslim men as "terrorists", Muslim women as either helpless maidens or veiled and oppressed, and Islam altogether as a "problem". However, stereotyped groups also use popular culture to speak for themselves. Popular culture is used to resist, contest, counter and subvert stereotypes. This potential is being realized by second-generation Muslims familiar with the platforms provided by Anglo-American popular culture. Their work has come into its own especially in the aftermath of 9/11, a time that saw both the intensification of stereotypes and heightening of Muslim-American consciousness.

I also argue that current efforts at contesting stereotypes by Muslims in the American cultural sphere have been facilitated by the fact that the circulation of digital and digitalized culture on the internet allows diverse voices to be more easily heard by a wide audience. I discuss how each of these works counters stereotypes and allows the targeted communities to be understood more positively and realistically by serving as a public pedagogy through its accessibility and its offering of knowledge previously omitted in representation. First, I argue that Muslim-Americans are drawing on a long tradition of minority groups, such as African-Americans and Jewish-Americans, utilizing popular culture in similar ways. Understanding how minorities were historically situated as the "Other" and how they were not only defined by but also responded through popular culture sheds light on the current movement by Muslims who are challenging stereotypes by creating a third space defining modern Americanness through a popular culture that is the most widespread and imitated in the world; thus I will be examining activity that has a wide influence. American popular culture also has great potential to have a transnational impact, an aspect I address in the conclusion.

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Introduction

It is Summer 2016. A childhood friend, now in Paris, gets in touch to jokingly ask whether we are going to the burkini beach party in London. She is referring to the August 'Wear What You Want Beach Party', a burkini ban protest outside of London's French Embassy. Women are angry at the French ban forbidding women to wear burkinis, furious at police officers for forcing a modest woman to remove her tunic in public at a beach in Nice (Said-Moorhouse 2016). I haven't seen this friend since we were classmates in Junior High School in Tangier, a coastal city at the tip of Africa, where we grew up surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea, the Atlantic Ocean and the Strait of Gibraltar. Although we haven't seen eachother in ages, at times like these, when we feel spotlighted, we reach out to one another and to other female friends with similar backgrounds who are in the diasporas.

I tell her that, for this very reason, my female English learner students in Tangier, where I had been teaching, decided to move to the US instead of to France. For my Moroccan female students studying for the Test of English as a Foreign Language, having the law on their side with regard to attire is a major, if not the main factor, in deciding where to live. In Morocco, there is no law requiring or forbidding women from wearing a burkini. The reality is that society is composed of different levels of religiosity and of being Muslim; and women have the right to travel back and forth between those identities and levels of religiosity.

What I mean is that these students are women who are accustomed to having that legal choice of what to wear and what to do with their hair. Should migration of women be to gain more freedoms and opportunities, doesn't it seem ironic to migrate only to lose that right to make a choice for oneself? I tell my friend that students decided to move to the US instead of to France despite the fact that France is closer to home than the US is, despite the fact that most Moroccans speak better French than they do English. And yes, hate crimes against people wearing Muslim dress or who are perceived to be Arab in the US have increased (Kishi 2016). Examples include setting a veiled tourist on fire (Serhan 2016) and yanking a hijab off of a woman's head (Kirby 2016). However, despite the increase in Islamophobic hate crimes and overall discomfort in the US, the actual laws in that country do not tell women what and what not to wear; and having the law on the side of the woman facilitates the pedagogical impact of the art created by that woman.

There are no actual laws with regard to bathing suits where we come from; but, in much the same way that it is common to see people instinctively cross to the other side of the street to leave space for others who happen to be praying on the sidewalk, cultural awareness and respect for others results in women instinctively knowing what to wear at what beach. A twenty-minute ferry-ride to Algeciras, Spain, our hometown is strategically located. Due to its history of interaction with diverse backgrounds, in Tangier, people have an almost innate level of cultural awareness that acknowledges the normalcy of varying levels of religiosity in society. According to The New York Times in 1970, "Through the ages since, many civilizations have left their mark on the city. The Romans, Vandals, Byzantines, Visigoths, Portuguese, Spanish and English all occupied the place" (Welsh 1970). As a student there in the 1980s and 1990s, my Math and Science teachers were Indian, my English teachers American and my French teacher Yugoslavian.

My friend and I compare and contrast what living in the different European and North American countries is like for women like us. She confirms that France is suffocating, with on-going bad vibes that are especially directed at Muslim women. She tells me that a lifeguard at a public swimming pool in the Alps made a snide remark about a 'burkini-type-thing' in reference to her 1940s-style bathing suit. She feels that, "yes, just a little more tanned than usual, hair pulled back, suddenly I look more 'Arab', and I get to be pulled into people's disgusting fears…I went back to the grassy area to burn."

I bristen. "'The colonial gaze descends upon women in burkhas or burkinis or in anything that resembles – as far as the colonizer is concerned – backwardness...'," I say (Prashad 2016).

She is seething. "I know I shouldn't have accepted to go to a public pool," from Paris vents. "I came out of the water to ask what he meant, felt uncomfortable, after all, I'm unfit, half-naked, and answering questions about what I'm wearing. I asked him what else I'd be wearing if not a bathing suit," on constant alert, defensive about stereotypes that she cannot relate to.

An awareness of the historic and powerful existence of framed thought with regard to Muslims has resulted in individuals from Muslim backgrounds feeling the need to brace for questioning, not just with the Department of Homeland Security, but in general. My friend's experience at the swimming pool in 2016 is reminiscent of

Moroccan novelist's Laila Lalaami's experience in Arizona in 2015 at the Question and Answer period of her book reading for *The Moor's Account*. *The Moor's Account* is a novel about a Moroccan slave during the European conquest of La Florida in the early sixteenth century. At the book reading, Lalaami gets asked unrelated and random questions about the terrorist organization ISIS, created in 1999, until, eventually, another audience member observes that the only Muslims that the television portrays are Muslim extremists.

> "What I understood this second woman to be saying was that the media she consumed had not provided her with enough context with which to interpret current events, so she didn't know how to process the fact that the Muslim at the dais didn't match the Muslim on television. Having to explain this mismatch is not a task I chose for myself, but from the moment I moved to the United States, it was asked of me with disturbing regularity." (Lalaami 2020, 28).

Similarly, when it comes to framed images of veiled women, most women from Muslim backgrounds in the diasporas that I speak to or read report feeling subjected to a form of Inquisition regarding the veil, the burqa, the niqab, the abaya, the hijab, and their different meanings in different countries. Personally, I have only ever met one veiled woman, on a train ride from Casablanca to Tangier. This is not to say that there are no other women in niqab but that it is not very common. She said she had spent a lot of time reading before deciding to start a wearing veil and that noone had anything to do with her decision. When I told her that I was planning on teaching English, she gave me the most eloquent update on the disparities of the educational system in the country. A mother of two, whom she considers to be at a 'critical' age, she had analyzed every angle of their schooling, from the school curriculum to the latest trending pink candy-looking pill (drug) being sold under the guise of candy to children who visit candy stands parked outside of schools. Personally, I have only ever met one veiled woman; I use the word 'hijab' for headscarf; 'niqab' ' for facial veil; 'Arab' for people of Arab descent, 'Arabic' for the language, 'Islam' for the religion, and 'Muslim' for people of Islamic faith. And now the burkini. Our backgrounds had prepared us for living abroad in terms of being multilingual, cosmopolitan and familiar with world cultures; we had not however, been expecting to deal with stereotypes, with having to talk Shari'a and with justifying styles of bathing suits and headdress. "Hello? I am not the

Ambassador for Muslim Women's Attire." "Tu sais ce qu'il nous reste a faire, Lamiae?" says my friend. "Write, write, write. Write all our memories down, and all our stories up." The last piece of writing relevant to representation of women in popular culture that I had done was my MA thesis on music videos by Egyptian and Lebanese female artists in the early 2000s, a controversy that didn't last long; the genre quickly became normalized and remains all the rage in the Middle East and North Africa. Before that, for my BA degree, I was looking at representations of women in Francophone and Latin American literature. If I were to get another degree, I would write about representation and gendered Islamophobia.

My PhD dissertation thus hopes to clarify the mechanisms through which artists are responding to Islamophobia today by critically engaging with works by film and media critics Jack Shaheen and Evelyn Alsultany on depiction of Arabs and Muslims in popular culture in the US. The problem for Shaheen and other critics is that Hollywood film, in particular, sheds Arabs and Muslims in a negative light. My dissertation hopes to add to previous analysis and documentation of "veiled and oppressed woman", "Arab=Muslim", and "evil Arab" Hollywood representations by offering examinations of series, music videos, and stand-up comedy that serve to contest stereotypes through their subversion, their transnational capabilities, their diasporic popularity, and their online accessibility. I highlight the works as an alternative feminist knowledge in the diasporic abroad that can influence existing hegemonic narratives of the female 'Other' by reflecting diverse realities, ethnicities, and socio-economic conditions of the women.

My dissertation acknowledges critique by Shaheen and Alsultany of repeated representations in media and film invoking images of stereotypes of Muslim women as either veiled and oppressed or as seductive belly dancers in harems; nevertheless, as a Moroccan woman in the diaspora, I would have liked to read more from Shaheen and Alsultany on representations of women in relation to Islamophobia and on how objectification of Arab and Muslim women enables gendered discrimination and defines Arab and/or Muslim women by their object status and as lacking in agency. Hollywood stereotypes of women reinforce discriminatory binary oppositions that reproduce ethnocentricity, unequal relations of power, and other forms of cultural domination, including gendered Islamophobia in the US. Muslim women have historically been spotlighted in terms of their bodies, sexuality and attire, and portrayed in relation to veils, headscarves and burkinis; unfortunately, mainstream media and popular culture consisting of

repetitive stereotypes of women prevents the public from alternate feminist knowledge.

This objectification can be reversed by ending the language of the Muslim female 'Other' through new representations that include contextual realities reflecting the diversity of Muslim women. My dissertation hopes to answer the following questions: How are cultural objects created by Muslims themselves, and as facilitated by their on-line availability, creating new space for cultural dialogue today? How are artists, especially female artists, contending with Islamophobia? What techniques of creation are being deployed to subvert, reverse and debunk colonial myths of Muslim women; and through what forms of popular culture is this taking place?

My overall argument is that representations of Arabs and Muslims (especially representations of women) in series, stand-up comedy and music videos by Arabs and Muslims themselves are creating new space for cultural dialogue. They do this partly by drawing on prior traditions of use of popular culture by minority groups, principally or initially in the US. With regard to the personalities and locations of the figures discussed in the dissertation, these are second-generation American artists. The second generation is conscious of their heritage (and likely sometimes targeted because of it), but is also familiar with the history of racism and discrimination in countries of emigration and proficient enough in Anglo-American culture to effectively build on the work of previous artists who have countered racial and other hierarchies. Significantly, the second generation of Muslims (and Arabs) has been profoundly affected by the events and aftermath of 9/11.

I include Arab-American Christians in the discussion because the "Arab=Muslim" stereotype is very common despite the fact that converted African-Americans and Indonesian-Americans form the largest part of the approximate 2.2 percent Muslim population in the US (Omidvar and Richards 2014). Only twelve percent of Muslims in the world are Arabs (Shaheen 2012). The fact that Edward Said, Jack Shaheen and Evelyn Alsultany, initiators of and pioneers in the discussion on the Othering of Arabs and Muslims in media and film, are themselves Christians indicates the stake non-Muslim Arabs have in the refuting of stereotypes.

Popular culture is manifested in many ways, including through film, literature, theatre, comedy, fiction, poetry, comics, music, and digital material. This is to say that, further to Said's argument that the media

is guilty of Orientalist depiction of Muslims, Shaheen added film to the forms of popular culture analyzed by postcolonial theorists in relation to Islamophobia. Other critics such as Evelyn Alsultany further expanded the discussion to include television shows, stand-up comedy and music (Alsultany 2012); and in his definition of popular culture in Muslims and Pop, Peter Morey adds docudrama, television thrillers, and fiction (Morey and Yaqin 2011). The two-volume work, Muslims and American Popular Culture, then examines popular culture communicated through digital media (Omidvar and Richards 2014). Digital media are widely utilized by a more recent generation of artists who use them to counter Orientalism in their own ways.

The series, stand-up comedy and music videos that I focus in my dissertation serve as exemplars of contemporary cultural objects subverting stereotypes of Muslims and Arabs. To offer consumers of popular culture representations of Muslims alternate to common stereotypes offered by film and media, a growing number of artists have been responding to Islamophobia through other forms of popular culture, such as Internet series, music videos and videos of stand-up comedy shows. I also concentrate on American (or North American) popular culture, despite the fact that stereotypes and responses to them are seen elsewhere in the Muslim diaspora. This is because (North) American popular culture is enormously popular and widespread, as well as being known for creating space for minorities to counter racial hierarchies.

Ever since the advent of the Internet, popular culture that was previously accessible only through print, cinemas, and television sets has become accessible to everyone with a device. In fact, the Internet has now become so vital to popular culture that certain films are available only online, for instance through the streaming services Netflix and Hulu. The Internet has increased not only the accessibility of digital popular culture, but also the speed with which it can be delivered and exchanged. In this way, the digital popular culture market has been strengthening relationships between different forms of popular culture, increasing access to film, stand-up comedy, and music videos and engaging wider audiences by creating space to reverse stereotypes of Muslims and Muslim femininities and masculinities. digital production and diasporic production create space for more translation and cultural repackaging, hence bringing international popular culture to broader viewerships For these reasons, my dissertation examines Hulu series, music videos and videos of stand-up comedy that are also accessible on-line. Online accessibility, representations of Muslim

women relevant to the veil, and the potential of those representations to de-construct stereotype, unite my data set.

In this way, the continued creation, circulation and consumption of cultural content is a public pedagogy in the form of non-movement. Non-movements are trends and practices (including sayings) of millions of individuals with similar problems; and while social nonmovements are not planned, they represent the people because solidarities are formed in spaces of flow and movement through individual yet similar complaints about communities. Non-movements, including those by migrants in the East and international immigrants in the West, form part of a larger global urban poor social non-movement (Bayat 2013). In other words, the era of popular culture as digital and transnational coincides with the era of the Arab Spring in the diaspora. Digital production and diasporic production create space for more translation and cultural repackaging, hence bringing international popular culture to broader viewerships (Alsultany and Shohat 2013). Anti-colonial messages in the Arab world are hence echoed in messages in work by Muslim Americans drawing on Civil Rights, anti-discrimination laws and the right to religious freedom laws.

An underlying theme of representation of marginalized communities binds the television and internet series, stand-up comedy and music videos discussed in this dissertation together. This is important to note because in terms of interdisciplinarity and social pedagogy, utilizing more than one form of popular culture to address a social issue deepens understandings by allowing for an interpretability through fragmented representations and contextual realities. This interpretability then creates possibility for a 'transfer' to new problem-solving strategies as conceptualized by others (Mansilla 2012).

My dissertation thus highlights the works discussed as attempts to extend the learning space for pedagogy through popular culture and technology. This is to say that works discussed are extensions of themes where images, sound and rhetoric serve as fragmented components of a larger collage of works in differing forms questioning recurring representations of marginalized communities. A pedagogical technique that gives less direction and more space to think about in relation to a topic by offering more forms of communication about that topic, the point of intersection between the series, stand-up comedy and music videos is marginalization and representation of Muslims. Interactions between understandings by

audiences from the different forms of popular culture then create space for even newer understandings and meanings resisting predominant depictions that affect social reality. In this way, the different forms of popular culture serve as fragmented components of a larger picture that leave space for the audience to interpret frameworks of power in relation to the 'Other' for themselves.

Less explanation and more forms create space for relationality and new understandings with potential to resist stereotypes. Fragmented representation through different forms of communication reaches more types of people; and relationality between forms enhances critical thinking and agility. Fragmented representation thus brings space for new meanings created by public understandings as processed through relationality between alternate forms and contexts (Cambre 2013). For these reasons, to allow for interpretability through representation-read-otherwise, discussion of Islamophobia and representation in this dissertation allows for examination of a combination of forms of popular culture. Challenging gaps between disciplines and forms to communicate social problems makes knowledge on Islamophobia public to broader audiences and creates room for forming syntheses within broader disciplines.

An objective of interdisciplinarity is to collectively expand public knowledge and counter social issues by communicating with alternate audiences. As public pedagogy, popular culture can shape individual and collective thinking that impacts public life. Therefore, it is necessary that alternate narratives and discourses create space for new meanings by contextualizing people's experiences and social realities (Giroux 2008); and representations of women must include diverse contexts, individual agencies, identities, backgrounds and knowledge. Offering space for dialogue through relationality, I hope that the combination of television and Internet series, stand-up comedy and music videos contributes to media and reality literacy by serving as a pedagogical praxis that creates conditions of possibility for the public to compose new understandings of stereotypes and new problem-solving strategies that resist conventional ways of thinking of 'Others'.

‘islamophobie’: Stereotypes in Popular Culture

Media and reality literacy is understanding how content creation in the news and in other forms of popular culture is constructed; media and reality literacy is being aware of the effects of the fast

dissemination of false news and 'alternative' facts on communities (Castillo and Egginton 2017). According to the Policy Backgrounder: Defining Islamophobia for a Canadian Context, Tessellate Institute, the French term 'islamophobie' was first coined in 1910 by Alain Quellien, writer and critic of the French in colonial Africa (Bullock 2017). Quellien defined 'islamophobie' as "a prejudice against Islam that is widespread among the peoples of Western and Christian civilizations" (Lequellec 2019). The English translation of the term at the time was "feelings inimical to Islam" (Bullock 2017, 6). Although mentioned in the 1980s by Christian-Palestinian scholar Edward Said, Islamophobia only became a field of study in 1997 after the Runnymede Trust, a think tank in the UK, published its report "Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All" (Runnymede, 1997). The report defines 'Islamophobia' as a "dread or hatred of Islam and therefore, [the] fear and dislike of all Muslims," (Bullock 2017, 6).

That said, if I were to venture to define gendered Islamophobia, I would describe it as fear and dislike of Muslims stemming from continuous misrepresentation that is manifesting itself through the colonial gaze directed at women, resulting in hate crimes against them and in their exclusion from swimming pools and from other public spaces in the diaspora.

Both the first and second ages of mass media are guilty of representation editing realities by framing lived experiences of Muslim women as a narrative or as a set of images revolving around attire as symbolic of oppression. Sexist and objectifying images of women dominated the first age of media, when framing in popular culture played out in print, theatre, painting, the visual arts and literature. Sexist and objectifying images of women also dominated in this second 'age of electronic media' (Castillo and Egginton 2017). The 'guided spectacle' of 'islamophobie' has been exacerbated by new technologies facilitating the editing of realities and truths in media; and wide-spread stereotyping has led to even more urgent need for media and reality literacy amongst audiences. In terms of the people consuming these objectifying images, before film critic Jack Shaheen began his project, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (Shaheen 2009), to document depictions of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood film, he had already informed us in *The TV Arab* that ninety-eight percent of Americans in the 1980s watched TV for at least six hours every day (Shaheen 1984, 7). "Framed thought as

sumes a pre-existing reality and hermeneutic thought is a state of being involving being on the alert of framing mechanisms that facilitate the false image of reality presented" (Castillo and Egginton 2017, 187).

Stereotyping in popular culture and its complex relationship with Islamophobia is a social problem that involves the framing of pre-existing realities of Muslims and necessitates a need for the other to speak for him or herself as a means of contesting Orientalist stereotypes which define Arabs and Muslims in terms of cultural and religious understandings that narrowly categorize individuals through attributes such as religiosity and femininity; it is these understandings as defined, that have resulted in the belief in irreconcilable differences between the "West" and the "East", between "us" and "them", and between what is "familiar" and what is "barbaric" (Abdulhadi 2011). Yet, and at the same time, marginalization has resulted in the creation of alternative theatres, newspapers, and other forms of popular culture (Said 1988); and while in the past, only those with access to Television sets, comedy clubs, and concerts had access to these alternative media, the digital era now grants access from "Other" voices to more audiences.

Chapter One of the dissertation, *Film as Pedagogy: Movies as 'rs'*, is meant to give insight into the power of film to fix stereotypes in the minds of a mass audience. I continue Shaheen's discussion of movies to 'lesson plans' by examining both the repetition of negative representations and the omission of diverse and contextual ones. Referring to films as 'lesson plans' suggests that film is a strategic means of transmitting knowledge through a channel that audiences are already engaging with. I discuss progress made by Muslim and non-Muslim film-makers to reverse stereotypes; and I suggest alternate knowledge on women to include in those future 'lesson plans'. What these new 'lesson plans' suggest is presenting an alternate cinema as a transnational form of feminist resistance with potential to counter stereotypical images of Arab/Muslim women through its dissemination to new audiences. The following chapters subsequently examine artists in the US who are creating work intended to contest these three common stereotypes "Arab=Muslim", "Terrorist" and "Veiled and Oppressed Woman", as well as others. As I explain throughout the dissertation, Arab and Muslim artists consciously create work intended to reverse racist images in the hope that they will alleviate, if not erase, Islamophobia.

Chapter Two *"Everydayness" in Hulu series Ramy*, examines Hulu Internet series *Ramy* (2019) as efforts made by Muslim filmmakers in the diaspora to counter stereotypes. In *Ramy*, the main character is an Egyptian living in an Arab/Muslim community in New Jersey. Ramy is the son of immigrants, and the series is mostly about his relationships with women. The star of *Ramy*, Ramy Youssef, is also one of the creators of the series, many of the episodes of which are written or directed (or both) by persons of Muslim or Arab background. *Ramy* counters stereotypes of Muslims by highlighting everyday elements of diasporic communities and identities; and representation of Dena's lived experiences is an intent to counter stereotypes of Muslim women that does not necessarily translate into a story-line centering around terrorism or Islam (Alsultany 2012) but into one highlighting everydayness that is relateable to non-Muslim audiences.

Chapter Three, *Anglo-American Muslim Stand-Up Comedy: Incongruity, Everydayness and Performativity*, discusses stand-up comedy in the US and in the UK. Efforts at contesting Othering by Muslims in America and the wider Anglo-American cultural sphere are facilitated by an active and creative popular culture in the form of stand-up comedy, allowing diverse voices to be heard by a wide audience. As Gilbert writes, "Stand-up comics simultaneously perform self and culture, offering an often acerbic social critique sanctioned as entertainment because it is articulated in a comedic context. Perhaps because of this cultural critique, stand-up comedy as a unique and powerful autobiographical form has been largely overlooked." (Gilbert, 1997, 317). In the last section of Chapter Three, I focus on Shazia Mirza along with Palestinian-American Tissa Hami, two of the very few female Anglo-American Muslim comedians on the scene today, highlighting how they draw on the tradition of "performativity", in ways similar to Jewish-American, African-American and Asian-American female performers to subvert the stereotype of the "veiled and oppressed" Muslim woman.

In Chapter Three, I also discuss the origins of ethnic stand-up comedy in the US with Jewish-American comedians, who then influenced performers of stand-up from other minority groups, including African-Americans, Latin-Americans and, more recently, Asian-Americans. The increase in the stereotyping of Arabs and Muslims post-9/11 forms part of a longer history of marginalization of minorities in the US, and the turning of the same population to stand-up also recapitulates the history of other groups. The Chapter examines the techniques used by Anglo-American Muslim stand-up

comedians to point out contemporary anxieties and perceptions about Islam and Muslims. The techniques highlighted are incongruity, performativity and everydayness. Incongruity is a form of humor that demonstrates how common presumptions about a targeted group are "inappropriate, absurd or inverted". Performativity refers to Judith Butler's proposition that the repetition of individual and collective acts constitutes the concepts of femininity and masculinity and grounds identity in social temporality. Finally, everydayness, or description of daily life that people can relate to, is particularly vital to subversion of stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims.

Chapter Four, *Muslim Cool Music Video Artists: Re-defining the hijab,* turns to music videos, a type of popular culture that came into being only in the mid-1980s (History.com Staff 2011). It is therefore a recent generation of diasporic Muslims that expresses its woes, hopes and aspirations in the form of videos. They nevertheless continue, as I demonstrate, an earlier tradition of music, located in the Civil Rights movements that began in the mid-1960s (Omidvar and Richards 2014). The chapter locates the Syrian-American artist Mona Haydar as Muslim Cool hip hop artists within the Muslim Cool movement.

Three enduring concerns addressed in this Introduction are popular culture as a pedagogy, for which the artists serve as interlocuters or 'organic intellectuals'; the concept of the Self and how work by diasporic Muslim artists both enables Muslim viewers to see themselves in the material and relays these new understandings to non-Muslim audiences; and the importance of the digital era in facilitating the creation and consumption of popular culture by Anglo-American Muslim artists. I will briefly take up each of these in turn.

Popular Culture as Pedagogy

In *Muslims and American Popular Culture,* Iraj Omidvar reminds us that negative stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims are based on the argument that there are irreconcilable differences between a civilized Occident and a backward Orient. He also reminds us that the issue of Orientalism, ie. Western self-definition as noble, sensible, civil, and benevolent that is automatically contrasted against "Otherness", has been highlighted by academic critics throughout the course of American cultural production, from its early days of travelogues, through the creation of still and moving images, and in media and film today. In other words, Orientalist

depiction in media and film is a discussion that has been going on in the academic world for a long time.

Nevertheless, when it comes to advancing knowledge on stereotypes of Muslims in popular culture, framed thought and hermeneutic thinking to people outside of academia, as Silke Schmidt puts it, "Only this heightened presence of Arab Americans in various media markets will continue to satisfy the steady demand for more knowledge created and narrated *by* not *about* Arabs and Muslims." (Schmidt 2014, 481). The inclusion of popular culture in knowledge production on Islamophobia also provides opportunities to present "intra-Arab American relationships and differences" in sexuality, gender, and class in order to offer more realistic perspectives aimed at non-academic audiences, Arab-Americans themselves and audiences involved in social movements (Adbulhadi 2011). This is to say that what Amarnath Amarasingam terms 'organic intellectuals', can play the role of not only spokespersons for their respective communities, but also what Iraj Omidvar calls 'amateur scholars', providing insights about their communities to others and the communities themselves.

Muslim-American filmmakers, stand-up comedians and creators of music videos are examples of artists who play the role of Amarasingam's 'organic intellectuals' and Iraj Omidvar's 'amateur scholars' by subverting stereotypes of Muslim-Americans while also addressing Muslim audiences. Utilizing techniques such as invention, arrangement, style and delivery to author their performances, filmmakers, stand-up comedians and creators of music videos act as persuasive speakers (Belanger 2017, 4). Artists share the skill of persuasive speech with academics; but they are not bound by the same rules and expectations. They are allowed to discuss a wider variety of topics and may offer uncensored opinions in multiple tones geared at multiple audiences. Representations of difference in film, stand-up comedy and music videos are written from a position that is outside academic frames of reference, while fulfilling some of the same functions. Intellectuals and organic intellectuals/amateur scholars both try to negotiate notions of similarity and difference. Organic intellectuals, however, can discuss difference in a flexible language and style; and their work is available and accessible to audiences outside the academic world and directly aimed at social change.

The Self

Understanding of the Self is awareness of being-in-the-world, an

awareness that includes individual and collective experiences, pasts and futures, one's home country and one's host country. The artists discussed in my dissertation are organic intellectuals in the form of storytellers contributing to the oral and written histories of their communities. As el-Sayed el-Aswad writes concerning the positioning of Arab Americans between Arab tradition and American culture: “The concept of travel or movement implies the spreading of cultural elements beyond the confinements of locality [and] likewise, being positioned on the boundary signifies the division between home and away.” (El-Aswad 2010, 237). Exiles and immigrants, or at least someone in their families, has a story from another geographical location to tell. Second-generation Muslim artists in the diaspora are similar to exiles and immigrants in the sense that their identities are shaped by a collective experience stemming from emigration and familiarity with more than one culture.

Moreover, ethnographic studies suggest similarity in choice of topics between oral narratives by people with exilic or migratory backgrounds and scholars of Orientalism in the sense that they include discussions on language, culture, social customs and norms, and so on. The difference between the intellectual and the non-intellectual (or organic intellectual) is in the chosen form of discourse, with the former opting for written discourse and the latter oral.

The fact that Arab Americans, for instance, speak and write about exilic and migratory experiences has resulted in a new sense of Arab-American identity that is framed by both American culture and knowledge of one's non-American background. Narratives and writings bring the Arab-American audience together through accounts and analysis of common ground as a result of both the story-teller's and audience's combination of insider and outsider status and understandings of both cultures (El-Aswad 2010, 237). The sense of Self as created by movement between local and global spheres and its creation of Arab and Muslim transnational identities of being-in-the-world.

Popular Culture in the Digital Era

The dissertation also highlights the importance of digital technology in the countering of stereotypes. An example outside the scope of this study that is nevertheless worth touching on because it is relevant to the subject of gender stereotypes as well as compelling is *Muslimah Media Watch*, which, in the words of the Muslim

feminist founders, is “a forum where we, as Muslim women, can critique how our images appear in the media and popular culture. Although we are of different nationalities, sects, races, etc., we have something important in common: we’re tired of seeing ourselves portrayed by the media in ways that are one-dimensional and misleading.”

Another example, aimed at a Muslim audience, is the many websites featuring hijabs created by Muslim women who choose to wear one themselves. The number of American-Muslim women who wear a hijab has increased as a consequence of post 9/11 Islamophobia, after which some second-generation Muslim women began to veil as a symbol of resistance. The hijab hence reflects an American identity that affirms that country's value of freedom of religion (Yazback 2007), while also expressing a particularly Muslim identity and practice. Fashion blogs such as HijabChique, *Hijabtrendz*, and *Hijabi Style* advertise the latest fashion trends and international store websites, along with tutorials on how to wear different styles. *Hijab Chique* is a blog that is mostly on hijab-related fashions around the world, while *Hijabtrendz: The Original Fashion, Beauty, and Entertainment* features young American-Muslim women and uses words like 'hip', 'cool', and 'glitzy' (Omdvar and Richards 2014). Thus the Internet has allowed women to present and consume alternate images of themselves as independent, dynamic and integrated, in this case in regard to fashion, which is yet another aspect of popular culture.

Technology and the Internet bring ease of access to many forms of cultural capital. *Hijab Trendz* products, for example, are available on Instagram, Twitter and YouTube, hence allowing for on-line shopping through multiple digital media outlets. Customers can quickly and easily browse through the latest fashion arrivals via their various devices and stay on top of the latest hijab models without having to make an in-person trip to malls and stores. The creation of websites, blogs, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and Facebook accounts for hijab styles and has increased the speed in which cultural objects are marketed, in the same way that Netflix's switch from postal mail to streaming has increased its customer base. Before becoming a streaming service, Netflix used to send films to its customers via postal mail and in the form of DVDs.

Prior to the advent of the Internet and digital technologies, viewers only had access to stand-up comedy and music if they attended the screenings or shows in person. The Internet has enabled audiences

worldwide to access work previously unavailable quickly and easily. Study of English-language work created in the US and that is accessible on-line reveals that subversion of age-old stereotypes and rhetoric is taking place simultaneously in different countries. Diasporic Muslim creators of film, stand-up comedians and music video artists in the Anglo-American sphere have thus been collaborating, in effect, in cyberspace to inform social perceptions world-wide. In sum, digital technologies enable audiences to consume contemporary popular culture in which creators re-cast images of marginalized diasporic communities that belie negative stereotypes. These audiences learn from the self-reflection of the artists, with some continuing to share and disseminate the material (another significant capacity of the Internet) or to produce content themselves.

Chapter 1
Film as Pedagogy: Movies as 'Lesson Plans'

Repeat After Me: "Terrorist", "Arab=Muslim", "Veiled and Oppressed Woman"

> "Functioning as visual lesson plans, motion pictures, like composed stories, last forever. They help to shape our thoughts and beliefs. 'It is time to recognize that the true tutors of our children are not schoolteachers or university professors but filmmakers...,' writes Benjamin R. Barber in *The Nation*. 'Disney does more than Duke; Spielberg outweighs Stanford.'" (Shaheen 2012, 11)

Shaheen argues that the use of repetition in film is a teaching mechanism intended to engrain certain information in students' brains. First, I examine repetition of negative representations; omission of diverse and contextual representation of women; and omission of authentic Arabic. Referring to films as 'lesson plans' suggests that film is a strategic means of transmitting knowledge through a channel that audiences are already engaging with. Then, I discuss progress made by Muslim and non-Muslim film-makers to reverse stereotypes; and finally, I suggest alternate knowledge on women to include in those future 'lesson plans'. What these new 'lesson plans' suggest is presenting an alternate cinema as a transnational form of feminist resistance with potential to counter stereotypical images of Arab/Muslim women through its dissemination to new audiences.

Shaheen argues that this repeated use of the same images and stereotypes in representation of Arabs and Muslims in film has the same effect on viewer perception that repetition in education has on students. For example, "They [the Arabs] all look alike to me," *The Sheik Steps Out* (1937); "All Arabs look alike to me," *Commando* (1968); "I can't tell one [Arab] from another. Wrapped in those bed sheets they all look the same to me," *Hostage* (1986) (Shaheen 2012, 340). Misrepresentation is also a consequence of limiting representations of Arabs and Muslims that omit their numerous backgrounds, ethnicities, contextualities, and individualities (Alsultany 2012). However, cultural domination through cinema can be resisted through updating 'lesson plans', or movies, to include 'Other' voices.

In the context of Islamophobia, repetition of misinformation, or lack

of diverse information, leads to public perception and collective memories of Muslims as a social problem. Dearth of media and reality literacy combined with fast dissemination of misrepresentation and continued omission of other depiction determines one's opinion (Castillo and Egginton 2017) and affects the "window", or "frame", through which audiences see. The creation of viewer "windows" through which students learn consists of a process of visual and verbal framing that is in conjunction with repetition and schemata, or recognition based on patterns (Schmidt 2014). Islamophobic stereotypes easily spread because the images and rhetoric in film remain engrained in people's minds. The focus on the veil, for instance, as '*the* sign of women's inequality' is more likely to attract negative attention because it evokes negative images of Islam. This is not to deny that there are girls and women who are forced to veil or wear a headscarf; but that is not the case with *all* females from Muslim backgrounds everywhere. By specifically and repeatedly stereotyping them as forced to veil, Hollywood, as a far-reaching and popular mode of communication, hence contributes to a sexist and imperial propaganda that singles Muslim women out.

Film critic Jack Shaheen began a project to document depictions of Arabs in Hollywood film, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People,* where he concludes that stereotypes create tensions between cultures and acknowledges works that attempt to reverse those misrepresentations. *Reel Bad Arabs* documents over a century of Hollywood film consisting of racist stereotypes of Arabs; and Shaheen argues that the Western public is fed constructions of Islam as a "problem"; Muslim men are depicted as "terrorists"; and Muslim women as "helpless maidens" or "veiled and oppressed". The terms "Arab" and "Muslim" are interchangeably used; the language used to depict Arabic is "gibberish"; and there is repeated portrayal of certain character types, such as the villain character, the sheikh character, the Egyptian character, and the Palestinian character. The villain character is violent, always attacking non-Arabs and non-Muslims, i.e Americans, Europeans, etc. Examples of films containing this character type go as far back as 1914. Reminding the reader that the word "sheikh" means a wise and respectable person who is older, Shaheen argues that sheikhs are instead represented as "... stooges-in-sheets, slovenly, hooknosed potentates intent on capturing pale-faced blondes for their harems" (Shaheen 2012, 125); and examples of film undermining sheikhs in its depiction go as far back as 1924. With regard to Egyptians, they tend to repeatedly feature as mummies, pharaohs, souk swindlers, or sleazy men drooling over Western women (Shaheen 2012).

There is also constant association of Arabs with animals such as camels, cockroaches, flies, goats, cows, pigs, dogs, jackals and others. Arabs in general, or as a group, are referred to as “sand flies”, “cockroaches”, “swine of the alleys”, “desert rats”, and “jackals”. Arab women are called “serpents”, “tiger claws”, and “sharks”. This association and equating of Arab men and women to animals in film is implication that they are non-human. Animals are considered to have no language, culture, or reason; they are, in other words, “barbaric” and need to be either domesticated and put in line, or eliminated. Emphasis is placed on camels, and characters are referred to as “foal of a camel”, “sons of a flea-bitten camel”, “camel farts”, and “camel-jockey”. Walking alongside cars in cities instead of in deserts, images of camels serve to emphasize the perceived lack of modernity and the “barbaric” quality of Arab life. The close and repetitive association with camels to Arabs serves to alienate the Arab from the rest of the world by masking the difference between the human and the animal and by making the latter symbolic of the former.

The most common stereotypes of Muslims, similar to those of African-Americans in the US, are related to religion and gender. Muslims are also racialized, as discussed below. Although converted African-Americans and Indonesian-Americans form the largest part of the approximate 2.2 percent Muslim population in the US (Omidvar and Richards 2014), depictions pay no attention to ethnic origin, and the terms “Arab” and “Muslim” are used interchangeably to imply terrorism. Only 12% percent of Muslims in the world are Arabs. In fact, 15 million Arabs are Christians; and although in the US most Arabs are not Muslim, in film, Muslim implies Arab. In other words, equating Middle-Eastern Arabs with Muslims and failing to distinguish between identity and criminality breeds the stereotype “Arab = Muslim = Godless Enemy” (Shaheen 2012). Moreover, confusing terminology used to refer to Arabic-speaking countries and Muslim countries (which are not always the same) went from Orientalist terminology in the pre-9/11 context to that of “new Orientalism” in the post 9/11 context. The wording metamorphosed from “Orient” to “Islamic Orient,” “Muslim East,” “Arab Orient,” or “Arab East.” However, although the terminology changed, the linking of Islam to terrorism didn't, continuing to reflect a “clash of civilizations” instead of a “dialogue between civilizations” that would decrease tensions between cultures (El Aswad 2013).

Visual correlatives relevant to Islam continue to place Muslims as contrary to what is considered the norm accompany images of

terrorists who look familiar (Morey 2010). What this means is that although "terrorism" is considered to be a term that is indefinable, one thing that everyone agrees on is that it holds negative connotations. Therefore, everything Muslimized or deemed to be an Islamic cultural object is deemed threatening; and in the context of terrorism, viewers have difficulty with interpreting cultural objects as what they are, linking them instead to terror (Said 1988).

Consequently, the majority of the approximate one thousand Hollywood movies, or 'lesson plans', studied by Shaheen contain negative depiction of a specific group of people. He believes that misrepresentation in film has resulted in reinforcing tensions between cultures and in reiterating the discourse of the "Other", argue critics (Shaheen 2012). Tim Jon Semmerling's work, *Evil Arabs in American Popular Film: Orientalist Fear*, then builds upon Shaheen's analysis by adding that the myth of the "evil" Arab is attributable to Orientalist fear, consequently arguing that stereotypes are a means of augmenting "our own stature, our own meaning, and our own self-esteem in times of our own diffidence", and that the myth of the "evil" Arab persists because reversal of myth by the "colonized" has always bothered the "colonizer" (Semmerling 2006, 55-56). "The past oversights and continued blindness of critics to the practice of representing Arabs as evil and inimical to our culture are among the most disturbing aspects surrounding the reputation of American cinema ..." (Semmerling 2006, 819-820). Semmerling asserts that "Othering" continues because non-stereotypical depictions threaten to subvert American ideology.

What Shaheen and other critics demonstrate is that wide-spread belief of negative stereotypes of Muslims is framed thought, a consequence of representations spread by media and film or what Castillo and Egginton in *Medialogies: Reading Reality in the Age of Inflationary Media* call 'pre-existing realities' (Castillo and Egginton 2017, 187). This misrepresentation, adds Alsultany, is also done by offering limiting representations of Arabs and Muslims that omit their numerous backgrounds, ethnicities, contextualities, and individualities (Alsultany 2012). Like Shaheen, Evelyn Alsultany emphasizes the conflation of the term "Arab" with the term "Muslim" and stresses the fact that the stereotyping of Arabs and Muslims in film and media has gone on for over a century. In early silent Hollywood film, for example, Orientalist tropes of Arabs served to exotify the region and its people through genies, flying carpets, mummies, rich oil sheiks, belly dancers, and harems. From the 1940s onwards, however, the rich oil sheikhs transformed into terrorists, and the women went from being members of harems to

being “veiled and oppressed”. She highlights the increase of TV dramas and news reports representing Arabs and Muslims as terrorists during the War on Terror, claiming that it results in hegemonic thinking that defines them in a way that does not distinguish between identity and criminality. This, combined with the lack of representation of Muslims as human, is racism (Alsultany 2012).

In terms of language, before 9/11, Arabic in film served one purpose only, to accentuate images of mosques, armed groups, and battles scenes; the sounds of muezzins and the shouting of mujahideens. In the 1930s, the Arabic used was literally “gibberish”, and the entire film would contain very few lines in the actual language. What this means is that Arabic was portrayed as a non-language and the Arabs as non-people; and the sentences in pre-9/11 film that do use actual Arabic tend to repeat one phrase, that of “Allahu Akbar” (“God is Great”), hence embellishing on the images of mosques and sounds of mujahideens. Arabs in film are not authentically portrayed as the individuals that they are, and the language that they speak in matches neither contexts nor settings. This, along with the stereotypes, results in the grouping of Arabs and Muslims and with the conflation of the terms “Arab” and “Muslim”. In other words, “Muslims”, the people who practice the religion of Islam, and who exist in every country and continent, are confused with “Arabs”, people who identify with the ethnicity, speak the Arabic language, and are nationals of one of the members of the Arab League. As such, all racialized people may be Muslim, but not all Muslims speak the “gibberish” language in film (Shaheen 2012).

Misrepresentation of Muslim Women: A Knowledge Omitted

Misrepresentation of Arabs and Muslims is not only a consequence of repeated portrayal of veiled women but also a consequence of representations omitting their numerous backgrounds, ethnicities, contextualities, and individualities (Alsultany 2012). This intentional exclusion of information is a historic strategy utilized since the first age of media, when the notion of “desengaño” played out through a focus on the divine and a dismissal of issues related to race and class (Castillo and Egginton 2017). Also, when it comes to the objectification of women, there is a history of sexist myths about women in US media and film in general. In *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, author and journalist Susan Faludi explains that feminism in the Hollywood film industry began in the 1970s when women began to question the social and economic inequalities of traditional marriage but that this feminist progress, in the film as well as in other industries, was quickly

stunted by dominant media. Media refused to support the women's movement, and anti-feminist propaganda labeled feminism a 'bra-burning trend'. In the 1980s, women's decisions to leave the sexist and discriminatory workplace were labeled as depression and mental illness. More examples of anti-feminist trends in the form of myths supporting the backlash against feminist progress are mental illness for single career women, poverty for women who divorce, and infertility for those who postpone childbearing (Faludi 1991).

With regard to gendered Islamophobia, it is important to note that Arab/Muslim men in film are stereotyped into sheikhs, terrorists, etc. Nonetheless, women are specifically targeted to justify the collective stereotyping of Arabs/Muslims (Alsultany 2013). Never is Muslim women's productivity in societies and economies world-wide portrayed by Hollywood (Shaheen 2012). The depiction of the Arab/Muslim female terrorist in film became popular after 9/11. Nevertheless, it is the veil that continues to be a source of debate justifying discrimination against Muslims as a group in real life (Alsultany 2013). A product of Western Orientalist imagination that omits contextual realities and individual backgrounds and identities, Muslim women and their choice of clothing take center stage in debates on ‘difference’ in the Muslim diaspora (Abu-Lughod 2002). But the media does not give women who choose to wear a veil, headscarf or burkini themselves a voice; and neither does film. The consumer of mass media and film hardly ever hears from the ‘Other’ woman herself, regardless of her choice of attire.

According to Laila Lalami, if you are to make a Hollywood movie depicting Arabs, “she should be entirely veiled in black; preferably, she should be mistreated by other Arabs. Another possible use of a female character is as a belly dancer” (Lalaami 1997). Shaheen also argues that, in film, Arab/Muslim women are, mostly either eroticized, portrayed as “scantily clad harem maidens with bare midriffs” and “shapeless bundles of black” (Shaheen 2012, 882). The Hollywood film industry simply embellishes on old and already-existing representations of Arabs and Muslims, he observes (Shaheen 2012). What Shaheen means is that objectification of Muslim women is not new and has been seen in the past, in other forms of popular culture, in photography of naked or half-naked nameless Maghrebi women from the years 1900 to 1930, for example. This time-frame is also known as the Golden Age of postcards, where photographers remain fixated on sexualizing bodies of Algerian women and insist on titles such as “Women's Quarters”, “Algerian Couples”, “Inside the Harem”, “Moorish women on their way to the cemetary”, 'Kabyle woman covering

herself with the haik", "Group of Moorish women", and "Moorish women taking a walk". Malek Alloula's interpretation of these photographs and titles is that the veil is a disappointment to Orientalist photographers and hinders their colonial propaganda by concealing the Algerian woman's body from their gaze.

"Thrust in the presence of a veiled woman, the photographer feels photographed; having himself become an object-to-be-seen, he loses initiative: *he is dispossessed of his own gaze*" (Alloula 1986, 14). In sum, Orientalist photography has simply been replaced by moving images in film. The form of art may have developed from still and taken on another form, that of moving; however, stereotypes that do not reflect the actual realities of Arabs remain engrained in both photography and film. As Omidvar argues, camera made for film is simply a new tool for the Orientalist gaze to continue alienating the "Other" (Omidvar and Richards 2014).

In terms of the stereotype of "voiceless and shapeless bundles of black", Shaheen argues that the combination of veils and muting the Arab/Muslim woman is a means of isolating her from other women in the rest of the world. In other words, neglecting to represent the Arab/Muslim woman as one who dresses in various types of clothing and who is involved in all types of careers, just like other women around the world, reinforces the concept of "difference" and the cultural "Other" (Shaheen 2012). The stereotype of the veiled woman "antedates not only the attacks of September 11 and the war on terrorism but also the Algerian War. It is an aspect of the long history of French colonialism that began at least as early as the conquest of Algeria in 1830" (Scott 2007, 31), when the French began to highlight differences in sexuality between Islam and France. Algerian women were depicted as veiled as well as sexual objects in harems; nevertheless, it is discourse on the veil that justified colonialism by defining it as a sign of backwardness.

After Algerian independence, rhetoric continued to reiterate colonial logic in the sense that arguments against wearers of the veil and headscarf are, for the most part, related to oppression, coercion and manipulation. This led to *le foulard* and *la voile* to become symbols of "the problem of Islam" in France and to the 1989, 1994, and 2003 headscarf controversies. However, and in the same way the veil and headscarf became symbols of identity and resistance in colonial Algeria, they have also come to symbolize resistance to the republican model of *laicite* and secularism in France. Contrary to France's legal requirements of sameness, American multiculturalism

advocates acceptance of religious and ethnic difference. Yet, despite American multiculturalism, Hollywood film reflects the same colonial logic that divided Arabs and Muslims into "good" and "bad" and pigeon-holed women into "veiled and oppressed" (Alsultany 2012).

Reiterating colonial discourses on veiled women who need "saving" from a "barbaric" culture by portraying them as oppressed perpetuates the myth of the "voiceless and oppressed" veiled woman and justifies discrimination toward Muslims as a group. The singular definition of Muslim women as veiled women is an Orientalist assumption which undermines the numerous contexts and attitudes of women to them as items of clothing; and depictions don't take into account individualisms of wearers who see it as freedom from fashion. Moreover, the contrast between the "free" and the "unfree" draws on ideologies that do not take into consideration national and international politics as responsible for women's living conditions, hence reiterating binary oppositions and the rhetoric of cultural difference (Abu-Lughod 2002).

The definition of the Muslim woman as "veiled and oppressed" provokes outrage at the culture the veiled woman comes from because the portrayal of Muslim women as oppressed implies male Muslim oppressors. This confirms the stereotype of the dangerous and sexually predatory Muslim man. In other words, colonial discourses on veiled women who need "saving" from a "barbaric" culture by defining them as "oppressed" contributes to colonial logic and modern-day racism implying that the veil is imposed on all women by men in all Muslim communities everywhere; and that is not the case (Alsultany 2012).

Yet, as Lila Abu-Lughod says, narratives continue to exclude postcolonial perspectives by leaving out contextual realities, backgrounds, agencies, and individualities that reflect the diverse realities of Muslim women world-wide. Excluding ethnicity, geographical location, and other valuable information, an ethnocentricity reiterating rhetoric on the West as the "Subject/Norm" and the Third World as the "Object/Other" is reproduced. Dominating discourses on "Islam versus the West" and "religion versus secularism", combined with the exclusion of veiled women from the conversation, normalize subjective perceptions of Islam and perpetuate a historical problem with female "Others" (Abu-Lughod 2002).

There is no universal woman's experience; and by defining Muslim women as inferior and lacking in agency, a form of colonial feminism widening the gap between "us" and "them" leads to their definition as attributes of religion (Alsultany 2012). Representations of Muslim women have, for a long time now, been reinforcing the global gender gap and perpetuating the discourse of the 'Other'. The objectification of women in popular culture legitimizes domination in society; symbolic agents reflecting the relationship between Arab culture and other world cultures, the cultural capita are, also creating an even wider gap between 'West' and 'Other' by perpetuating racism and sexism and reproducing gendered, racial power relations and their unconscious acceptance in society. Unconscious acceptance of age-old discrimination as a consequence of continued transmission and consumption of Hollywood representation as an artifact of cultural capital is seen in both the reproduction and unconscious acceptance of modes of gendered cultural and social domination, such as hate crimes against veiled women. Offering limited knowledge to viewers about Arabs and Muslims creates misinformed viewers. It is therefore important to offer audiences alternate knowledge on women in the form of popular culture created by the 'Other' themselves.

Arabic: A Knowledge Omitted

Misrepresentation of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood film includes portraying the native language of the 'Other' as "gibberish" or using the wrong dialect (Shaheen 2002). Authentic reflection of the language of the 'Other' is representation of perspectives of the 'Other'. Exactitude in language is necessary to properly reflect the numerous dialects occupying the different regions of the Arabic-speaking world and the various social classes of those considered to be Arabs (Omidar and Richards 2014)' and in the Arabic-speaking world, "Because of cinema's 'realistic' capabilities, film makers from the very beginning preferred to use colloquial dialects for dialogue. The classical language, or its more recent form, modern standard Arabic, has been confined to genres such as the news, or educational, historical, and religious films." (Shafik, 2017, 81). Egyptians, for example, have been speaking Arabic since the 7th century. Before that, they spoke indigenous languages, some of which are still used today. Demotic Egyptian, which is also known as ancient Egyptian, is still used in the Nile Delta; Bedouin Arabic, which consists of Nubian languages, is spoken in the Sina; and Swisi Berber, which is similar to the Berber spoken in Libya, is used in the Egyptian Siwa Oasis. Knowledge of English in the country is contributed to British colonialism, which lasted from 1882 to 1952, and French is the foreign language studied at school. Nonetheless, Arabic has been the

main language since the 1920s.

The most popular and most widely-spoken version of Arabic in Egypt is referred to as Egyptian Arabic, ammiya or masri; and in southern Egypt, where it is less urban, Saidi Arabic, which is a variation of Egyptian Arabic, is the main language. Therefore, in Egyptian cinema, it is Egyptian Arabic and Saidi Arabic that are used to distinguish between language in the city and in rural areas. Also, “Cinema was believed to create a platform for counter-representations, giving the formerly colonized a chance to challenge Western dominance” (Shafik, 2007, p. 209); and during the post-colonial modernization process, popular culture in Egyptian Arabic as a form of national pedagogy emerged (Al-Kisan, 1982).

Hence, Classical Arabic became reserved for historical and religious film only (Shafik 2007). Fatima Rushdi for her film *Al Zawaj* (*Marriage*), Bahija Hafid for *Al Dahaya* (*The Victim*), Assia Daghir for *Indama Tuhib Al Mar'a* (*When A Woman Loves*), and Aziza Amir for *Kafri An Khati'atik* (*Repent Your Sin*) ... The feminist movement, national independence, and the transformation of the Egyptian film industry from 'silent' to 'talking' in 1920s Egypt coincided; and the award-winning films, which are directed by women, are all in Egyptian dialect (Al-Kisan 1982). When it comes to writing for the screen, Egyptian cinema has been using Egyptian Arabic since its beginnings; and debate on what form of Arabic to use is more common in discourse on literature than it is in discourse on film. When it comes to literature, 20th century academics such as Taha Hussein argued that the use of Classical Arabic creates a barrier to communication with the masses. He argued that Classical Arabic should be modified, because the reality is that it is dialect, not Classical Arabic, that Egyptian people use on a daily basis (Abdel Baki 2013).

Unlike the Maghreb, where the use of French, Arabic, and Berber languages in film are still understood in terms of resistance to colonialism and post-colonial identity, in the Egyptian picture, focus is more on national independence, post-colonial identity, and feminism than it is on language. Nevertheless, the transformation of the Egyptian film industry from 'silent' to 'talking' resulted in an immediate increase in its pan-Arab distribution, and this led to knowledge of Egyptian Arabic in other Arabic-speaking countries.

Pan-Arab distribution of Egyptian cinema intensified after World War II, the 1952 revolution, the 1967 Six-Day War, and the 1975 Sinai Disengagement Agreements. This, along with the increase in

post-colonial and nationalist movements, is the main reason for wide-spread distribution of Egyptian cinema and the knowledge of Egyptian Arabic in the Arabic-speaking world (Al-Kisan, 1982). Due to Egyptian cinema's popularity, viewers in Arabic-speaking countries outside of Egypt understand Egyptian Arabic. Egyptian film language emphasizes nationhood and Egyptian identity (Abu-Lughod 2004); and writing in dialect that is specific to a mass Egyptian audience is considered to be a more efficient and realistic approach to relaying messages on post-colonial development, cosmopolitanism, and socio-cultural issues such as gender (Sabry 1995).

Post-colonial popular culture in radio and Television hence uses spoken Egyptian Arabic as a tool to communicate rhetoric on class, gender, and anti-colonialism to its mass Egyptian audience. The use of Egyptian Arabic contributed to musicals being the genre of film most produced by the country's industry (Al-Kisan, 1982), and thanks to radio, the singers cast in Television musicals already had a pan-Arab audience. Musicals featured singers such as Oum Kulthum Mohammed Abdel Wahab, Farid Al-Atrache, Asmahan, and Abd al-Halim Hafiz, who were already famous in all Arabic-speaking countries (Shafik 2007). Hence, from the 1920s to the 1980s, Egyptian musicals were the most popular genre of film in the pan-Arab region (Al-Kisan 1982). In this way, the value of featuring famous singers like Oum Kulthum in musicals is that the stars' popularity on radio guaranteed mass viewership on television.

Lyrics initially consisted of long poems called *zajal, qasida* and *muwashshah*. *Qasida* and *muwashshah* are in Classical Arabic, but *zajal* lyrics are in dialect. Then, because *zajal, qasida,* and *muwashshah* songs are very long, songs in film began to be edited. By the '50s, long lyrics were only used in historical and religious film. Shorter songs in dialect, the *taqtuqa* and the *ughniya,* became the trend (Shafik 2007). The conversion of Egyptian musical lyrics from *zajal, qasida,* and *muwashshah* to *taqtuqa* and *ughniya* resulted in an even larger audience. Shorter songs that are in spoken Arabic provide a space for viewers as participants. In other words, using dialect and editing the length of songs makes lyrics easier to memorize and guarantees that everyone can sing along. This results in more sales. Songs in dialect are more sellable, facilitate communication, and create a space for audience participation. Therefore, none of the Oum Kulthum musicals on the history of Egyptian djawari use Classical Arabic only; and Oum Kulthum's ‘Ala Baladi al Mahbub' (To My Beloved Country) in musical *Wedad* is one such example of a song in Egyptian dialect

that has sold internationally. Even though it was originally made for a local Egyptian audience, and its lyrics are on Egyptian nationhood, the song has been made into a Hindi remix 'Ghar Aaya Mera Pardesi' by Shankar-Jaikishan (Srinivasan 2018). 1936 musical *Wedad* was written by Ahmad Rami and directed by Fritz Kramp. It is the first film to be made in Studio Masr, the first studio in Egypt. *Wedad* is also the first Egyptian film to ever make it to an international festival (Al-Kisan 1982). Oum Kulthum plays the role of a, djariya, a singing slave. In Egypt, slave-owners made their slaves learn new skills to make them more valuable. Music and singing are some of those skills. Oum Kulthum plays the role of a singing slave in three musicals that draw on the history of the djawari, *Wedad*, *Dananir*, and *Salamah* (Shafik 2007). In *Wedad*, *Dananir*, and *Salamah,* the language has not been limited to Classical Arabic only. In *Wedad*, both dialogue and song lyrics are in dialect. As such, Egyptian musicals reflecting Egyptian history used dialect from the start. 1940 *Dananir* was also made in Studio Masr (Al-Kisan 1982), and it uses Classical Arabic in dialogue to place the film in its historical context. The *taqtuqa* song *Bukra al Safar (The Voyage is Tomorrow),* is in Egyptian Arabic, though. In *Salamah*, some of the dialogue is in Classical Arabic, but most of the songs are in Egyptian Arabic (Shafik 2007). This is to say that Classical Arabic does not dominate Egyptian historical musicals. It may dominate historical film but not historical musicals.

Unlike Egyptian film, the use of Arabic, French, and Berber languages in Maghrebi film is still understood in terms of resistance to colonialism and post-colonial identity (Sabry 1995); and unlike with Egyptian Arabic, the majority of people in Arabic-speaking countries outside of the Maghreb do not have an understanding of Maghrebi Arabic (Al-Kisan 1982). Like Egypt, before Arabic, there were indigenous languages in the Maghreb; and the people of Northwestern Africa, in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya, are of Berber origin. Therefore, the Berber languages of the Maghreb are still in use today. Berber is also spoken in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and the Siwa Oasis of Egypt.

There are seven major types of Berber languages, Eastern Berber, Norther Berber, Zenati, Kabyle, Atlas, and Tuareg; however, in the Maghreb, each country has a main dialect that combines Arabic words with Berber and French (and in some cities Spanish), and conjugates them according to the rules of the dialect. This is a form of Arabic referred to as Maghrebi or Western Arabic. It is different from Mashriqi or Eastern Arabic that is spoken in Egypt and in the Middle East. It is also called 'Darija', which means 'everyday

language'. In the case of the Maghreb, Arabic first began to spread in the 7th century. The process of Arabization intensified after French colonial independence because it began to be seen as a form of post-colonial resistance and as a way of unifying the different ethnicities in the Maghreb through one language.

Arabization was aided by 20th century mass media and education, which led to increased knowledge of Arabic and culture. In the Maghreb, Arabization has influenced language more than it has Berber identity. As such, there are on-going debates on the use of French, Arabic, Berber, and Darija. In Morocco, for example, although the Institute for the Study and Research of Arabization made the Arabic language official soon after the country's 1956 independence from the French, the most widely-spoken language remains the local dialect, Darija. Moroccan Darija is a mix of Berber, Arabic, and French; and people who advocate for the dialect to become one of the official written languages see it as a bridge between the eastern and western parts of the Arab world (Elinson 2013).

Discussion on the use of Berber, Darija, Classical Arabic, or French in film is also due to the fact that there were no independent films by local indigenous Maghrebi film-makers before colonial independence. In Algeria, for example, French acculturation during colonialism did not permit indigenous Berber film. That is, there were no films by Algerians before the country's 1965 independence (Hammond 2006). Only some media in Arabic was allowed; this is despite the fact that native Algerian languages are indigenous Berber languages, and the main dialect spoken is a mix of French, Arabic, and Kabyle. Because not all Algerians understood Arabic, film in Algeria widened the gap between the Algerian educated and the Algerian masses during French colonialism (Shafik, 2007); and although Arabization was seen as a means of resistance against French colonialism, the Algerian people began a “Mouvement Culturel Berbère” advocating for their own Berber languages as well (Hiddleston 2012). In addition to individual movements in native Berber countries, there is a movement aimed at unifying Northern Berber languages under one language called Tamazight. This is also the name of the Berber language used in the Moroccan Rif and the Middle Atlas.

The use of Arabic dialect as post-colonial resistance is a cinematic tool that Egypt introduced to the Arabic-speaking world. Independent countries and nationalist movements in the Maghreb also use Darija that combines Arabic with Berber and French to

represent history, development, and resistance (Hafez 1995). For example, Selma Beccar's *Fatma 75* is in Tunisian Darija. The film is about the history of the country's development in terms of gender, and it focuses on the creation of L'Union des Femmes Musulmanes Tunisiennes (1930–1938), the resistance of Tunisian women against colonialism (1938–1952), and the advancement of women's rights in Tunisian law (1956–1975). Language in Maghrebi film is similar to Egyptian cinema's in the sense that it uses dialect as resistance to communicate socio-cultural identity, ensure audience reception, and relay themes related to nationhood, post-colonialism, and gender. However, while Egyptian historical film is usually in Classical Arabic (Shafik 2007), Tunisian *Fatma 75* is in Darija. Communication with a mass audience was also recommended by the 1973 Resolution of the Third World Filmmakers Meeting in Algiers (Cineaste 1973). As such, Darija dominates most Maghrebi post-colonial film. Nonetheless, because Maghrebi Arabic is not as available to the Arabic-speaking world as Egyptian Arabic is (Sabry 1995), Maghrebi film has more of a French audience than a pan-Arab one (Green 2011).

In the Arab world, local and regional dialects are considered 'mother tongues', and linguistic authenticity in popular culture is a means of reaching target audiences. In the Maghreb, Algerian film is mostly known for its discourse on freedom (Al-Kisan 1982). Initially reflecting resistance against colonialism, Algerian scripts then expanded to include other themes such as emigration as caused by colonialism (Shafik 2007). One such example of an Algerian film-maker who communicates through dialect to reflect post-colonial resistance is Assia Djebar. A Francophone writer who incorporates the Algerian Darija, she includes dialect in her work to empasize the cultural hybridity from which the country is composed and to bring to light resistance to language politics as caused by colonialism (Hiddleston 2012). In *The Nuba of the Women of Mont Chenoua,* she combines myth with archival footage to relay stories by women who fought against colonialism. The protagonist does not speak Berber, but she speaks the Algerian Darija. She is an Algerian woman who lives in France and who moves back to Algeria. Drawing on different cultures, the film uses the dialect as resistance to expand on anti-colonial discourse in order to reflect anti-colonialism, emigration and the bi-culturalism that came post-independence. Nonetheless, in 1982 *Zerda ou les Chants de l'oubli*, the writer uses Classical Arabic. The word *zerda* means counter-representation of historical discourse (Shafik 2007), and considering the tradition of dialect to communicate anti-colonialism, one expects the film to be in Algerian Darija. Nonetheless, the film-maker chooses to use

Classical Arabic for narration instead of dialect to counter French colonial discourse. In other words, while most post-colonial Algerian film uses Darija to portray post-colonial identity, Djebar also includes Classical Arabic because, prior to dialect, Arabization and the Arabic language were a means of resistance against French control and linguistic politics.

This is to say that the film-maker draws on both linguistic phases that served as resistance to French colonialism in the Maghreb. By employing both forms of Arabic, Djebar highlights the fact that both Classical Arabic and Maghrebi Arabic serve as resistance to French colonialism. She uses the Egyptian cinematic tradition of linguistic resistance to relay Algerian history and to highlight post-colonial development, ethnicity, local languages, bi-culturalism, and gender. Musicals are not popular in the Maghreb; and in the Arab world, only the Egyptian film industry has had commercial success with the genre (Shafik, 2007). Nonetheless, Djebar has continued Egypt's tradition of music in film by combining music with language to communicate with her target audience. In *Zerda ou les Chants de l'oubli,* she transforms a compilation of historical archives from 1912 to 1942 into songs. The songs are on rebellion, refusal to compromise, isolation, and emigration. Lyrics diverge from Egyptian post-colonial film lyrics, which tend to be on nationhood and love, to portray rebellion, refusal to compromise, isolation, and emigration (Shafik, 2007). In this sense, one can say that Maghrebi film lyrics are different from Egyptian. Also, when Egyptian film covers the topic of emigration, it focuses on emigration in the context of people moving from rural areas to cities but not on emigration from one country to another. 1978 *The Nuba of the Women of Mont Chenoua* is set in 1955 and 1956, when the Algerian women's revolution took place, and Djebar uses the structure of the 'Nuba', which is an Andalusian genre of music. In 18th and 19th century Andalusian Nuba music, vocals and instruments are alternated before being combined; and in Dejbar's film, images and sounds are presented in intervals and then mixed (Shafik 2007).

In *The Nuba of the Women of Mont Chenoua,* song lyrics are all in Classical Arabic. In this way, Assia Djebar's *Zerda ou les Chants de l'oubli* and *The Nuba of the Women of Mount Chenoua* are unique in the sense that they continue both Egyptian traditions of music and language as resistance during the late '70s and '80s, at a time when there was a decrease in Egyptian musicals (Al-Kisan 1982). Djebar argues that music is the only element in Algeria that was not affected by French colonialism (Shafik 2007). This does not include Rai music. Rai music in Algeria first began during migration to cities in

the 1930s; and lyrics on emigration became popular in the 1980s when the Algerian star Cheb Khalid moved to France (Hammond 2006). Hence because the effects of French colonialism are the major cause for Algerian emigration to France, traditional Rai music is an exception to other Algerian genres of music in the sense that it was indeed affected by colonialism. The latest Algerian film that incorporates Rai music is 2016 *Atlal* by Djamal Kerkar. The film is about a family in the south of Algiers during the 1997 war between Islamists and the military, and it features Rai music by popular star Cheb Hasni in the same way Egyptian musicals featured popular star Oum Kulthum.

The use of Maghrebi music in film to demonstrate resistance is on-going. 2015 *A peine j'ouvre les yeux (As I Open My Eyes)* by Tunisian Leyla Bouzid uses rock music to convey the gender inequalities and the marginalization of youth that contributed to the 2011 Jasmine Revolution. 2014 *Ahalil*: *Music of the Red Oasis* by Nino Kayel recounts history and cultural heritage through Ahalil, a religious genre of music in the Algerian Sahara. The use of Arabic in film to demonstrate resistance is also on-going. For example, Selma Baccar's 2006 *Khochkhach (Flower of Oblivion)* draws on the country's national anthem in Classical Arabic as linguistic resistance to French colonial domination (Shafik 2007). The film portrays Tunisia as a mental asylum for both women in the resistance and for nationalists. In this way, Maghrebi film continues to employ language and music to relay Maghrebi identity and history, and to reflect the increasing rate of movements in the Arabic-speaking world (Al-Kisan 1982). Djawari singing slaves have traveled from Egyptian reality, to theatre, to cinema (Shafik 2007); and Egyptian cinema, the oldest in the Arabic-speaking world, has influenced film in other countries in the region, including that of the Maghreb, to create film and music in dialect as well. Countries in the Maghreb have been influenced by Egyptian cinema in the sense that they communicate messages on anti-colonial resistance and post-colonial development to a target audience through local dialect.

Writing in local dialects facilitates communication, ensures comprehension by local audiences, and is reflective of cultural diversity (Gana 2008); and the choices that writers in Arab countries make when writing in languages that are not Classical Arabic 'clearly coalesce around issues of reception' (Roger 2015). In this way, by tailoring language to local audiences, and by emphasizing national identities, different ethnicities, and socio-cultural post-colonial development, Maghrebi film dialogue and narrative has been influenced by Egyptian (Sabry 1995).

The main reasons for Egyptian cinema's popularity and influence in the Arab world is the rise of post-colonial development and nationalist movements (Al-Kisan 1982); and in the Maghreb, the objective behind the use of dialect remains communication of resistance and identity (Sabry 1995). For this reason, and in addition to foreign monopoly and limited distribution and exchange, Maghrebi cinema has more of a French audience than it does a pan-Arab one (Green 2011). In Hollywood film, the Arabic employed is either made up or the choice of dialect does not match the location and/or context.

Alternate 'Lesson Plans' Recommended by Alsultany and Shaheen

Understandings of how representations in popular culture take part in forming public opinion suggest potential for the use of film as a tool to combat discrimination, a key to subvert stereotypes au lieu of enabling them, a key to develop cross-cultural conversations. Through the lens of film as a form of pedagogy with capacity to transform social reality through resistance to 'Othering', what would 'lesson plans', or movies aimed at reversing mainstream stereotypes of Muslim women, consist of? Alsultany recommends depiction that avoids terrorism altogether. In *Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation after 9/11 (Critical Cultural Communication),* she recommends *Whoopi!*, *Aliens in America*, *Community* and *Little Mosque on the Prairie* as examples of television series that do a good job of contesting stereotypes by not centering on terrorism, thus bringing images and insights on the everydayness of Muslims to the forefront instead. Arguing that stereotypes are usually examined through the lens of colonial history, she emphasizes the importance of transnational analysis as well. This is because transnationalism opens up room for new cultural dialogues on diasporic identities and resistancies and includes analysis of contemporary representation in actual geographical locations and diasporas as well as in the digital world (Alsultany 2013).

The series that Alsultany recommends are therefore comedy series. Whoopi Goldberg's *Whoopi!* played on NBC from 2003 to 2004. The Emmy nominated show is about singer Mavis Rae who opens a hotel in New York and her interactions with an Iranian handyman, Nasim, who experiences racial profiling. In Alsultany's opinion, *Whoopi!* is a comedy series that demonstrates the absurdity of racial profiling by humorously highlighting stereotypes. *Aliens in America* played from 2007 to 2008 on CW network. Tolchucks is a middle-class white American family in Wisconsin with two teens, a social

daughter and an awkward son. Their mother signs up to host a Norwegian foreign exchange student as a way of helping her son become more popular. The family gets a Pakistani Muslim, Raja Musharaff, instead; and he speaks with an accent and wears Pakistani clothes, which works against the mother's plan for her son's popularity, because the other characters in the story are suburban racist Americans. The bringing together of a white American misfit with a 'foreign' Pakistani Muslim accentuates similarities between the two characters while exploring cultural and religious differences through everydayness. NBC *Communit*y (2009–present) is about a a study group at a community college. One of the students, Palestinian-American Abed Nadir, is obsessed with popular popular culture., the character is described by Alsultany as "refreshingly original, unlike any other portrayal of Arab Americans on network Television to date" (Alsultany 2012, 173). She also recommends *Little Mosque on the Prairie*.

Of the four television series recommended by Alsultany, only *Little Mosque* is made by a Muslim. Suggesting that this limited Muslim presence in the industry is what accounts for the lack of series by Muslims, Alsultany also mentions that only two Muslim television networks have ever existed in North America: Links TV was created in California (1999 - 2012) and Bridges TV was created in New York (2004-2012). Kyle Conway's book *Little Mosque on the Prairie and the Paradoxes of Cultural Translation (Cultural Spaces)* expands on Alsultany's observations by explaining how creators of *Little Mosque* consciously targeted a more broad and diverse audience through the "saleable diversity'' of the content. 'Saleable diversity'' is a technique argued to facilitate inclusion of characters from minoritiy groups into North American television by offering cultural translations, or descriptions of Muslim experiences that are tailored to non-Muslim audiences. Cultural translation potentially increases the saleable diversity of a cultural object, or its potential for audience expansion and global consumerism (Conway 2017). Indeed, Phillip Drummond's e-book *The London Film and Media Reader 1: Essays from Film and Media 2011* includes an essay in Part 3: Media Identities, "Little Mosque on the Prairie: Inter-faith TV through Malaysian Eyes", where the writer highlights the diversity of religion among Malaysian viewers of *Little Mosque* (Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism) (Drummond 2011, 173-183).

Indeed, breaking the language of homogenity creates possibility for new space enabling construction of new meanings that re-define Muslim identities. Transitioning from the language of "Islam and

the West" and the language of "religion versus secularism" by reflecting contexts of worldliness that correspond to the global world highlights the active agency of "Muslims-being-in-the-world". By so doing, Muslim identities are re-defined from a political discourse on difference that cannot be integrated to reflect worldly, heterogenous and cosmopolitan Muslim societies (Dabashi 2013). Creating a new "window" through which the problematized group is seen involves adding new images and language while keeping a link or association with the knowledge that viewers already have. Stereotypes in media propaganda are thus deconstructed through the diversification of representations.

Little Mosque on the Prairie

Little Mosque on the Prairie is a satire about a Muslim community in a Canadian town. Created by Pakistani-Canadian Zarqa Nawaz, the title recalls the popular 1970s series *Little House on the Prairie*, based on a series of children's books published in the 1930s and 1940s by Laura Ingalls Wilder. Ingalls' work relates the adventures of a family of pioneers in the nineteenth-century Midwest, suggesting, perhaps, a similar pioneering role for the Muslims in *Little Mosque.* In *Little Mosque,* a Muslim family establishes a place of worship in the local church hall. There is a character who is a right-wing local radio talk show host, but the most striking feature of *Little Mosque on the Prairie* is its highlighting of everyday elements of Muslim diasporic communities and identities instead of focusing on terrorism and on veils (Morey and Yaqin 2011).

The creator of *Little Mosque*, Zarqa Nawaz, is a Muslim Canadian woman of Pakistani background, whose main goal when creating was to subvert negative public understandings of Muslims as spread by media representations. Nawaz therefore attributes everyday aspects of life to Muslim characters in *Little Mosque*, presenting them to viewers as "normal", or as Shaheen emphasizes in *Reel Bad Arabs*, "just being parents" (Shaheen 2012). 2012 CBC Television Canadian series *Little Mosque On the Prairie* was also consciously created with saleable diversity in mind to increase its viewership and to spread awareness of positive images of Muslims in that country; cultural translation of representations of lived religion, combined with representations of diverse characters, contributes to the saleable diversity of the Television series (Conway 2017). At the same time, *Little Mosque* pays hommage to previous Canadian shows geared at families, and settings common in North American family shows, such as the family's cosy kitchen and living room and a diner-style café feature (Chao 2015); and this application of cultural translation that does not focus on the mosque only makes

the work more relateable to non-Muslim viewers.

Increasing saleable diversity targeting North American viewers also entails the downplaying of Islamic artifacts symbolic of 'terrorism'; hence, in *Little Mosque*, a mosque is located in an Anglican church. This tiny mosque is also the imam's office and a prayer hall. Construction of an actual mosque for Muslims in the community is completed by the end of the series. The downplaying of artifacts symbolic of "terrorism" increase saleable diversity. and that, which attracted 2.1 million viewers (Chao 2015). A brief summary of the first episode stands as further example of the successful effort at cultural translation by creators of the series.

"Little Mosque" begins with a small Muslim community celebrating the opening of a mosque. "Finally, our own mosque! No more shuffling around from one basement to another." As, they, a handful of Canadian Muslims, are praying, a non-Muslim character, Fred Tupper, who is also the host of a local radio talk show, enters, sees the Muslims praying, gets scared, starts running into furniture in panic and yells out "I'm in the wrong place!" Then, he calls 'the terrorist attack' hot-line. The opening scene of the first episode of *Little Mosque,* "Little Mosque" ends with the terrified white man with a cell phone standing outside of an Anglican church, being asked by a terrorist hot-line to hold.

Ending the opening scene with Tupper reporting a terrorist attack and being put on hold is a strategy of cultural translation whereby the creator addresses an issue that both audiences are familiar with without delving too much into the topic of terroristm, soon moving from the mosque as a setting. Later on, in another scene, the Tupper character expands on the topic, "I saw bowing and moaning, just like on CNN." "They are Muslims. They pray five times a day," explains the Church parish. In this case, cultural translation through expansion on descriptions of a Muslim practice is relayed via a non-Muslim character.

Another interesting scene in the opening episode of the series is one where Nawaz succeeds in humorously addressing racial profiling and takes place at an airport. In the first episode of *Little Mosque*, the Imam, who has just spent a year volunteering at a development agency in Afghanistan, gets arrested upon landing at Mercy. The young Imam is arguing on the phone with his mom while waiting in line to board the plane. The mother tells her son that his father is worried. "It's not like I just dropped a bomb on him! If Dad thinks it's suicide, so be it. This is Allah's plan for me," responds the Imam.

A woman waiting ahead of him in line overhears his conversation, panics and runs to security. “I'm not throwing my life away, I'm moving to the prairies to run a mosque,” continues the Imam-to-be explaining to his mother. He is arrested as soon as he hangs up. “What's the charge, 'flying while Muslim'”? he asks. He is humorously grilled over his volunteer work in Afghanistan. Upon his release by the police and arrival to the mosque, he is bombarded with silly questions from a reporter outside the church building. “Wait. Are you from Saudi Arabia?” And at the end of the episode, talk show host Fred Tupper invites him to an interview: “Are you a terrorist?”

Cultural translation is a technique that seems to attract both Muslim and non-Muslim viewers, requiring the artist to be cognizant of and deploy knowledge of more than one target audience. By drawing on social and cultural contexts of both minority and majority audiences, *Little Mosque* is a comedy series that is subversive through its inclusive form of humor; and its cultural translation of everydayness facilitates a form of social communication that reaches wider and more diverse audiences because it entails keeping audiences' pre-existing patterns of thought in mind and reduces the complexity of a topic by explaining and expanding on aspects of their autobiographies.

In terms of intra-Muslim relations in *Little Mosque*, differences in levels of religiosity between members of the Muslim community are also humorously addressed. For example, Muslim characters meet to confirm the start of Ramadan (Muslims use a lunar calendar). As they are trying to figure out how to use a telescope, a female character, a local convert, suggests that Muslims just pick a month for Ramadan and stick to it; and she recommends December because the days are shorter. *Little Mosque* includes depiction of convivial intra-Muslim and inter-religious relations both as peaceful scenes to which Canadian viewers can relate. By the end of the first episode, the new imam and the church reverend are friends, uniting against the hate speech spread by the radio talk show host, Fred Tupper.

Kingdom of Heaven, Three Kings, Body of Lies, Syriana, Rendition

In addition to the Television series *Little Mosque*, some apparent progress with regard to images of Muslims and Arabs is visible in even popular culture that is not produced by Muslims and Arabs. To expand on the select films recommended by Jack Shaheen in *Reel Bad Arabs*, after 9/11, certain Hollywood film by non-Muslims began to incorporate more Arabic and in more realistic contexts.

Kingdom of Heaven, Three Kings, Body of Lies, Syriana, and *Rendition* all employ a mix of Classical Arabic and colloquial Arabic; and the more realistic use of language in these films makes for more objective representations of Arabs in the sense that they are humanized and their diversity is more clear to see for a non-western audience. In *Kingdom of Heaven*, Classical Arabic is used to reflect religion and history, and colloquial Arabic is used for regular everyday dialogue; *Three Kings* uses colloquial for conversation with everyday people and Classical Arabic for religious expression; *Body of Lies* employs Iraqi, Palestinian-Jordanian, and Syrian dialects for everyday dialogue and Classical Arabic for religious settings; and *Syriana* employs both literary and colloquial Arabic, with the former for religious settings, and the latter, a form of Bedouin vernacular, for dialogue amongst Bedouins (Tayyara 2014). *Syriana* is another film that Shaheen commends for non-stereotypical portrayal of Arabs. Makers of the film actually hired him as a consultant to confirm that they do not make the same mistakes as other films considered to stereotype (Omidvar and Richards 2014). Insights into the collective memory of viewers about Arabs and Muslims suggests that, in order not to stereotype, filmmakers must be aware of predominant perceptions that previous filmmakers created before them (Firat and Venkatesh 2001). Nevertheless, although the films commended for less stereotypical representation of Arabs now include more Arabic, they still all take place within the context of terrorism; and strange Arabic detectable to the native speaker remains. In *Rendition*, one character speaks classical Arabic, but her father responds in Egyptian colloquial. Approximately one-third of the film dialogue in *Rendition* is in subtitled Arabic (Omidvar and Richards 2014).

The movies discussed as shedding Arabs and Muslims in a more realistic and truthful light are works applauded by Alsultany and Shaheen. In the next section, I examine employment of the image of the 'veiled and oppressed' woman in *Sex and the City 2.*

New 'Lesson Plan' on the Veil: *Sex and the City 2*

Inclusion of female voices reflecting agencies, individual identities, backgrounds, and knowledge as informing choice exposes the public mind is to alternative images and rhetoric reflecting women's diverse realities, ethnicities and socio-economic conditions. Stereotypical cultural capital as a route to the subconscious accumulation of social and cultural knowledge can be detrimental resulting in absurd obsession with women's image. Not only does misrepresentation reinforce perceptions of the 'Other', but its

consumption and re-appropriation impact behavior, social interactions and justice. Alternate representations are meant to guide audiences toward articulating and developing their own thoughts on Arab and/or Muslim women and have potential to offer cultural knowledge to non-Arabic-speaking audiences that is more reflective of the changing realities of the veil.

Rhetoric on women as in need of 'saving' is a selective concern with the struggle of Muslim women that draws on the myth of the veil as a product of Western Orientalist imagination; and representations of Muslim women in the West omit descriptions of backgrounds, contextual realities, and changing human conditions (Abu-Lughod 2002). In my opinion, representations of Muslim women in popular culture should illustrate societal problems, such as women's rights, workers' rights, and the rights of minorities, as global commonalities to which feminists have responded transnationally. Depiction that gives audiences the time and space to reflect on new images while comparing to images previously offered makes it possible for the audience to learn about feminist theories through channels that they are already engaging with, such as film and music made easily accessible by the Internet post-colonial feminist theory and the concept of 'othering'; and transnational feminist theory and fiction explaining feminist identity politics communicated in another style of writing film is to both highlight diasporic identity politics that are underrepresented in popular culture and to show that cultural objects refraining from stereotypes and normalized corporeity also become popular cultural capital in the form of film.

Through the lens of Lila Abu-Lughod's theory of 'saving', I find that the movie *Sex and the City 2* both perpetuates and subverts the myth of the “voiceless, veiled woman” (Abu-Lughod 2002). The movie *Sex and the City 2* (2010) is the sequel to *Sex and the City* (2008). Before being remade into movies, *Sex and the City* was a series that aired from 1998 to 2004. The series is based on a collection of essays by Candice Bushnell, published in 1997, 2001, 2006 and 2008. The story is about the sex lives of four women in New York in the 1990s. The 2008 film is also set in New York. A 2010 romantic comedy by Michael Patrick King, S*ex and the City 2* keeps the same main female characters as the film and series.

Sarah Jessica Parker, Kim Cattrall, Kristin Davis, and Cynthis Nixon are invited to Abu Dhabi by an Emirati sheikh. Part of the movie is therefore set in an Abu Dhabi that is filmed in Morocco. In this mythical Abu Dhabi, the myth of the veil is called upon despite

the fact that there is no law that requires women to wear a veil in the UAE. I therefore point out the following scenes and dialogues in relation to the myth that veiled women need 'saving' (Abu-Lughod 2002). First, during a telephone conversation that she is having, the character Miranda sees a local woman lift her veil up to eat a french fry. "... the veil that covers everything except the eyes is a veil," she explains. "Certainly cuts back on the Botox bill. Women are required to dress in a way that does not attract sexual attention," she continues. "Well, I could get into the head wrap ... but the veil across the mouth, it freaks me out." "It's like they don't want them to have a voice," responds the character on the other end of the line, Carrie. Second, a false accusation of theft involving Miranda conveniently ends up revolving around sexuality. A bazaar owner thinks the bag Miranda is carrying is stolen from him, so men in the souk surround and search her. Condoms then fall out of Miranda's bag. "I AM A WOMAN! I HAVE SEX!" she yells. Third, it is the veiled women who get the American women away from the souk vendors. Finally, there is bonding over what brands these veiled women are wearing underneath their veils. These are the *Sex and the City 2* film sections that I find evoke the myth of veil in ways that allow for space to incorporate social and cultural analysis.

The telephone conversation and the souk scene in *Sex and the City 2* perpetuate the myth of the veil as a symbol of women's inequality; and representations of the veil and hijab as '*the* sign of women's inequality' is "… a way of drawing the line not only at Islam but at the differences Arab and Muslim populations represent, a way of insisting on the timeless superiority ..." (Scott 2007). The telephone conversation is reflective of what Abu-Lughod calls the rhetoric of 'saving'. In other words, the portrayal reiterates historic binary oppositions and the rhetoric of cultural 'difference' as strengthened by the myth of the "veiled, 'voiceless woman". The statement 'it's like they don't want them to have a voice' does not reflect women's individual and respective identities, backgrounds, and knowledge as informing their choices and their freedom of choice within religion. Depiction of the veiled female 'other' in *Sex and the City 2* as a symbol of oppression undermines the numerous contexts and attitudes of Muslim women. Reducing the diverse realities of women in Abu Dhabi (a location where there is no law forcing women to veil) to a single item of clothing, representation of veil in *Sex and the City 2* reflects a discourse on Muslim women that reduces their agencies.

The false accusation of Miranda stealing a bag conveniently leads to revolving around a sexuality that champions the 'us versus them'

binary. Sex outside of marriage is a criminal offence in the UAE; and Miranda yelling that she has sex in a country that forbids sex outside of marriage perpetuates the 'us' versus 'them' binary by setting her apart from the 'other' local Muslim women (Abu-Lughod 2002).

Yet, *Sex and the City 2* also subverts the myth of 'saving' when veiled local women help the American women escape from the male souk vendors. Considering that the film is a 'chick flick' with a predominantly female transnational audience, the role reversal when it comes to 'saving' could be an attempt to subvert stereotypes of veiled women by portraying them as having some sort of agency. A huge hit reaching audiences world-wide, the movie set a record by showing in 3,445 theaters on May 27, 2010 (Wikipedia); and the interaction between American and veiled local women could be seen as an attempt to depict transnational dialogue, solidarity, or resistance. But a more skeptical analysis would be that because Miranda and possy need help, contempt for 'difference' is conveniently transformed into a friendship. Then, there is much gesturing and excitement over what brands the women are wearing underneath their veils. The film thus expands on its other universal theme of fashion by portraying it as something that the American and local women have in common.

Fashion and consumerism are major themes in the *Sex and the City* series and in the 2008 movie, and the clothes have been compared to the cars in Bond Films (NYMAG. 2010); and according to Wikipedia, the decision to depict Abu Dhabi in *Sex and the City 2* is the fact that it is well-known for its high-end fashion. Unfortunately, the cosmopolitanism of the fashion scene in Abu Dhabi is only depicted in relation to the veil; and this omits women's realities. Although the reversal of the myth of 'saving' at the expense of male 'buffoons' hints at a transnational feminist solidarity, by making 'religion versus secularism' the root problem, *Sex and the City 2* also perpetuates 'difference'. Yet, despite this perpetuation of 'difference', the depiction of the veil remains a new one because there is dialogue between American women and veiled local ones who are usually portrayed as 'voiceless' and because this interaction partly reverses the myth of veiled women as needing 'saving' (Abu-Lughod 2002). Therefore, creators of content must continue the effort to normalize and humanize Arabs as seen in the examples above, to reflect a more authentic language of the “Other”; and refrain from representations of terrorism and oppressions. Viewers, or students, are thus offered more accommodating ‘lesson plans’ that result in successful

assimilation of new knowledge into their mental schemas.

Conclusion

Hollywood's historic objectifying and gendered portrayal of Muslim and Arab women gives gender discrimination new authority by buttressing and reproducing rhetoric of the artificial 'Other'. Capitalizing on the idea of film as pedagogy and movies as ‘lesson plans’, discursive colonialism emphasizing rhetoric on woman as a homogenized 'Other' supercedes representations of commonalities in women's experiences; Hollywood's cinematic depictions of the Arab and Muslim female character are almost always based on the stereotypical and predictable 'Other'. Stated otherwise, with the aim of subverting Hollywood stereotypes of Arab women as a form of cultural capital reproducing gendered Islamophobia, ‘lesson plans’ in the form of an alternate cinema suggest reversing that discrimination by countering dominant representations through diverse ethnicities, social classes, and geographical locations. Film production can hence be knowledge countering dominant Western representations of Arab/Muslim women in the form of cultural capital that can both create and reverse the reproduction of behavioral trends, such as the increasing trend of hate crimes targeting veiled women in North America.

Introducing new female Muslim 'Other' characters is transition toward diverse representations of Muslim women as 'beings' world-wide, with production as a re-imagination of medieval hermeneutics that counters mainstream rhetoric on 'Islam-land',' Arab-land', 'erotic', 'oppressed', 'female terrorist' refrains and breaks the language of homogenity that has been historically used in reference to Muslims. Addressing issues faced by women as global commonalities, makes the distinction between Western representation of Muslim women and feminist self-presentation. An alternate form of pedagogy by Arabs and Muslims hence reaches people on a wider scale. Reflecting specific realities of women in the US speaks to the different ethnicities and socio-economic conditions of diverse women; and focusing on the agency, setting, and location of the woman instead of her dress code contextualizes the character’s reality and makes her an individual from a particular background. The changing of the culture’s medialogy takes place through small depiction, nevertheless, the changes of opinion that it produces is on a global scale.

Chapter 2
Everydayness in Hulu series *Ramy*

Introduction

The digital age is an appropriated space for Muslim creators of content to contest stereotypes while simultaneously speaking to Muslims themselves. As an everyday act, the circulation and consumption of popular culture, such as film and series available on on-line platforms such as Hulu is revolutionary in the sense that it enables audiences to immediately access new representation of Arabs and Muslims by Arabs and Muslims themselves. These images represent everyday lives and key messages intended to counter negative images that have been dominating the sphere of popular culture for over a century. The consumption of digital popular culture as everydayness is in some way, a cultural revolution in cyberspace.

'Digital everydayness', or consumption of in the form of blogs, Instagram posts, Youtube videos, videos of film, videos of stand-up comedy, music videos etc. facilitates understandings and appropriations of identify and concept of "self" (Suh 2020). Content creators utilize digital everydayness to offer mass audiences new knowledge offered through depiction of an everydayness and self-reflection previously inaccessible to audiences. As a social platform for social pedagogy, Hulu suggests that the digital age has resulted in a new cultural space created by the act of consumption of digital cultural objects in everyday life. Digital everydayness allows for communication through social media platforms that encourage individual identity by being a space for the marginalized.

In this chapter, I explore representation of everydayness through Dena's character in Hulu series *Ramy* as facilitating media and reality literacy amongst viewers. I argue that the series in general counters stereotypes of Muslim women without necessarily translating into a story-line centering around terrorism or Islam *(Alsultany 2012)* but by highlighting everydayness that is relateable to non-Muslim audiences (Gana 2009). Instead of being portrayed in relation to terrorism, religion or veiled women, the Muslim characters are everyday people sharing their stories through humor and self-reflection. Thanks to *Ramy*, at a time when Islamophobia is on the rise, new knowledge on the diverse realities of Muslim women and men is offered through online courses on everydayness in the form of a comedy series.

> "We live in an age where we're like, 'Oh, if I'm standing up for myself I need to attack this head on and say it,' but I think a really influential perspective is to look at how humans like to be told things and what makes it easy for them to hear. And a lot of times, it's not being direct, because unfortunately we get a little defensive. I feel like that's how Ramy works, and he's brought that into his writing and into his story. [His writing] makes people reflect without feeling attacked," says May Calamawy, the actress who plays Dena (Fahim 2020).

Narratives and writings bring the Arab-American audience together through accounts and analysis of common ground as a result of both the story-teller's and audience's combination of insider and outsider status and understandings of both cultures (El-Aswad 2010, 237). This sense of Self is created by movement between local and global spheres and its creation of Arab and Muslim transnational identities of being-in-the-world. Everydayness of Muslim North Americans mirrored by diverse characters and a diverse cast, in Hulu internet series *Ramy* is a saleable diversity that accommodates both target audiences (Muslim and non-Muslim); in this way attempts by content creators at subverting negative images of Muslims and Islam reach a more diverse audience.

Ramy

2019 Hulu series *Ramy* was created by comedian Ramy Youssef with the intention of educating a wider audience about Muslims in a predominantly non-Muslim market. "I don't want to explain Islam to people on a show, because it's a comedy and I wouldn't be good at doing that. But I can show how people are living it," says Youssef (Wajahat 2020). Calamawy believes that "This is just a call for more Arabs to start writing. I feel there has to be a wave of stories of [Middle Eastern] women finding their voice and learning how to take space and express themselves and being seen, really" (Fahim 2020)..

Of course, the fact that Ramy Youssef is an already famous stand-up comedian contributes to the success of his series. Ramy Youssef, who featured in *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* in 2017, also performs in 2019 HBO comedy special *Feeling*s; and in the same way he tailors his stand-up comedy performances at both Muslim and non-Muslim North American target audiences, he has culturally translated a comedy Internet series about Arabs and Muslims. Youssef's Hulu series, *Ramy,* is a "coming-of-age" genre of writing that is at the heart of Hulu's corporate branding and channel differentiation strategy prioritizing a wide variety of viewers'

demands (Omotayo 2021). In addition to guaranteed viewership by his fans of stand-up comedy routines, he also increases his serie's potential for audience expansion through more everydayness.

In his 1927 masterpiece, *Being and Time*, German philosopher Martin Heidegger highlights the importance of thinking about the meaning of Being, pointing out that because the act of Being is so simple, it tends to be overlooked (Heidegger 2019). Everydayness is similarly both a fundamental feature of life and little recognized. As **Henri Lefebvre confirms i**n his 1987 *The Everyday and Everydayness*, "The everyday is the most universal and the most unique condition, the most social and the most individuated, the most obvious and the best hidden" (Lefebvre 1987).

Hamid Dabashi's 2013 *Being Muslim* then makes a case for a transition from mainstream portrayal of Muslims to portrayal of "Muslims-being-in-the-world" through a new language of hermeneutics that focuses on geography and race. To transition from the language of "Islam and the West" and "religion versus secularism", he says, one must communicate Islam as a cosmopolitan world culture realized also in the everyday lived experiences of Muslims. In his *Being Muslim*, Dabashi argues that to transition from creating work reflecting the language of 'Islam and the West' as the language of 'religion versus secularism' and the myth of Muslim = Arab, for instance, one must see Islam as a cosmopolitan world culture; and to communicate Islam as a cosmopolitan world culture, the language must reflect contexts of its worldliness that correspond to the global world (Dabashi 2013).

Everydayness in Muslim-American popular culture sphere has been discussed in terms of fiction, life narratives and autobiography, I will begin the discussion here with two brief illustrations of everydayness from that type of work in order to clarify the concept. *Diane* Abu-Jaber's novel *Crescent* is one example of *a work of fiction that offers alternate, more realistic, representations of Arab-American lives by focusing on individual and communal everydayness in a diasporic community instead of on a single representation.* Crescent is a love story between an Iraqi-American chef in a café in Los Angeles and an exiled Iraqi professor of Near Eastern Studies. *T*he novel describes the Arab-American community and the characters' relationships with their transnational identities, with each other, and with cooking. In Crescent, avoiding stereotypes by highlighting everyday topics, such as cooking and romance, serves to de-stereotype and to de-politicize Arabness (Gana 2008).

British Muslim author Shelina Zahra Janmohamed's 2009 novel, Love in a Headscarf, is another example. Janmohamed explains: "I went into a bookshop promoting literature about Middle Eastern women and all the book covers showed women in black veils and they were about escaping from slavery and forced marriages. I looked at them and thought none of them told my story. That's why I decided to write a book. I wanted people to stand in my shoes so I wrote a quirky, irreverent book." Set in London, the novel's protagonist, also named Shelina, wears a headscarf. Secular Muslims interpret Shelina's hijab as a sign of backwardness, while non-Muslim characters, such as Anne, tell her, "You Muslim women are oppressed, forced to cover up and not express yourselves. You have to stay at home and men run everything". This is despite the fact that Shelina is a single woman, a traveler, and a student at Oxford (Akbar and Taylor 2010). Janmohamed's novel depicts everyday life as perceived by the female "Other" in an Islamophobic world in which popular culture is also dominated by non-Muslim women.

Although the intention behind *Ramy* was the same as that behind the novel's, the series was criticized for not delving into theology and politics. "For all its lofty ambitions to dismantle the stereotyping of Muslims in America, *Ramy* is no less shallow or formulaic in its own way than the average American mainstream TV drama. Every element of Islam is oversimplified" (Fahim 2020). In my opinion, American Muslim screenwriters also consciously engage with the technique of everydayness, because everydayness establishes rapport with the audience and challenges stereotypes about Muslims as a collective by highlighting daily experiences of individuals. Descriptions and understandings of these scenes of everydayness, then increases the pedagogical capacity of a cultural object even further by tailoring it to non-Muslim audiences. This facilitates transition from colonial images of women to those reflecting the diverse realities of Muslim women from within contexts that depict different ethnicities and socio-economic conditions and exposes the public mind to alternate images and rhetoric on the diversity of Muslims and Islam through representation of the everyday.

"The task is not to retrieve the sacred and to posit it against the secular—but, instead, to re-imagine the sacred in the immediate vicinity of its current worldliness" (Dabashi 2013, 8). Moreover, and according to Professor of Comparative Literature and Near Eastern Languages and Cultures Nouri Gana, portraying the everyday challenges dominant representation and hermeneutics by selectively replacing stereotypes with new visuals and rhetoric on Arabness and

being Arab; representation of everydayness is conscious accounts of individual and ordinary experiences (Gana 2009).

With regard to critique of the comedy series as over-simplifying information about Islam, *Ramy* is not obliged to explain the entire process of Muslim prayer to viewers who are not familiar with Islam. The series offers information about washing one's feet properly instead. This piece of information is new for the viewer who does not know about daily ablution and prayer in the religion but can be perceived as 'oversimplified' for one who does.

I refer to the first episode, "Between the Toes", which begins with the protagonist's mother dropping him off outside of a mosque in New Jersey to attend his friend's wedding celebration. She gives her son a short lecture on the importance of getting married before letting him out of the vehicle. The first episode of a series is important because it has to establish viewer rapport with characters, invite audiences into a specific context that interests them and convince them to watch the next episode. A series continues a story-line for longer than a movie, and potential viewers determine whether they are willing to dedicate that much of their time to watching the entire production at the beginning. It is therefore important that viewer rapport be established with characters right away and in ways that keep audiences interested and entertained.

Ramy enters the mosque and begins to perform ablution; another character comments upon the fact that Ramy doesn't take his socks off, which makes the washing of his feet less efficient. "I took a shower this morning," explains Ramy in Arabic. Humorous acknowledgement of the varying levels of religiosity amongst people born into a religion demonstrates to spectators previously deprived from diverse representation of Muslims that the majority are not terrorist men and veiled women. The goal is to produce work that speaks to both groups and to facilitate knowledge-sharing with Hulu customers and industry stakeholders.

While at the mosque, Ramy's best friends tell him to find a Muslim wife (Ramy is seeing a Jewish woman who is not very religious either). "You need to find someone who knows where you came from and what you believe in", advise Ramy's friends. Ramy breaks up with his Jewish girlfriend and starts checking out Muslim women on the dating website, Muslim Tinder. He goes on a blind date with a Muslim woman; but she is not for him. The topic of dating is a popular one in North American series; and *Ramy*, in keeping with its goal of saleable diversity highlights the topic while depicting

characters of Muslim background.

Then, while having dinner with his family, Ramy asks his parents to set him up with a Muslim woman. His mother happily asks him whether he wants the woman 'covered or uncovered'. “Uncovered.” “Good choice.” Realistic portrayal of varying levels of religiosity within their Arab-American community is extended to depiction of the family. Ramy's parents are happy to see their son grow up, but his younger sister responds with a “Are you f-in' kidding me? You had one lonely day at a wedding, and now you want mom to set you up?” Dina is worried that if her older brother marries, her parents will expect the same from her. “If you get married, they're gonna start putting pressure on me to start a family and stare at my stomach like it's the answer to their mid-life crisis. I don't need that shit right now. F- you, Ramy.” The predominant stereotype of the voiceless, veiled Muslim woman is contested by the voice of Dina, who is outspoken and straightforward, adamant and articulate.

In the episode “3riana Grande”, Dena notices that her hair is starting to fall out. Her father mentions that he started losing his hair at her age. Dena is very upset; she wants to know if this is happening because of the ‘evil eye’ or because of her genes. She’s going to her uncle’s to ask about when he started losing his hair. On the way, she wears a hijab, a pink headscarf; now that she’s noticed her hair is falling out, she doesn’t want anyone else to see it until she gets to the bottom of what is going on. On the way back, her car stalls. The driver sent by the service to pick up her car and drive her back home comments about the headscarf. He tells her that as a Mexican he knows what it’s like; but she’s in America now and she doesn’t have to wear that. Then he makes another comment, this one about female genital mutilation. Dena is already feeling emotional because her hair loss coincides with a lump on her breast and her mother yelling at her for posting her news of a scholarship to law school on Facebook. She begins to cry and asks her Mexican driver to stop the car; but before she leaves, she explains that she is wearing a headscarf because her hair has been falling and that she’s sorry she doesn’t know “why they cut people’s clits off.” As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, women from Muslim backgrounds often report being grilled about forced veiling, honor crimes, FGM; but never do we see those types of realistic dialogues that at least call out the awkwardness and discomfort caused by misinformation.

By looking to digress from mainstream representation of Muslim women as ‘veiled and oppressed’, *Ramy*’s employment of everydayness to contest stereotypes is ‘extreme’ (Venkatesh 2022),

as is everydayness in popular culture as a socio-pedagogical technique disruptive in its intent to counter Islamophobia by increasing the rate of media and reality literacy. “Extreme suggests some form of transgression and boundary-breaking” (Venkatesh 2022, 1). An Internet series accessible to all offering descriptions of contextual ‘realities’ is a tool necessary for the realization of individual and collective efforts at a social pedagogy challenging preconceived notions of the ‘Other’. *Ramy* facilitates knowledge on Muslims by highlighting their everyday lives, hence resulting in normalisation of their multiple identities. That these identities are made ordinary through Hulu series *Ramy* suggests the capacity to contest negative portrayal, fake news and “alternative facts” by reality through other, newer lived experiences via electronic media accessible to all (Castillo and Egginton 2017).

Ramy is also ‘extreme’ in that it diverges from mainstream American film production by employing the Arabic tradition of addressing social issues and by making the sister character Dena out-spoken. Addressing social issues in *Ramy*, where the main characters are Egyptian-American demonstrates insight by the content creator into Egyptian culture’s medialogy and knowledge in terms of expectations of Egyptian viewers familiar with Egyptian cinema. Film-makers in the Arabic-speaking world have always used cinema to address the public about issues related to gender, class and social change. For example, during Nasserism, when the leader defined revolution as progressive popular action toward development, progress, and democratic expression (Nasser 1972), Egypt's revolutionary dramas reflected dreams of a new Egypt and the people's ideology of social and cultural changes. And in the 1950s, revolutionary dramas were simultaneously being made as problems affecting Egyptian society took place (Gordon 2002). In other words, Arab cinema is a cultural capital that has historically inspired people to demand social justice, equality, and democracy; and film resisting local gender discourses has always been part of the long-existing feminist struggle in the region.

Women in the Egyptian revolutionary process gave birth to a female consciousness throughout the region that still exists today (Shafik 2017). This consciousness can be seen in the 2011 Arab Spring, the most recent massive people's revolution where women led and organized both in-person and digital protests. It was a Libyan woman who organized the 'day of rage' protest, which got the Libyan army out of Benghazi, for example. Women also mobilized through social networks world-wide. They used Facebook to organize, YouTube videos and Flickr photos to give visual images, and Twitter

to share live news globally. It was a Tunisian female blogger who first covered security forces' attacks on protesters; and it was an Egyptian woman who made the video mobilizing Egyptians to protest the regime in Tahrir Square on 25 January 2011, which is National Police Day. Public concern with women's rights is a topic frequently addressed by female Arab characters in both Egyptian reality and in cinema. The first film made in the Arabic speaking world was made by a woman. Made in 1920 Egypt, where the liberation of women was considered to go hand in hand with the anti-imperial struggle, *Leyla* highlights feminism, nationalism, and anti-colonial rhetoric through allegory (Dickinson 2007). I am therefore not surprised to see Dena's character reacting as such and taking preventative measures against the possibility of her parents marrying her off as triggered by her brother's whimsical whining over dinner.

New and transnational representations of Muslim women in the Hulu series as a digital feminist knowledge accessible to non-Arabic-speaking markets demonstrates potential for a new form of transnational feminist resistance challenging dominant media representations. According to Dabashi, The Arab Spring has also expanded the public space to increase and expand feminist knowledge on women's rights movements (Dabashi, 2012). Digital media hence constitutes a public sphere contributing to knowledge on women and gender dynamics in their respective diasporas. Although it is considered to go hand in hand with social movements and to have historically aided the feminist movement, depiction of Arab women in film that was not a Hollywood production before the advent of the Internet was rarely accessible. Reiterating the role of cultural capital as knowledge, and emphasizing its impacts on societies, transnational access to different types of popular culture reflecting different backgrounds via on-line platforms suggest countering gendered post-colonial discrimination by placing value on contemporary public concerns, such as stereotyping.

> "The Arab world is not, as is often perceived, a monolith, but is made up of different communities, peoples, states, and governmental and societal forms. Neither does it form linguistically, ethnically, and culturally an unchallenged unity. The majority of its inhabitants adhere to Islam, but other religions are represented in the region, including Judaism, Christianity, and Islamic sects such as those of the Alawites and Druze. On a linguistic level little unity exists; in addition to the languages of the ethnic minorities like Berbers, Nubians, and Kurds, the Arabic language itself has

split into a huge variety of local dialects (Shafik, 2017)."

Diversifying representations of women de-groups the veiled women depicted by Hollywood into individual women from specific locations, speaking the most appropriate dialect for each setting and context; the audience starts to pay more attention to the points the films are making. When that happens, the many commonalities between women world-wide become more clear. Nonetheless, access to 'Women's Cinema, World Cinema' remains limited to the festival and art house ecosystem because the commodification of film production as 'foreign' and 'feminine' positions it in relation to genre categories and market assumptions. In other words, domination of global consumption limits the circulation of 'Women's Cinema, World Cinema' and its potential for transformative change through the circulation of this culturally specific world cinema as in opposition to 'American imperial entertainment production' (White, 2015). Access to non-American translated or culturally repackaged cultural capital remains limited for Americans, and imperial generalizations of other women continue to affect our environments by reinforcing gender discrimination. This is to say that the imperial pop we are fed affects us at a transnational level; at the same time, one must wait for film festivals reserved for the privileged to access non-stereotypical content. Being that gender discrimination is a global problem, it is important to extend 'women's cinema, world cinema' from the festival space into the digital one and to make feminist knowledge easily accessible to all. Thanks to its technological capabilities, Hulu as an on-line platform facilitates access to knowledge through *Ramy* and becomes a mode of transnational communication to collectively expand a feminist knowledge of a region and its diasporas by offering knowledge previously omitted.

Conclusion

The main character in *Ramy* is male; representations of Dena in "Between the Toes" and in "3riana Grande", nevertheless foreground what I believe to be just the beginnings of more 'extreme' representations of Muslim women and their different 'realities. In *The TV Arab*, Shaheen points out that mainstream representation of Arab and Muslim women in the US revolves around the veiled, voiceless and oppressed one and neglects to include representation of other women with the same background(s) but with different lived experiences. The writer gives examples of the singer Um Kalthoum and women's rights pioneer Huda Sharawi (Shaheen 1984). Although impressive in terms of what they have accomplished, when it comes to representation geared at countering

stereotypes through everydayness however, neither life of neither woman is ordinary or relatable. The intent behind *Ramy* is to educate mass audiences about the diversity of Muslims; for a first-time viewer of the series who is unfamiliar with the religion of Islam, *Ramy* provides enlightening depiction of everydayness; content is proven to be relateable, as seen in the popularity of Muslim-American stand-up comedians who engage with the subject.

To mass audiences of North American Television and streaming comedy series, the internet series serves as new knowledge offered through depiction of everydayness and self-reflection previously inaccessible to audiences. The overall packaging and content of *Ramy* is that of a comedy series aimed at more than one target audience, including audiences uninterested in religion. The wide reach of *Ramy* as series subverting stereotypes is, I believe, accomplished through tailored portrayal of everydayness on major mainstream Television and Internet networks targeting non-Muslim viewers. The fact that the series cleverly addresses intra-Arab American relationships and differences by highlighting differences between levels of religiosity between Muslims, for example, in the scene where he is told to wash between his toes, and by including Dina's funny reaction to her brother's sudden interest in marriage, makes *Ramy* is amusing to both Muslims and non-Muslims.

Ramy exposes the public mind to alternate images and rhetoric reflecting the diversity of Muslims and Islam through representation of the everyday that is available for online streaming; and the everyday experience as described to non-Muslim audiences facilitates transition from colonial images of women to those reflecting the diverse realities of Muslim women from within contexts that depict different locations, ethnicities and socio-economic conditions.

Chapter 3
Anglo-American Muslim Stand-Up Comedy: Incongruity, Everydayness and Performativity

Introduction

As developed in previous chapters, Shaheen argues that the Western public is fed constructions of Islam as a "problem"; the terms "Arab" and "Muslim" are interchangeably used; Muslim men are depicted as terrorists; and Muslim women as veiled and oppressed. Much has been written on the generation and effect of stereotypes promoted by popular culture. However, stereotyped groups also use popular culture to speak for themselves. Popular culture also functions to resist, counter, and subvert stereotypes. In other words, the other can speak for him or herself through popular culture as a means of contesting stereotypes that define Muslims and Arabs in terms of cultural and religious understandings that narrowly categorize individuals through attributes such as religiosity and femininity (Abdelhadi 2011). This potential is being realized by second-generation Muslims familiar with the platforms created and provided by other marginalized groups in Anglo-American popular culture; and their work has come into its own especially in the aftermath of 9/11, a time that saw both the intensification of stereotypes and heightening of Muslim-American consciousness (Morin and Yaqin 2011, 35).

Stand-up comedy is a performance in which individual comedians use narrative consisting of fictional and semi-autobiographical jokes and stories to speak to audiences about various issues (Mintz 1985). Although the term "comedian" didn't come into being until the 1890s (Double 1991), stand-up comedy began in America in the 1840s, when minstrel shows incorporated blackface monologues of Jim Crow, a theater character created by Thomas D. Rice. Rice was an actor who studied African-American slave dance and music culture. His 1830s theatre performance of Crow, a slave who sang while working the fields, included him painting his face and hands black and singing a song that he also created, titled, "Jump Jim Crow" (Lewis 2009). Nonetheless, subsequent minstrel performances in the 1940s drawing on the Crow character did not include music and consisted only of monologue.

Ethnic stand-up became popular as early as the 1920s, with Mort Sahl (1927-1996) and Moms Mabley (1894-1975), then again with Lenny Bruce (1925-1966) in the 1950s. Moms Mabley is the first

female stand-up comedian and ventriloquist in the US. An African-American woman, her work addresses both race and gender (Williams 1995). Mort Sahl, who is Jewish-American, discusses US news and current events in his work; and Lenny Bruce addresses antagonism between the Irish and the British, amongst other topics (Limon 2000). Richard Pryor (1940-2005), whom I discuss in more depth later in this chapter, is especially known for turning the tables on the original form of minstrel stand-up by applying the humor of incongruity (addressed below) to stereotypes of African-Americans. His focus on race issues in the US in the 1970s and 1980s set the tone for a common trend among stand-up comedians from other marginalized communities (Jaclyn 2011).

Contemporary post-9/11 Muslim and Arab stand-up comedy builds on this long tradition in the Anglo-American sphere of ethnic and racial stand-up comedy by performers from marginalized groups, such as Jewish-Americans, African-Americans, and more lately, Asian-Americans, as well as feminist or proto-feminist comedy by female comedians. I begin with a review of the major figures and trends in Muslim-American comedy since its beginnings in 2003. This is followed by discussion of certain techniques and approaches that have been used by stand-up comedians to counter predominant and discriminatory perceptions of "Others". These techniques are incongruity, performativity, and everydayness. In each case, I provide examples of employment of the techniques by comedians working in the prior traditions, as well as use by contemporary Muslim comedians who are influenced by these approaches. I argue that contemporary Anglo-American Muslim stand-up is a combination of incongruity and performativity, as well as everydayness. Everydayness, as I will explain, is particularly vital to subversion of stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims in stand- comedy.

In the last section of this chapter, I focus in on case studies of British-Pakistani Shazi Mirza and Palestinian-American Tissa Hami, two of the handful of female Anglo-American Muslim comedians in the scene today, and how they draw on the tradition of "performativity" in ways similar to Jewish-American, African-American and Asian-American female performers to subvert the stereotype of the veiled and oppressed woman. All Muslim-American comedians engaged in stand-up as social critique perform themes relevant to the Arab=Muslim and terrorist stereotypes. Nonetheless, and because they are women, Hami and Mirza also include the "veiled and oppressed woman" stereotype.

The Marginalization of Muslim-Americans

The increase in the collective stereotyping of Arabs and Muslims post-9/11 is connected to a longer history of marginalization of Blacks in the US. Just as the Civil Rights Movement influenced African-American stand-up comedy, so Anglo-American Muslim stand-up comedy was born and became a full-fledged genre after the unfair and discriminatory collective backlash following the events of 9/11. The discrimination faced by Muslim-Americans may not be of the same kind and degree as discrimination experienced by African-Americans. Nevertheless, Islamophobia is a form of marginalization stemming from racialized stereotypes revolving around religion and appearance. Hence, Muslim-American comedians challenge common social perceptions in the context of Civil Rights by establishing the fact that the group they are speaking of is stereotyped (Mintz 1985). As I will explain in the next chapter on hijabi and hoodjabi hip-hop artists, there exists within the Black Arts Movement a movement known as Muslim Cool (Abdul Khabeer 2016, 115). Muslim performers use "Blackness" and Black performers add "Muslimness" to emphasize social justice and inclusion. The black rapper Queen Latifah adopts a Muslim name although she is not a Muslim, for instance. Muslim Cool music video artists, post–civil rights era performers continue the legacy against racial discrimination in the form of popular culture, with the understanding that the term "Black" is used in reference to the common experience of racism and marginalization across different ethnic communities. In terms of stereotypes of Muslims post-9/11, Muslim-American stand-up represents Muslims as Americans, who, like African-Americans, form part of a racial, gendered, and religious imaginary. As such, the Black Arts Movement, which is centered on social justice, is a suitable source of inspiration for Muslim-American stand-up, a genre of stand-up inspired by racial and religious discrimination.

Focusing on being Muslim and on being a minority is the main preoccupation of artists in the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Arts Movement and the Muslim Cool Movement. Thus Preacher Moss says: "Muslims, here's the scoop. Haters have been around for years and believe me, the same people that hate Muslims hated Asians, hated Latinos, hated blacks, hated Jews ... I'm African-American and Muslim. The United States is scared of two things: black people and Muslims." (Omidvar and Richards 2014). African Americans have been prominent creators of and participants in popular culture, including stand-up comedy. The association of Muslim stand-up with African-American culture through Muslim Cool and actual participation of Muslim African-American stand-up

comedians (as well as musicians, as we shall see in a subsequent chapter) is a powerful expression of solidarity and advocacy for freedom of religion.

The religious framing of the Arab as Muslim overrides the importance of differences between religion and ethnicity; the fact that Arabs are not always Muslim, and that there are Arabs of different races and colors as well as Muslims of different races is not often acknowledged (Schmidt 2014). A conscious decision made by stand-up comedians to focus their humor on Islam suggests using the platform for social change to affect opinions of both the tragic events of 9/11 and the intensification of stereotypes that followed. Encompassing Muslim-American humor, also referred to as "brown humor", Muslim stand-up is a collective effort by comedians of Muslim background aimed at reaching wide audiences to address Islamophobia, a social issue that affects Muslims and their communities on an everyday basis. Referring to the vilification of Islam as a "narrow-minded view of a religion", African-American comedian Dave Chappelle, who does not perform humor that is relevant to religion, decided to share how he converted to Islam at age seventeen and to comment on Islam being "a beautiful religion." In terms of level of religiosity, he says that he's "not particularly good at it". I note Chappelle's comment to point out that, since Islamophobia is such a widespread social issue, a comedian who has been a Muslim without ever having felt the need to mention it before, decided to bring it up at an interview after negative stereotypes of Muslims increased. An African-American, Chappelle is familiar with the historical problem of marginalization and racialization of groups of people in America.

Similarly pointing out the different ways minorities are viewed and treated, Indian-American Hari Kondabolu says that "there is such a high bar to prove something is a hate crime. . . . Did they say a racial slur? Can you prove its intent? Was there a video recording or was there a white witness— you know, an eye whiteness? Was whiteness present at the time? … Terrorism, on the other hand, has a very low bar." The comedian then goes on to explain, in his 2018 Netflix special, *Warn Your Relatives*, the difference between how white people and Muslims are perceived by pointing out that if "a white dude did the shooting, that's mental health issues."

Once persons are defined as Muslim or Arab, they are racialized, and the comedians recognize this. Obeidallah repeatedly reminds the audience that he is half Palestinian: I always tell people I'm not white now anymore. And they go: 'well you look white'. I

understand. But white to me in America is not skin color. It's status, it's the way you're treated in society." Therefore, to demonstrate his opposition to racism, and to demonstrate solidarity with the underdog, Obeidallah began to take Arabic lessons and to publicly identify as Palestinian instead of as white.

Referencing how Arabs have become "the new Blacks", Obeidallah jokes that the "coolness" implied behind being black makes the stereotype of the Arab/Muslim "terrorist" better. "Sure, we are police targets," but "oh my God, we're cool," so now "white kids in the suburbs" will "start act'n Arab with their friends, dressing Arab, wearing like traditional Arab headdress, tilted to the side to be cool, open shirt, gold chain, smelling like lamb." In other words, although African-Americans are stereotyped negatively as thugs and as a "social problem to be dealt with", the fact that they are front-runners and trendsetters in popular culture has also earned them the "cool" label as a group; and by being compared to blacks, Arab-Americans, are also, it is implied, "cool", despite the stereotype of terrorist. In the same way that blackness is extended to Muslimness by Preacher Moss and Dave Chappelle, Obeidallah's redefinition of Muslimness extends its meaning into that of coolness as associated with blackness.

Overview of Muslim-American comedy

This section gives a brief overview of Muslim-American stand-up comedy, which technically began with the solo act of Preacher Moss, an Africa-American convert to Islam, called, *Allah Made Me Funny,* created two years after 9/11, in 2003. Several studies have argued that Muslim-American stand-up began post 9/11 because that is when Muslims in America came into the limelight as a group. In "Muslim Ethnic Comedy: Inversions of Islamophobia", Mucahit Bilici states that "Muslim" comedy existed before 9/11, but the form of comedy known as "Muslim-American" comedy only emerged after that tragic event:

> Like every other ethnic group, the various Muslim communities had their internal humor, their own comedians. But they were completely obscure from the point of view of the larger society. They lacked both common language with and a reputation among mainstream audiences. Members of comedy troupes such as *Allah Made Me Funny* and *Axis of Evil* were comedians, but they were not 'American Muslim' comedians. They were either obscure ethnic comedians or generic mainstream ones (Blici 2010, 197).

Preacher Moss hoped that *Allah Made Me Funny* would educate audiences "about the truths of Muslims and non-Muslims' existence in America following 9/11, but also preceding it. *The Axis of Evil, The Muslims Are Coming!, The New York "Arab-American" Comedy Festival* and Netflix comedy specials *Mo Amer: The Vagabond* and *Warn Your Relatives* are all examples of what has now developed into a whole genre of Muslim-American stand-up comedy, the popularity of which is evident amongst viewers of stand-up comedy of both Arab/Muslim and non-Arab/Muslim backgrounds, on Netfix, Youtube, Vimeo, Twitter, and Imdb, among other digital platforms, as well as off-line in live performances across America and beyond. The titles of the various shows and tours deliberately include terminology indicative of Islam at a time when Islamophobia is on the rise. *Allah Made Me Funny* and *The Muslims Are Coming!*, for instance, include the words "Allah" and "Muslims"; and 2006 *Axis of Evil* is a spin on the Bush administration's 2005 label for Iraq, Iran and North Korea (Heradstveit and Bonham 2007). Indian-American Azhar Usman, of *Allah Made Me Funny*, explains, "The word 'Allah' ... is actually beautiful. And it is nothing more, nothing less than the Arabic word for God. So Allah Made Me Funny is the Muslim answer to God Made Me Funky." (Blici 2012, 177). Usman has been referred to as "America's Funniest Muslim" and one of the "500 Most Influential Muslims in the World."

In the words of Indian-American comedian Azhar Usman: "When you study the history of stand-up, you see how often it gets used as a tool, an art form for the underdog. Black American comedians, Jewish-American comedians, Latino comedians, women comedians, gay comedians, blue-collar Americans, Jeff Foxworthy and that whole hillbilly comedy tour… time and time again, you find that groups that are written off by mainstream America use comedy as a weapon. This is a way for them to speak truth to power – that quintessentially American thing to do. And that's what we're doing as well." (Amarasingam 2010, 463).

It might seem strange that such a non-humorous event as 9/11 would create an opening for comedy. Nonetheless, writings on this topic argue that the event was a turning point in general for subversion of Islamophobia by Muslim-Americans; and scholars on the topic, such as Bilici, Amarasingam, and Michael, argue that post-9/11 backlash is the driving force behind the creation of a stand-up that is "Muslim-American", per se (Blici 2010). Muslim-Americans are the most recent minority group in the US to be spotlighted negatively. Orientalist tropes of them did, however, exist before

9/11, as demonstrated earlier in this dissertation. They merely metamorphosed into stereotypes of Muslims as “terrorists”, as a threat to national security, post-9/11. This caused comedians of different Muslim backgrounds to adapt their stand-up routines to include new themes, contextualizing the humor in their jokes to the new Muslim-American situation and to the environment in which they and other Muslims would henceforth live.

Muslim-American comedy thus addresses common stereotypes and situations of Arabs and Muslims that intensified post-9/11, including “airport profiling and air traveling, Arab and Muslim alleged anger, terrorism, religious fanaticism, suicide bombing, etc. [in addition to] differences between their ethnic and religious groups.” (Micu 2012, 26). In other words, post-9/11 backlash affects people's lives on an everyday basis; and the decision by many comedians to self-identify as Muslim and address that identity in their work is a conscious one in response to those circumstances (Schmidt 2014). Because negative stereotypes affect the everyday lives of Arabs and Muslims, performers of stand-up comedy of diverse Muslim backgrounds who were not addressing topics related to being Muslim before 9/11 felt the need to turn to humor relevant to Muslim-Americans following the terrorist attack and subsequent backlash. As indicated by the title of Bilici’s *Finding Mecca in America: How Islam Is Becoming an American Religion*, Muslims actually became Muslim-American, that is discovered that identity, post 9/11 (Blici 2012, 177).

In 2003, Preacher Moss performed his *Allah Made Me Funny* at a comedy club in Washington, D.C. _Preacher Moss, who is also founder of the show *The End of Racism,* is “dubbed the 'new Dick Gregory' owing to his artistry, wit and insight into his cultures from around the world”. Dick Gregory (1932-2017) was an African-American comedian, anti-racist and vegetarian activist. In 2006, Preacher Moss's *Allah Made Me Funny* developed into a trio including comedians Indian-American Azhar Usman and Palestinian-American Mo Amer. *Allah Made Me Funny*, the troupe, is comprised of stand-up routines on what it's like being a Muslim in America after 9/11; and is considered to be the longest-running “Muslim-American” comedy tour, lasting from 2003, when the idea was conceived, up until 2011, when it was made into a film.

The year 2003 was also the point that Palestinian-Americans Dean Obeidallah and Maysoon Zayid founded *The New York Arab-American Comedy Festival*. *The New York Arab-American Comedy Festival* brings together Arab-American comedians from across the

US and, as per the website, was also created with the aim of overturning "negative images and stereotypes of Arab culture in post-9/11 America". The festival is specifically "Arab", instead of "Muslim-American". As discussed in Chapter 1, there seems to be limited knowledge of the fact there are Arabs who are non-Muslim (chiefly, Christians); and in my opinion, *The New York Arab-American Comedy Festival*'s focus on Arab comedians is an effort at overturning perceptions of Arabs as 'evil' but also the perception that "Arab = Muslim", a stereotype that is highlighted by Jack Shaheen (himself an Arab of Christian background) and other critics. One of the performers of Christian background at the festival, for example, is Sammy Obeid. Obeid is the creator of the work *Get Funny or Die Tryin*.

In 2006, only one year after the Bush Administration coined the phrase "the axis of evil", Egyptian-American comedian Ahmed Ahmed created *The Axis of Evil Comedy Tour. The Axis of Evil Comedy Tour* features Ahmed Ahmed, Palestinian-American Aron Kader, Iranian-American Maz Jobrani, and Palestinian-American Dean Obedallah. The comedians say that they hope their work casts Muslims in a more realistic and positive light. Indeed, *The Axis of Evil* has been described as crossing borders by reaching out to non-Muslim audiences and creating a stronger sense of solidarity between diverse Muslim identities (Willet and Willet 2019). Jobrani explains the difference between Arabs and Iranians. "I tell my American friends I'm Iranian, and they go, "Oh so you're Arab". And I go, "No, we're different. We're not Arab; but we're similar. We're all getting shot at, that's one thing. But Iranians, ethnically we're White. So stop shooting." And then my American friends go, "Well how can we tell you apart?" And I go, "It's in the accent. Iranians talk a lot slower. Arabs talk a lot faster." Jobrani is poking fun at the confusion between Arab as a race and Islam as a religion, between Arabs as people with origins in Arab countries and Muslims as followers of a faith.

In 2008, PBS released the film *Stand Up: Muslim American Comics Come of Age*, featuring Ahmed Ahmed, Azhar Usman, Dean Obeidallah and female comedians Iranian-American Tissa Hami and Palestinian-American Maysoon Zayid. The objective behind *Stand Up: Muslim American Comics Come of Age* is to debunk negative images of Muslims post 9/11. The work has been said to "leave no stereotype untouched". Comedians address fear of Muslims by non-Muslims and their own fears as Muslims in a post-9/11 world, where images of them are those of terrorists and threats. "In preparation for an emergency, please take a moment to look around and locate the

Muslim nearest you," jokes Hami, in reference to airport security. Ahmed Ahmed says "For Homeland Security, I try to look like I'm a patriot .. red, white, and blue, the baseball cap and the Adidas. I try to talk American and look American: go to the ticket counter and be like, "Hey! How y'all doin' man?"

Then in 2012, Dean Obeidallah and Iranian-American Negin Farsad co-created the comedy tour *The Muslims Are Coming!*, an obvious reference to the cry of Paul Revere who warned against the imminent invasion of the British at the beginning of the American Revolution, the implication being that Americans need to be warned of "invading" Muslims in order not to lose their liberty and country. The irony, of course, is that the show tells the audience that there is no need for alarm at all. *The Muslims Are Coming!* deals also with stereotypes of Muslims. *The Muslims Are Coming!* was made into a film-documentary in 2013, in which the audience is shown a road tour of Muslim-American performers of stand-up in the US and their conversations with locals. With the same goal of addressing Islamophobia, the comedians highlight everyday Muslim-Americans. "If you've never had a Muslim friend, this movie is your first Muslim friend, which is cheesy, but we're happy with that, we want that to be the case." (Zimbardo 2014).

In 2018, Indian-American Hari Kondabolu created the Netflix special *Warn Your Relatives*, a title which humorously advises the viewer (and viewer's family) that he is of "Other" background. Kondabolu discusses the racism that his immigrant parents went through in America, claiming that someone told his mother to "wipe that red dot off her face." One of his jokes is about how President Donald Trump's ban on travelers from Muslim-majority countries can be ended by the boy band One Direction, on the condition that they bring back the Muslim singer Zayn Malik, who left to pursue a solo career. "Then they have to plan a worldwide tour, including every major city in the US." Banning a whole religious group from America is obviously not a funny thing; Kondabolu deals with the event by ridiculing it in a humorous fashion.

In that same year, 2018, Mo Amer released the Netflix comedy special *Mo Amer: The Vagabond.* As a refugee seeking American citizenship, Amer, who is of Palestinian-Kuwaiti origin, travelled to do comedy for many years to other countries on a special document for refugees without a passport After waiting twenty years to obtain citizenship, Amer goes to his American History Immigration Exam. He describes the anxiety that he and Javier, a Latino whom he meets in the waiting room, feel while waiting their turn for the exam; and

he highlights Javier's concern at waiting two hours for his turn. Amer goes on to joke about anxiety-inducing questions forming part of the exam. “Have you or anyone else you know been involved with or given funds to, from the time period of 1933 to 1945, for the Nazi party?” “Have you or anyone else you know been given funds to a terrorist organization, Mr. Mohammed?” In these examples, we see that “Muslim-American” stand-up comedy is a genre of comedy that was created after 9/11 as a conscious decision on the part of Muslim-American comedians, and has been developing rapidly ever since.

The landscape of Anglo-American Muslim stand-up cannot be described without considering the Internet, which has created a space for stand-up comedy in the form of videos, films, and documentaries. Stand-up comedy shows that were only accessible in-person are now easily recorded and put on-line. The fact that much of the material is free also makes them more accessible. The worldwide popularity of Anglo-American Muslim stand-up comedy aimed at addressing stereotypes is therefore partly attributable to its digital landscape, to mainstream media, and to the fact that comedians own their own websites and do their own promoting on networking sites such as MySpace, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook and Instagram. Videos of Muslim comedians in the diaspora, as facilitated by technology and cyberspace, have thus been informing social perceptions by responding to stereotypes such as evil terrorist, Arab = Muslim and the veiled and oppressed woman.

The backgrounds of Muslim-American comedians

Comedians working in what may now be called a genre of Muslim-American comedy have diverse backgrounds. Comedians interviewed on whether they are Muslim mostly stated that they identify with Islam because they are of Muslim background. This was the response of a group of comedians, some practicing and some not, interviewed on the subject. Dean Obeidallah explained in the interview that he was raised mostly Christian, but that he had learned about Islam from his Muslim father. Palestinian-American Aron Kader explained that he has one parent who is Mormon, and one who is Muslim. Jobrani and Ahmed said that they were raised Muslim, as did Ramy Youssef, who featured in *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* in 2017. The comedian also performs in 2019 HBO comedy special *Feelings* and plays the character Ramy in Hulu series *Ramy*, which I discuss in Chapter 2. Concerning fear of Muslims encouraged by the media, Youssef jokes: “Have you guys seen our show? . . . *Fox News* or any of the news, really. They are all about us. I get why people are afraid of Muslims. Even if I watch for too long, I’m like, whoa.” (Willet and Willet 2019, 55) Youssef

both acknowledges the wide-spread fear of Muslims by non-Muslims and invites Muslims to put themselves in the shoes of non-Muslims by “seeing themselves” as they are seen by viewers on a mainstream media that continues disseminating negative images of them.

To demonstrate the diversity of Muslims and Muslim-Americans, one of Azhar Usman's jokes includes saying “Salaam” in African-American, Arab, Latino, White “new Caucasian Convert”, and Indian accents, “because truthfully, I believe you can tell how diverse the American Muslim community is just by listening to the way people say Salaam.”

These diverse backgrounds enable many different kinds of jokes; Muslim-American comedy is far from monotonous. Preacher Moss recounts his conversion to Islam and his Christian parents' reaction, which was to take him to Church. “I walked into the church and everybody knew I was Muslim, even the old ladies. I was like 'Hey, Mrs. Johnson!' and she was like [making a feminine voice] 'Hi, Satan!' [To the audience] You know is bad when you walk through and a whole choir is singing about you! [Singing and clapping like in black gospel music] 'Jesus help this fool 'cause his going to hell! Jesus help this fool 'cause his going to hell! [In high pitch, like a background singer] Heeeeeell! [Back to the previous pitch] Jesus help this fool 'cause his going tooooooo hell'.” (Blici 2010, 196).

Individual Muslim-American comedians performed before 9/11; but their performances did not focus on religion. Generic and non-religious themes shaped their performances. “Muslim-American stand-up comedy”, as such, involving themes such as “flying while Muslim” only began to take shape after the tragic event and the increased stereotyping of Muslims as a collective that followed (Zimbardo 2014). Before 9/11, Preacher Moss's show *The End of Racism* had existed for over twenty years https://bookamuslim.com/preacher-moss/; and the comedian was producing stand-up for African-American audiences and writing for Hispanic-American comedian George Lopez and Jewish-American Darrell Hammond in 1995. His work did not focus on Islam and on being Muslim-American as it does presently. Similarly, in 1999, Mo Amer won Houston's Funniest Person Contest, a contest involving general, non-religious themes that have nothing to do with perceptions of Muslims. It was only after 9/11 that Preacher Moss created the *Allah Made Me Funny* comedy tour, as well as the Islamic Scholarship fund for film and documentary-makers seeking to make their voices heard.

Obeidallah began performing generic stand-up in the late 1990s. After 9/11 however, he founded the "Arab-American" Comedy Festival and began to purposely refer to his Arab last name in his performances. "My last name is Obeidallah, I know many people here can relate to this, for the non-Middle Eastern people, do you know what it's like being of Arab heritage with a Muslim last name living in America the last few years? I could use a hug." Obeidallah says that after 9/11, "I thought to myself maybe I can be a comedy ambassador and introduce America to my culture."

Comedian Ahmed Ahmed switched careers from acting to stand-up because he was sick, he says, of being typecast as "terrorist #4" (Zimbardo 2014). Usman changed careers from law. Tissa Hammi switched from Wall Street; and to counter stereotypes of Muslim women, she purposely uses a veil in her performances, as does British-Pakistani Shazia Mirza, who has used the opening line: "Hi my name is Shazia Mirza, or at least that's what it says on my pilot's license."

Critical Reception

Comedians countering Islamophobia have been creating a space for non-Muslim viewers to form new understandings that place Muslims in alternate social and cultural contexts by highlighting the increasing social anxiety channeled toward Muslims and by addressing the Arab = Muslim, evil terrorist, and veiled and voiceless woman stereotypes. Due to world events, fear of the ethno-racialized Muslim passenger and the veil have become everyday topics that both Muslims and non-Muslims are familiar with; and in terms of critical reception, non-Muslims viewers have commended performers for their humor. Jobrani says that, "When we did the *Axis of Evil Comedy* tour….what's funny is, I went online to see what people were saying about the show, and I ended up on Sean Hannity's chat room, and one guy had written another guy, he said 'I never knew these people laughed', and if you think about it, you never see Middle Easterners laughing in American film or television, you know, maybe like an evil 'I will kill you in the name of Allah' (laugh), but never you know like a 'ha ha ha ha', so just that in itself, to have people realize that, that in itself is, I think, a little bit of progress". (Zimbardo 2014).

Muslims are apart of the intended audience for Muslim stand-up comedy; and reaction by Muslims to this body of work has also been mostly positive. Muslim viewers are supportive of Muslim-American stand-up comedians and "also grateful to them for painting a new image of their faith … Muslim standup comedians

are playing a role in breaking down cultural barriers, promoting inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue, as well as tackling the misperceptions about Muslim and Arab Americans in the United States" (Amarasingam 2010, 470).

Jokes by and about an ethnic group are appreciated by members of that group because they constitute an insider knowledge that few comedians who are not from that group possess. This insider knowledge permits the audience to identify with and relate to the comedian; there is a thrill, you might say, in recognizing oneself in a public representation in a humorous and thus positive way and feeling that others might appreciate the representation. Most or all of the jokes play this role, but examples are nevertheless instructive. Ramy Youssef, for example, says that he wishes Muslims prayed on Sundays. A non-Muslim audience may be familiar with the fact that Friday prayer is a big deal for practicing Muslims. What the non-Muslim viewer may not have considered, however, is how tricky that can be in terms of scheduling and how that balances out with being an American with Friday plans after a long week at work. Christians do not have that problem because they go to Church on Sunday, a day that precedes the start of a new workweek rather than celebrating its end. This is a dilemma a Muslim-American audience would not hear about from a comedian with a non-Muslim background. Another example of a joke from an insider's perspective that Muslim viewers can relate to is: "I think all Muslim people do this: You ever been watching television or a movie … at the end they start rolling the credits … suddenly you see a Muslim name. You get so excited! Saliiiiiim! Oh my God! His name is Salim!" Usman's point on limited representation of Muslims involved in the film industry is a valid one that may have not crossed a non-Muslim's mind.

A 2015 case study of college students of Muslim backgrounds claims that the comedians speak to Muslim-Americans through jokes in a way that allows them to "see themselves", to appreciate their upbringings, their ethnic backgrounds and religion, and their perceptions of stereotypes of Muslims. *Axis of Evil* humor, for example, includes jokes about prayer, drinking alcohol and eating pork. Comedian Aron Kader says that his father used to have to bribe him to learn chapters from the Koran; and in *Allah Made Me Funny*, Mo Amer stops mid-joke to pray. The Muslim interviewees indicated that they identified with the jokes related to them, particularly the one concerning pork that dealt with the fact that many Muslims commit sins such as drinking alcohol, but won't commit the sin of eating pork. Muslim interviewees could also relate

to jokes on perceptions of and lack of knowledge on Muslims by non-Muslims, such as Obeidallah's joke “Oh you’re Arab, but you look so nice!...Oh you’re Arab, what a coincidence, I love Indian food”.

With regard to female Muslim comedians, Muslim viewers highlighted Maysoon Zayid's jokes about marriage, for example when she says that a 33 year-old in American years is actually 67 years old in Arab years for a woman; implying that she is too old for marriage (Hussain 2015). Covered-up Shazia Mirza says “Muslim men won't marry me because I speak”, implicitly making fun of the stereotype of the “veiled and voiceless” woman. Mirza and Hami both incorporate veils and hijabs in their performances; and female Muslim viewers and interviewees who wear the hijab say that they particularly identify with the two comedians, referring to their work as “a whole new genre of stand-up” that Muslim women can relate to. Arguing that the incorporation of the veil and headscarf in stand-up contributes to a sense of normalcy by challenging stereotypes of Muslim women, one hijabi interviewee says, “It’s just like if someone was wearing a suit like – I guess it’s nice to see that cuz it kind of gives a different portrayal like it breaks stereotypes of you know the hijabi Muslim, she doesn’t talk she doesn’t do like anything. She just does – like she’s the oppressed but she’s doing – she’s acting like a normal person you know? So I guess– it, it helps in the image of Muslim women.” “I feel like people alienate Muslim women who wear hijab,” says another interviewee, “like okay, she’s a foreigner, she’s oppressed, or she doesn’t know what she wants. She’s being told what to do kind of thing. And here she is, she’s wearing it she’s a comedian. So I think it helps break that image of that mindset people have of Muslim women, especially those wearing the hijab.” (Hussain 2015, 40). In other words, Muslim viewers are accustomed to veiled and hijabi women's engagement in all kinds of careers; and because the stereotype of the veiled and voiceless woman is one of the most popular stereotypes of Muslims, comic subversion of the image is appreciated not only by female, by also male Muslim viewers. Asked about female comedians wearing the hijab, a male interviewee remarks: “It’s not an issue for a woman to wear a hijab and do any profession … I think it actually helps break stereotypes in my opinion you know. To people who see Muslims as very uptight people you know and they don’t really see Muslims right? It shows the diversity of Muslims you know? It shows here’s the Islam but Islam doesn’t mean a bunch of very strict people… Some people are not so strict, some people are very strict.”

However, a couple of interviewees in the study mentioned that it is

acceptable to employ the veil and hijab in stand-up as long as performers are aware that they are representing the Muslim community. “She (the performer) should like also be aware of like she carries a heavier role in what people will think of Islam. People notice that she’s a Muslim and they’ll be like extra sensitive to the things she says... As opposed to like someone – a random person wearing a hijab it would be a big deal since more people know her. There’s always going to be people looking for like something to like pick on kind of.” (Hussain 2015, 45). Here is a suggestion that there are limits to dealing with religion, or at least Islam, in comedy. In fact, while both Tissa Hami and Shazia Mirza use the veil and hijab in their performances, some reactions to Mirza in particular have been negative. She has both received hate mail from male Muslim viewers and been verbally and physically attacked during performances because of the sexual nature of some of her jokes (Jaclyn 201).

Nonetheless, overall, Anglo-American Muslim comedians continue to be supported by the majority of Muslims who understand and identify with jokes that include an insider's perspective. Support continues during the COVID crisis, with viewers going on-line to attend shows. For instance, in 2020, the Concordia Forum at Concordia University in Montréal, Canada hosted *The Socially Distant Eid Comedy Night*, which brought together approximately forty performers of Muslim background with the aim of “lifting the spirits” of Muslims who could not gather with family during Ramadan and the Eid because of COVID. At this event, Canadian-Muslim comedian Salma Hindy humorously pointed out the similarities between COVID precautionary measures, such as covering one's face, maintaining one's distance and washing one's hands, to Shari'a law.

Comedic techniques

Comedy that aspires to reveal and reverse stereotypes involves more than “making jokes”. It is a subtle and highly skilled art that requires the conscious use of techniques. I argue that three techniques figure prominently in contemporary Anglo-American Muslim stand-up: incongruity, performativity, and everydayness. As we saw above, Muslim-American comedians follow in a tradition of using this type of popular culture to present their own worlds and concerns. Thus in each case, I provide examples of employment of these techniques by previous comedians from other marginalized groups, such as Jewish-Americans and African-Americans, as well as examples by contemporary Muslim comedians who take them up.

Before proceeding to the three techniques, it will be useful to define and discuss superiority humour. I introduce it because Muslim-American comedians do not employ abjection humour, which is related to superiority humour (see below), because superiority humour has long been used against Muslims and Arabs. Thus they recognize that some persons, including even perhaps members of their audiences, consider Muslims inferior or strange (and themselves superior and "normal") and set out to undermine that attitude. In other words, Muslim-American comedy rejects and moves beyond superiority humor.

Superiority humour has a long history. Plato, for instance, wisely observed that laughter at others indicates ignorance of others. O.J. Double traces superiority humour through philosophers such as Aristotle, Cicero, and Hobbes, who explained that perceived flaws in other people make one feel superior or better about oneself, thus causing one to laugh (Double 1991, 11-15). Rhetoricians Quintilian and William Hazlitt are amongst many critics of superiority who perceive it to be hostility and derision disguised as humor, while the ethnologist Konrad Lorenz argues that the technique is instinctively aggressive. "This is the essence of 'putdown' humor", writes Communications professor Joanne Gilbert. "Putting the 'object' or butt of a joke 'down' raises the subject or teller of the joke 'up'." (Gilbert 1997, 326).

In the case of superiority humor specifically aimed at minority groups, Hungarian-British novelist and journalist Arthur Koestler (d. 1983) argues that it reflects an instinctive dislike by the comedian of "physical or mental malformations" on the part of the comedian as well as on the part of the audience which finds the jokes funny. He explains that "a joke is funny if it esteems a group to which the individual belongs, or a group with which the individual identifies (a 'Reference Group'); similarly, it will not be found funny if it disparages a group to which the individual belongs, or a group taken as a reference group by the individual." (Double 1991, 15-20). Whether one finds jokes that use superiority humor aimed at minorities to be funny is relative. If a joke puts down a group the audience dislikes, does not know well or cannot relate to, the viewer perceives that joke to be funny. But if the joke puts down the viewer's own community, they will see the joke as hostile or as racist. Superiority humour evidently does not allow all spectators to take part in the laughter.

John Limon identifies a kind of humour common in American standup from the 1960s forward he calls "abjection". Limon's theory

is complex, but the aspect that is useful for our discussion here concerns the relation of abjection to superiority humour. Abjection is related to superiority, but includes self-deprecation. Limon believes that much of American stand-up in its heyday in the mid-twentieth century depended on abjection and gives examples from male comedians of Jewish background, who dominated stand-up at that time. These artists performed Jewish stereotypes in their routines, for instance by parodying Yiddish accents. Not all viewers, however, get the joke of abjection humour. Some continue to understand superiority, rather than realizing that the stereotype is being subtly undermined.

Although comics argue that they make fun of everyone and everything, abjection does not work for everyone in the audience (or at least a diverse audience). As Willett and Willett say, "Those who do not share the comic's perspective may find the humor offensive and fuel for their own outrage, or they may miss the irony entirely." (Willet and Willet 2019, 27). Abjection humor thus does not necessarily result in the subversion of stereotypes. Most seriously, abjection risks insulting parts of the audience: the targeted group as well as "politically correct" spectators, since it continues to contain some measure of objectification and subjectivity (a term used by scholars of humour to refer to jokes that speak to one audience only by putting others down), as well as aggressivity. This is important to note because it is precisely the absence of objectification and subjectivity in incongruity humor, which I discuss in more depth in the next section, that gives it its ability to establish a "known" platform (that is, a common understanding) upon which the entire audience can "get" a joke.

Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that some scholars of popular culture have deemed abjection humour, with its element of put-down, essential to both ethnic and feminist stand-up. As Joanne Gilbert puts it: "Many critics of humor seem to forget that they are analyzing *jokes* – humorous discourse that reminds the audience not to take it (or themselves) seriously with every punchline. Indeed, humor is a rhetoric unique in its ability to undermine its own power with the "only joking" disclaimer. Critics, especially those most adamantly opposed to self-deprecatory humor, however, appear to overlook that fact that *these are the jokes, folks*!" (Gilbert 1997, 326). This does not, however, appear to be the view of diasporic Muslim and Arab comedians working in the Anglo-American sphere. I would contend that their avoidance of "abjection" actually contributes substantially to their success. Knowledge that "abjection" is a form of humor that is not well-received by everyone informed

the Muslim-American comedians' decision. The objective is to reach and educate as wide and varied an audience as possible; hence, to refrain from "abjection" is to refrain from alienating spectators and to ensure winning all target audiences over.

Incongruity

Incongruity is a form of humor that demonstrates how common presumptions about a targeted group are "inappropriate, absurd or inverted" (Jaclyn 2011, 69). This is accomplished through a process that involves the collision of frames of reference amongst spectators (Zimbardo 2014), the concept of incongruity itself involving making frames of reference, or patterns of thought, collide (Double 1991). Incongruity and its sometimes humorous effects is a subject that has long been discussed, by figures such as philosopher Francis Bacon (d. 1626), Thomas Hobbes (d. 1679), Francis Hutcheson (d. 1746), David Hartley (d. 1757), James Beattie (d. 1803), Soren Kierkegaard (d. 1855), Arthur Schopenhauer (d. 1860) and Arthur Koestler (d. 1983). Incongruity, it is argued, is the most subversive form of humor, since it plays with the social and cultural contexts of both the minority and majority, so that jokes that employ it can succeed in getting spectators to identify with both the comedian and the target of the joke (Zimbardo 2014). Incongruity is, above all, an inclusive form of humor, which requires the artist to be cognizant of and deploy knowledge of the cultural contexts of an audience. What is considered humorously incongruent in one country, era, age group, ethnic population (and so on) depends on how it plays off of that particular culture and context, and is likely to be not funny or even incomprehensible to others (Jaclyn 2011).

Incongruity, as explained above, consists of making frames of reference, or patterns of thought, collide. Thus the success of each joke relies on deviation from what is perceived as "normal" or expected. Without understanding of the context in which both the humor and performance take place, there is no guarantee that the incongruity, unexpectedness, absurdity or clash of concepts that makes audiences laugh will occur. The clashing of concepts in incongruity only happens when the artist understands what is normal. In other words, to point out an absurdity of a stereotype, comedians needs to know what the audience will consider incongruous or absurd (Double 1991). Acknowledging what is "normal" and "abnormal" at the beginning of a joke hence guarantees that its absurdity will clearly shine through and have the desired effect.

Starting with common knowledge, jokes employing incongruity make a point through a shared ground upon which an experiential

understanding with an audience can take place. This common ground is then combined with autobiography (Zimbardo 2014). As discussed in Chapter 1, "frames", or windows, through which spectators understand a joke or film, are created through already existing patterns of thought (Schmidt 2014). Framing is widely employed by creators of media content and writers of autobiographies for explaining complex topics (Double 1991). By drawing on pre-existing patterns of thought, framing reduces the complexity of a topic, which permits audiences to process information more easily; and the understanding that results from simplification of a topic is argued to, in turn, to alter cognitive frames and perceptions.

Jokes employing incongruity are based on the premise that absurdity and juxtaposition of words and ideas drawing on pre-existing knowledge make people laugh. Framing an incongruous joke in this way depends on three elements: a shared common knowledge; absurdity; and autobiography (Double 1991). I discuss everydayness as an important characteristic of autobiography in a subsequent section. What is important to note here is that the aim behind incongruity humor is that new collective knowledge and understanding of where the stereotype comes from is stronger than illogical fear, and that this new understanding can cause an alteration in social perceptions (Willet and Willet 2019). A mismatch of concepts, language or logic recognized through a shared knowledge results in a collision of "frames of reference", "associative contexts", "types of logic", "codes of behaviour", or "universes of discourse" (Zimbardo 2014, 63), and such collisions only occur when social and cultural notions of "normal" and "abnormal" are taken into account.

According to Limon, Richard Pryor (1940-2005), an African-American, was the first stand-up comedian to apply the humor of incongruity to the topic of race (Limon 2000). Comedians from minority groups are able immediately to perceive deviations from common sense in stereotypes because they are underdogs amongst the majority themselves. This kind of insight is shaped by both insider and outsider knowledge, so that the comedian is able to speak to a minority group while explaining minority life to the majority group (Zimbardo 2014). Pryor demonstrates close familiarity with not only Black, but also White culture; familiarity with the majority culture is, in fact, needed by minorities to function and survive. Pryor does not use what Limon terms abjection humour because he comes from an "abjected" race himself. He uses the humor of incongruity instead. With both black and white spectators in the

audience, his performances involve wearing a cap that is half black and half white. As Limon puts it, rather than employing incongruity, Pryor's work "pollutes all distinctions between the dead and the living, whites and blacks, prehistory and modernity, the vertical and the horizontal". Limon illustrates his point with the following comedic bit:

> Look at the white people rushing back! This is the fun part for me when the white people coming back after the intermission find that [n-word] stole their seats. [One of Pryor's white voices, nasal:] 'Weren't we sitting there, dear?' [Black gangster voice:] 'Well, you ain't sittin' here now, motherfucker.

By presenting both black and white characters in his routine and by drawing on a racist cliché of black lawlessness, Pryor mocks societal white privileges, such as getting the best seats in a show. By imagining Blacks taking the good seats from Whites, he creates a scenario in which racial roles are reversed (Limon 2000, 84). Framing a scenario in which racial roles are reversed by drawing on shared knowledge of inequalities as seen or experienced on a daily basis in American society is a tactic that enables spectators from both minority and majority groups to see the absurdity of racism.

Continuing a historical tradition of subverting stereotypes through stand-up, Muslim-American comedians are the most recent ethnic group explaining what it means to be a minority by pointing out irrationalities in stereotypes through deviation from what is perceived as "normal" or expected. Stressing differences between the perceived Muslim and the "real" Muslim on stage, comedians fully familiar with both American and Muslim cultures address both Muslim and non-Muslim audiences. Anecdotes from a marginalized minority reiterate the absurdity of stereotypes as addressed by other minorities in the past; and comedians' insider knowledge enables them to share experiences as "Otherized" Muslims self-positioning themselves in ways that offer audiences new insights. Of course, this also involves actively building "common knowledge" by informing audiences about aspects of Islam and Muslim life, which they are more likely to be unfamiliar with than with black culture, a point humorously brought home by Azhar Usman in the *Allah Made Me Funny* comedy tour: "We gotta do a better job in explaining ourselves. Do you ever think about how ridiculous you sound when you go to your boss to ask for a day off for Eid but you don't know which day it is?"

In “Muslim Ethnic Comedy: Inversions of Islamophobia”, Mucahit Bilici also observes that there is, overall, a lack of “common sense” on the part of the non-Muslim majority, that is a social consensus and social vision shared with the Muslim (or Arab) minority (Bilici 2010, 197). The Anglo-American public, as suggested in the previous paragraph, is not very familiar with Islam and the life of Muslims or Arabs. How then to find the shared understanding or platform that is necessary to deploy incongruity? Willett and Willett suggest and Bilici at least implies that common ground is found in fear; this is something the majority, non-Muslim and non-Arab audience immediately recognizes (Willet and Willet 2019). Therefore, Muslim-American comedians frame their work in a way that strategically shares culturally determined fears in a post-9/11 climate, and then proceed to point out the absurdity of stereotypes and by making viewers' frames of reference collide. The comedians establish common ground more surely by letting it be known that they themselves experience fear in such situations: explicitly, fear of being mistaken for a terrorist, but also implicitly (reading between the lines of such jokes) actual fear of terrorism. “I get why people are afraid of Muslims. Even if I watch [the news] for too long, I’m like, whoa,” (Willet and Willet 2019, 55) confesses comedian Ramy Youssef.

Incongruity is an ideal approach to subversion of stereotypes in the case of Muslim stand-up artists since it is aimed at establishing a new collective understanding of where a stereotype comes from that is stronger (so the artists hope) than the illogical fear initially presented (Willet and Willet 2019). When recognizable social attributes given to a group of people - Muslims, for example - clash with a stereotype (in this case, the Muslim-Arab terrorist), the audience perceives the absurdity that the comedian is attempting to point out. Muslim stand-up artists begin by drawing on “social signification”, or common stereotypes, to ensure that everyone is on the same page (Schmidt 2014). Then, as the “Other” standing immediately before the audience on stage, they offer different perspectives by emphasizing the lack of common sense in stereotypes; and in this way, spectators are put in a position in which they question their own patterns of thoughts and assumptions about the stereotyped group.

To re-cap the workings of incongruity before proceeding to additional examples: A joke is only effective if the audience can understand it and relate to it on some level (Gilbert 1997). This is why incongruity requires knowledge of the audience's culture and patterns of thinking (Double 1991). Enabled, in their own culturally

hybrid position, by their knowledge of not only Muslim-American but also American culture, Muslim-American stand-up artists are able to speak to both audiences simultaneously. Stand-up humor drawing on a long history of American marginalization of minority groups is thus used to address both insider and outsider audiences. Offering understandings of both the majority view and that of the underdog, the use of incongruity humor in Muslim-American stand-up comedy reveals the illogic and actual absurdity of stereotypes. Thus, thanks to its cultural contextualization, the humor of incongruity is a form of social communication that reaches wider and more diverse audiences than abjection humor.

Dean Obeidallah acknowledges his own subversive use of incongruity (which he calls "absurdity"), explaining that, "subverting is what comedy does…I think there's a lot of absurdity inherent in the assumptions people make, which makes it easy to make jokes about—through naming it or claiming it". Describing his employment of the technique, Obeidallah says: "For me to get up on stage and be like "I'm Muslim, so look out!" you know, it's ridiculous, playing with hyperbole…Comedians are in a great position to reveal a lot of that absurdity…I mean humanize is such a tricky word because obviously (laughter) I think it does allow people to see Muslims as people rather than as stereotypes (Amarasingam 2010, 463). In more technical terms, Obeidallah tells how Muslim-American stand-up comedy employs, with great effect, a strategy of framing that makes patterns of thought collide in order to reverse stereotypical thinking and to establish what Bilici calls "common sense".

A joke about Americans by British-Pakistani comedian Shazia Mirza provides an illustration of the comedic technique of incongruity (or absurdity) described by Obeidallah. Mirza begins the joke by presenting a piece of information that both American and non-American audiences are aware of. She plays on the common perception of Americans as lacking in knowledge of geography and other countries and cultures. "An American told me, "When are you going back to India, Paki?" Now, I know the Americans are bad at geography, but that is taking the piss. I started talking to her, and she said, "I know what you mean. I used to live in Islam once"." By presenting the American character as confused about whether Islam is a religion or a place and unaware that there is a difference between India and Pakistan, Mirza does three things. First, she establishes a common ground with her audience by acknowledging the limited importance supposedly assigned by the average American to other countries; second, she highlights the lack

of “common sense” in the question and comment; and third, she vividly expresses, using language that is a bit humorous, her own frustration as a Pakistani visiting America: “I know the Americans are bad at geography, but that is taking the piss.” India and Pakistan have a very long on-going conflict (over Kashmir); therefore, to a Pakistani like herself, confusion between India and Pakistan is absurd, similar to the absurdity that an American would see in confusion between Connecticut and California. The “new knowledge” that is communicated here is that Muslims are particular people in particular locations, rather than one undifferentiated mass.

Drawing on her experiences traveling in the post-9/11 era, Mirza brings our attention to another absurdity: not wanting to be seated near a Muslim woman on a plane. The common ground or platform here, as explained above, is fear. Added to this is the stereotype of a veiled Muslim woman, who is presented in popular culture not only as oppressed, but also frightening because she is associated with the culture from which terrorists emerge. “Sitting three rows behind a “terrorist” does not make you any safer,” is Mirza's “reality check” to her audience. The hope behind incongruity humor is that common sense is stronger than illogical fear.

Similar to Pryor's deployment of the humour of incongruity by playing on differences between white and black people in America, Anglo-American Muslim comedians often use differences between “whites” and Muslims in their routines. Muslims are evidently not a racial group; but they are often racialized as such, so the comedians are able to begin with that common platform, which the audience is already familiar with through the work of African-American stand-up artists. Dean Obeidallah jokes: “There’s a difference between us and white people. White people never suffer as a group when a few people do something bad in their group. Middle-Eastern people do. And honestly, white people... let’s be honest, you have a fair share of bad things: corporate scandals, President assassination, NASCAR, Paris Hilton, country music... That is audio terrorism to me.” By juxtaposing post-9/11 Islamophobia with well-known symbolic artifacts of American popular culture, Obeidallah speaks to both Muslim-American and non-Muslim American audiences. The non-Muslim audience readily understands the ridiculousness of Hilton, country music (and so on) as terrorism inflicted by Americans, and may consequently realize the ridiculousness of considering all Muslims to be terrorists.

As the more evidently white son of Muslim converts, Ahamed

Weinberg plays on race in a different way, by showing the absurdity of racialization of Muslims itself. The shared platform with the audience is that he *is* white, as well as (going back to Pryor) the now widely recognized truth that whites are privileged. “I'm a White Muslim. It's an interesting reality. First of all, my name is A*ha*med not Mohammed, which is more confusing, I know ... If I looked Muslim, my life would be much harder. But I'm White, and it's great. I think that's the secret. If you wanna be Muslim, just be white, have red hair, and make sure your last name is Weinberg. Being White is an advantage. It's like having a motorcycle in the traffic jam of races.”

Performativity

Judith Butler has famously proposed that the repetition of individual and collective acts constitutes the concepts of femininity and masculinity and grounds identity in social temporality. According to Butler, definitions of the body are cultural constructions consisting of how one acts, or performs. “The gendered body”, Butler writes, “acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives.” (Butler 1988, 526). Butler’s concept of performativity is useful for the study of stand-up comedy. Stand-up is an "act", and a theatrical one at that, which reflects individual and collective experiences that constitute social reality through language, mannerisms, and other symbolic artifacts. The interpretation of acts in society maybe compared to interpretation of scripts in stand-up and other types of theatrical performances. For instance, drag artists (an example given by Butler herself) use performativity to challenge concepts of masculinity, relay novel understandings of gender, and re-define identities.

Butler’s attention to the ways norms may be displaced by performing them in a different way is crucial to the analysis here. In Butler’s telling, notions of gender are continuously created and re-created; and perceptions of the body are culturally perceived and determined through repeated acts relevant to gendered existence. Nonetheless, if these acts are performed and/or repeated in another way through other channels, socially or culturally construed definitions are subverted (Butler 1988). Drawing on the familiar, or on pre-existing knowledge, stand-up artists therefore write and re-write comedic scripts to offer new meanings of their identities.

Performativity has been a useful tool for feminist comedians. With a career in stand-up that began in the 1960s, Jewish-American Joan Rivers, for instance, employs performativity by engaging her

audiences through a linguistic framing that is conversational. Rivers uses repetition of certain expressions such as “look at that person”, “C’mon”, “I’m so glad”, “Am I wrong?” to communicate immigrant Jewish-American identities and feminist issues such as aging, parenthood, and self-image. Her conversational style of performativity, which Adetunji characterizes as “addressivity”, creates a space for her spectators to partake in her routine by, for example, “looking at that person” (Akin 2016). Rivers performs (in Butler’s term, repeats and re-enacts) a well-known aspect of femininity, that of the catty woman, the “bitch”, but as she repeats that act, she subverts it by making it into truthful telling while gradually drawing the audience into that truth.

The work of African-American Whoopi Goldberg provides another example. Goldberg performs being black and female by embodying different characters in her stand-up routines. In her 1985 one-woman show, *Whoopi Goldberg: Direct from Broadway*, she plays “Fontaine,” the “Junkie,” the “Surfer Chick,” the “Little Girl,” the “Jamaican Woman,” and “the Cripple.” Each of these characters represents a stereotype of African-American femininity that Goldberg repeats, but subtly subverts through exaggeration (somewhat similar to drag performance) and putting it in a different context, i.e. in a performance, expected to be funny, by a Black woman recognized to have some wisdom. Using performativity where both Blackness and femaleness are involved is a delicate operation, given prejudice against African-Americans, and African-American female stand-up artists are said to write their comedy scripts with black feminist writers such as Alice Walker and Patricia Hill Collins in mind in order to facilitate performing of the experience of being both Black and a woman (Blackburn 2018).

Paula Poundstone's 1995 HBO Harvard performance includes using a stool as a prop in order to initiate a conversation with her audience on what to do with her body. Should she stand behind or in front of her stool? Should she sit on it? If so, which leg goes on what rung? https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0358630/ A tactic common amongst female comedians, playing dumb is one way of ensuring that the men in the audience aren't too offended (Limon 2000). Poundstone performs the dumb female, her performance being “at once a reenactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established”. But she does it “in a different manner, designed to alter to undermine it” (Butler 1988, 526). She enacts the dumb female in a different way by evidently exaggerating it, using the same stool throughout her performance to behave as if she has no idea what to do with her own body. As that act is repeated in

different, increasingly exaggerated ways, the socially established meaning is undermined. In this and the previous example, we see that stand-up comedians engage with performativity to demonstrate differences between dominant and marginal cultures, regardless of whether the oppressive factors in these cultures have to do with racism or sexism.

By the same token, and following in the footsteps of Jewish-American and African-American comedians, female Muslims employed in the tradition of stand-up challenge the concept of difference through performativity. As discussed in Chapter One, Muslim women and their choice of clothing are constantly highlighted in debates on difference in the West. As Schmidt puts it, "The intersection of race, religion, and womanhood culminates in the image of the veiled woman." (Schmidt 2014, 55). Stereotypes of Muslim women also suggest that they cannot speak for themselves (Abdulhadi 2011). Indeed, not only the agencies of Muslim women, but their very realities and individualities are overlooked. This echoes the concern of African-American feminism that White feminism neglects black, poor, and queer women and does not keep intersectionalities of race, class, and sexuality in mind (|Blackburn 2018). Comedians Tissa Hami and Shazia Mirza use a veil, or more precisely, the act of wearing a veil, in their performances to re-enact this cluster of socially established meanings. But they do it in a different manner. Simply wearing a veil in a comedy club, a space that is completely unexpected and almost inevitably includes the drinking of alcohol and perhaps even a bar, alters the performance. The use of the veil in a comedy club draws on religious attire that spectators are familiar with, while juxtaposing it with a non-religious (as well as non-political) space (Morey and Yaqin 2011, 35). Both women also remove the veil at some point in their routines – and then, in some cases, put it on again. A veiled woman obviously doesn't wear a veil all the time; she puts it on, takes it off, and puts it on again in the normal course of her life. In this sense, it is a repetition of a normal performance, but done in a different manner, i.e. in front of the audience, it undermines the stereotype of non-agency or lack of choice – and certainly silence, since the performer both exhibits and comments on the act. Hami actually refers to the removal of her veil on-stage as a "strip-tease", thus emphasizing control of her own body.

I conclude here by acknowledging that although performativity, incongruity, and everydayness are discussed separately in the chapter for analytical purposes, they work in tandem in the stand-up routines. For instance, Hami deploys incongruity by drawing on the

“common knowledge” that women in Muslim countries are stoned and making the incongruous, absurd answer to the question, “Why aren't there more female Muslim stand-up comedians?”, “I didn't want the competition, so I stoned them” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DLV4dCAXZ1c. As a veiled woman referring to stoning, she performs a pious Muslim (or the stereotype thereof), but her performance is different and undermines the accepted meaning by virtue of incongruity.

Everydayness

Nouri Gana points out that Arab-American and Arab-Muslim life narratives, i.e. biography and autobiography, especially impact public discourse because they reveal multiple everyday experiences instead of a single representation (Gana 2009). This point is significant because comedy, and perhaps especially ethnic comedy since it necessarily includes self-reference, is highly autobiographical. “Stand-up comedy”, Gilbert contends, “is a powerful form of autobiographical performance unique in its simultaneous construction of personal identity and cultural critique.” (Gilbert 1997, 329).

Everydayness is especially relevant to and effective in the routines of Muslim-American stand-up artists because dealing with stereotypes and vilification has become an everyday element of Muslim life. Therefore, as they follow in the footsteps of their peers from other minority groups, Muslim-American comedians also consciously engage with the technique of everydayness. Autobiographical everydayness establishes rapport with the audience and challenges stereotypes about Muslims as a collective by highlighting daily experiences of individuals. “We are talking to white Americans, we are saying ‘this is what it's like to be Arab post 9/11 in the United States’,” explains Maysoon Zayid (Jaclyn 2011, 118).

“Flying while Muslim” is an instance of everydayness frequently engaged in Anglo-American Muslim stand-up comedy. Travel and going to the airport is an everyday experience for Muslims, as for others. Azhar Usman, a member of the *Allah Made Me Funny* troupe referred to above, highlights how travel is a common, everyday, part of the life of a stand-up artist in particular: “I love being a comic but I tell you what my least favorite thing is all the travelling, ok, and the worst part about it is the moment when I have to walk into the airport. Come on people, you can write your own joke right there”. Usman is evidently referring to racial profiling, which increased after 9/11, when people who “look Muslim” (Usman himself has a

very substantial beard) were regarded as suspicious and singled out for searches. “The minute I get on a plane, people are in shock,” Usman jokes. “Whenever I get on a plane”, Ahmed Ahmed says, “I always know who the air marshal is. It's the guy holding *People Magazine* upside down looking right at me” (Omidvar and Richards 2014). “Are you selected for random search even when you are dropping a friend at the airport?” asks Dean Obeidallah (Yasser 2014). What Obeidallah is saying is that this is his everyday life, his normal. “Dress white, make your flight”, he advises. “It means two words: Banana Republic, my friends. Khaki pants, polo shirt with a little animal like an alligator or a tiger. No camel.”

Similarly, references are made to the new Muslim disease, “9/11-itis”, where one is afraid to go to the mosque or to wear a headscarf. Being profiled and scapegoated in an Islamophobic environment has become a common, everyday experience. As a cerebral palsy patient who is also Palestinian, Maysoon Zayid has her own autobiographical twist on the everyday experience of being profiled. “I am not afraid to go to Palestine! I am afraid to go to Newark Airport!”, she says. “Because when I walk into an airport, security sees an Arab trying to board a plane, and we don’t have a good record. And they don’t see just an Arab, they see a shaky Arab, and they’re like, that bitch is nervous!” (Jaclyn 2011, 122).

Despite their fears, Anglo-American Muslim performers of stand-up comedy continue to travel, and the popularity of post-9/11 comedy tours such as *Allah Made Me Funny* and *The Axis of Evil* has led to even more travel. In his article “Laughter the Best Medicine: Muslim Comedians and Social Criticism in Post-9/11 America”, Amaringth Amarasingam concludes that Islamophobia is a major contributing factor to the increase in travelling by Muslim-American stand-up artists. “Such ignorance has put Muslim comedians into overdrive – they tour excessively, do dozens of interviews every week, and are dedicated to promoting a better image of Arab and Muslim Americans” (Amarasingam 2010, 470). The comedians incorporate this aspect of autobiographical everydayness into their routines.

Family and marriage are also a fundamental part of autobiographical everydayness, as in the examples from literature above. The outstanding solicitousness of Muslim and Arab parents is a favourite topic. It is relatable since anyone who has parents has particular or peculiar relations with them and has to negotiate those relations. Referring to the increase in concern and worry for one's children during the COVID-19 pandemic, Egyptian-Canadian Muslim

comedian Salma Hindy jokes that her parents have, since the global outbreak, obtained PhDs in WhatsApp to frequently touch base (the joke has an “in” part, i.e. the fact that WhatsApp is wildly popular throughout the Middle East across the generations).

Several comedians share their parents' reactions to their offsprings' choice of stand-up comedy for a career. “My dad, when we started out, he didn't know what I was doing — he just knew that I shook and was in a club,” says Maysoon Zayid. “So he asked me, ‘Are you a stripper?’ When he found out I wasn’t stripping he was ecstatic. He was like, ‘OK, you’re just telling jokes and your pants are on?’” With regard to her mother, she says. “I’ll go on ‘60 Minutes,’ and whereas other parents would be like, ‘You did a great job, I’m so proud of you,’ my mother will be like, ‘Your hair — it was not nice.’”

As for marriage, Shazia Mirza, characterizing her father as a Saddam Hussein-type figure, jokes: "He had this regime going at home. He told my mother, ‘You've got to get your daughter into the kitchen, to teach her to cook and clean, or no one will want to marry her.’ He told me: ‘The only way you're going to get a decent husband is if you're in a decent profession yourself.’ “Good thing I got married before Trump’s Muslim ban went into effect”, Mirza says. “My husband is an Arab Muslim refugee who came here on a K1 fiance visa. If Trump had his way, I would die a virgin.” Again, controversy with family about marriage and concerns with marriage or “love life” are a part of the everyday of many or most people of all cultures, but not quite in the same ways in a Muslim family Mirza humorously depicts.

By including examples of everydayness from their own lives that spectators can relate to, comedians hope to subvert common stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims and present images of themselves as “normal”. Azhar Usman, in fact, makes this explicit in his closing words in performances in the “Allah Made Me Funny” tour: **“**We say this all the time at the end of the shows, we tell the audiences that once you've watched the show and you've been with us, you are now officially part of the Allah Made Me Funny family, and that's because all of us are a family," he explains.”unconventional

Conclusion

Stand-up comedy, depending on the form of humor used and topics chosen, can be a means of relaying information about different cultures and identities (Sjöbohm 2008). With the aim of countering Islamophobia, Muslim-American comedians, working principally after 9/11, have thus been creating a space for their audiences to

form new understandings that place Muslims in social and cultural contexts different from what they might have initially imagined. Offering perspectives as the Other by emphasizing the absurdity of common perceptions puts audiences in a position in which they (hopefully) begin to question their own assumptions of the stereotyped group. Highlighting the increasing social anxiety channeled toward Muslims as a group, Anglo-American Muslim stand-up comedians subvert the stereotypes of "Arab = Muslim", evil terrorist, and the veiled and voiceless woman. Through skillful deployment of the technique of everydayness, combined with performativity and incongruity, the comedy routines allows for disruption of a distorted "common sense". To counter stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims, knowledge producers need to target all types of audiences, including consumers of popular culture, who are certainly a large population. Arab and Muslim voices countering stereotypes must also be heard in various mediums. Because comedians have more flexibility than academics in their manner of presentation, they are able to engage with different audiences on various topics and in different tones (Belanger 2017). With a license to serve as a "spokesperson, as a mediator, an articulator of culture, and as a contemporary anthropologist," (Mintz 1985) stand-up comedians "simultaneously perform self and culture, offering an often acerbic social critique sanctioned as entertainment because it is articulated in a comedic context." (Gilbert 1997, 1).

Early stand-up comedians such as Richard Pryor, for example, have long been considered contributors to social critique (Blackburn 2018); and influenced by him and by other comedians from other minority groups, Muslim stand-up comedians are also shifting knowledge about Muslims from the academic space to the space of popular culture. As alternate interlocutors, these artists, as Amaringth Amarasingam expresses it in his article, "Laughter the Best Medicine: Muslim Comedians and Social Criticism in Post-9/11 America", take on the role of "organic" or "amateur" intellectuals (Belanger 2017). Muslim-American stand-up comedy can therefore be seen as an attempt to educate a wide and diverse audience on Islamophobia and the vilification of Muslims in a post-9/11 America.

Chapter 4
Muslim Cool Music Video Artists: Re-defining the hijab through "Blackness"

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the role of the Muslim Cool movement in the creation of an alternate popular culture in which Muslim female performers use the medium to speak for themselves and to challenge prevailing perceptions of the Other in mainstream media and the wider culture. I subsequently examine some of the work of the British group, Poetic Pilgrimage and American artist, Mona Haydar, including their (in my opinion) most compelling videos, "Land Far Away" and "Hijabi". I present these musicians as examples of Muslim Cool female alternate interlocutors in the UK and US who use both visual imagery and lyrics to complicate images of Arabs and Muslims presented by mainstream media. As second-generation Muslims in the United States and United Kingdom, Mona Haydar and Poetic Pilgrimage have embraced music videos as a medium for their messages, aimed at gender, race, and religion.

I contend in this dissertation that one of the reasons popular culture is a powerful means to convey messages is that it communicates in many different ways involving different approaches, and hence is able to appeal to different senses, emotions and sensibilities. When it comes to music videos, it is important to acknowledge its visual elements. Up until the 1960s (see below), audiences had been exposed to audio and live performance only. Today in the age of the music video, musicians have embraced music involving two modes of communication together, that is visuals and audio. This can make statements stronger and result in a greater impact on public opinion as affected by the "window", or "frame", through which global consumers of that form of popular culture see, learn and understand.

The combination of two forms of communication (audio and visual)_makes music videos a .media space providing opportunities for individuals who are not religious authorities to formulate their own identities reflecting new identities that mass audiences may not be familiar with.. Social movements have historically depended on digital media to spread information; and religious expression today is mediated by digital platforms that were not formerly available. Religion is intertwined with the digital world, in the sense that forms of digital media such as music videos are used to convey understandings which may be different from those of traditional

authorities (Peterson 2019). In this way, hijabi creators of music videos make meaning in the hip hop music video space and context in order to influence public opinion and contest Islamophobia and gendered Orientalism.

In this chapter, I will focus on the visual aspects of Poetic Pilgrimage, and the audio, that is lyrics, of Mona Haydar in order to explore each aspect more completely. I will use Poetic Pilgrimage particularly to explore styles of Muslim women's dress, and especially headscarves, which are a prominent feature of music videos created by Muslim women, in which they are used to simultaneously signify religion, race, and a certain Muslim femininity. I also use the visual aspects of Poetic Pilgrimage, principally their attire, to explain how female Muslim identity in music videos is located at the crossroads of "blackness" and Islam through the African-American background of the Muslim Cool movement. In regard to Mona Haydar, I explore how the lyrics of her videos, and particularly her breakout piece, "Hijabi", communicates messages on the hijab, religious freedom, and again, Muslim femininity.

The History of Music Videos and Introduction of Muslim Themes

The concept of music videos is not, surprisingly, very new and has its roots in filmmaking. In 1895, in Thomas Edison's studio, film with music was created for the Kinetophone, a device that combined moving pictures with phonograph. Synchronizing moving image with audio through a violinist and two dancers, the "Dickson Experimental Sound Film" recording was never released, because the Kinetophone did not gain currency. Then, in 1923, the Rivoli Theater in New York City, released the first "sound-on-film", which synchronized movies and soundtracks. Unlike film with music made for the Kinetophone, sound-on-film, now referred to as 'musical shorts' and featuring vaudeville and opera singers, immediately became popular and regularly played before feature films at theatres from the 1920s to the 1950s.

In the 1950s, "soundies", or three-minute films featuring music and dance performances on a device similar to a jukebox became popular in both the US and in Europe. The term "music video" was subsequently coined in 1959 by musician Jiles Perry Richardson, also known as The Big Bopper. The 1960s Beatles are the earliest famous musicians to make music videos somewhat in the form we know today; their work set a trend that lasted throughout the 1960s

and 1970s. The Beatles are also worth noting as an example of early music video artists who contested industries of mass communication and acted as interlocutors of the Beat counterculture, which used rock and roll music to emphasize individualism and express the anti-capitalist sentiments of their generation. Music videos by the Beatles and the counterculture of the Beat Generation then developed into an international anti-war and human rights hippie movement, ultimately developing into Pop Culture. Subsequently, in the early 1970s, a trend of television music programs aimed at teenagers emerged in Australia which led in 1981 to a new channel based in the United States focused on music videos which is now the most popular music-video channel in the world – MTV or "Music Television".

Thus we see that music videos were not only from their inception associated with popular culture, but also very soon also became a medium for questioning of and opposition to establishment norms. This characteristic has made the music video an ideal vehicle for expression of diasporic Muslim identity while countering the stereotypes aimed at Muslims and Islam overall.

The first Golden Age of music videos took place from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, occupying most of the programming of the cable channel, MTV. Nonetheless, at the end of the 1990s, reality TV took over, and the production of music videos diminished. This lasted until YouTube came along in 2005, initiating what is widely regarded as the second Golden Age of music videos. The lower prices, user-friendly software, easier online digital distribution and short length of videos in the second Golden Age, along with freedom from mainstream modes of audiovisual production, have all contributed to the new and diverse looks and feels of music videos as we now know them. Most significant for my discussion, the onslaught of YouTube in 2005 provided more feasible ways for diverse groups to represent themselves independent of the music industry. The swift and global nature of the Internet and the growing variety of music videos have helped music videos to become transformative rather than merely representational by reflecting aesthetics and lyrics that diverge from the mainstream (Shaviro 2017).

Islamic themes were introduced into American popular music and to some extent videos before the culmination of the developments

described above. This content is worth reviewing because it foreshadows what would later emerge in music videos, while standing, in important ways, in contrast to it. There are two types of Muslim-American music videos: mainstream videos that make reference to Islam, and religious videos. The compositions in question employ mostly mainstream American beats and melodies; they use popular American music as a framework and then add some Islamic elements that are recognizable to a non-Muslim audience. This genre of music was in the mainstream of 1970s American rap and hip hop, with the most famous Muslim-American musicians at the time being the *Five Percenters*. Then in the 1990s, rapper Mos Def (Dante Terrell Smith) incorporated verses from the Quran into his music; for instance, his album *Black on Both Sides* begins with the *Fatiha* (the short opening chapter of the Quran). This was followed in 2000 by Everlast (Erik Schrody) singing part of the *shahadah* (the "witness" that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is His Prophet) in his duet with Carlos Santana, *Put Your Lights On*. In 2006, Lupe Fiasco (Wasalu Muhammad Jaco), a rapper from Chicago, released an album called *Lupe Fiasco's Food & Liquor.* The Persian calligraphy on Fiasco′s cover has become a symbol of popular mainstream Muslim-American music.

These American hip hop artists drew on various sects of Islam, including the Nation of Islam, The Five Percenters (also known as The Nation of Gods and Earths), and Sunni Islam, demonstrating that there is no single Muslim identity among African Americans. Gender, class, and generational differences, rather than sect, inform each artist's choice of what cultural artifacts to include in their music. Public Enem is a very successful hip hop group formed in the eighties and active to this day. Talib Kweli is a rapper who emerged in the late nineties. Both are examples of artists influenced by anti-racist discourses from the 1960s Civil Rights era who thus use symbols from the teachings of the Nation of Islam, which ran parallel in some ways to the Civil Rights and Black Pride movements. Lupe Fiasco, Mos Def, and Scarface (a rapper and member of the hip hop group Geto [sic] Boys who first emerged in the 1980s) combine messages from Islam and Christianity to encourage inter-faith tolerance. All the artists mentioned above appear to be converts to Islam, and all, with the exception of Everlast, are Black. They are part of a generation and persuasion that was discovering Islam as part of a Black heritage. The spirit of discovery, and reflection on how to include it in the music, is illustrated well in these words of Mos Def:

> Hip hop and the texts of the Koran are both forms of poetry … Both possess a rhyme pattern and convey essential information in a condensed form. Vital information gets across in three minutes … because the Qur'an is like that. The reason that people are able to be *hafiz* (one who memorises the entire Qur'an through constant repetition) is because the entire Qur'an rhymes. And it holds fast to your memory. And then you start to have a deeper relationship with it on recitation. Like, you learn Surat Al-Ikhlas, right. You learn Al-Fatiha. And you learn it and you recite it. And you learn it and you recite it. Then one day you're reciting it, and you start to understand! You really have a deeper relationship with what you're reciting. A'uudhu billhi min ash-shaitan al-rajim … You be like Wow! You understand what I'm saying? Hip hop has the ability to do that – on a poetic level." (Abdel-Alim 2005)

The second type of music and associated videos introduces American sounds to predominantly religious music. For example, the *nasheed,* an a cappella chant that usually consists of vocals only, was adapted to hip hop by some Muslim musicians, notably Native Deen ("Deen" means religion and refers to Islam), a trio hailing from Washington D.C. (Harvard University 2007). Predominantly religious music is not directly relevant to my dissertation because it is directed to Muslim audiences (and perhaps potential converts), and thus does not reach wider audiences in order to subvert and undermine stereotypes. It nevertheless illustrates the impact of popular culture communicated through digital media. As Kristin M. Petersen observes in her "Pushing boundaries and blurring categories in digital media and religion research", messages relevant to religion are usually communicated through institutional and media outlets, leaving a gap capable of connecting people and religion in other social contexts unfilled (Peterson 2019).

A form of music consisting of a combination of two different forms of communication (visuals and audio), music videos enable a wider reach in diverse social contexts by establishing recognizable common ground in more than one way. The types of videos treated in this chapter are also different from music that merely inserts Muslim themes into American popular music (the first category discussed above) in that the latter introduce selected elements or signs of Islam, apparently as the artists are themselves are discovering it, rather than expounding Islam and tackling

stereotypes. There is much "sampling" (i.e. using a bit of another sound recording) of Islamic material in order to create a certain sensibility or atmosphere, instead of the dense, expressive and highly original verbalization of rap and hip hop. In sum, Islam is in the background, rather than foregrounded.

These first ventures are closely associated with the African-American discovery of Islam and various African-American Islamic movements. Islam is presented as part of a racial identity; the one non-Black figure mentioned above, the Muslim convert Everlast, also relates to that identity, through the interesting strategy of defining himself in relational contrast to Blackness, for instance by using the stage name "Whitey". In the videos focused on in this chapter, race remains a concern, especially because Muslims have become a racialized group, but Islam comes much more to the fore. The rise of non-Black artists of Muslim immigrant backgrounds is no doubt a factor in all these changes, but the influence of Black or African-American musical culture remains fundamental and profound, as seen in the next section.

Muslim Cool

Muslim Cool is a space for American Muslim artists that is also the link between the hip hop generation and the Black Power movement through the arts (Abdul Khabeer 2016). Contemporary Muslim music videos from the post-9/11 era, I argue, also dwell in this space, including in locations outside of the US. The goal behind the Black Arts Movement, be it in the form of literature or music, is to express the culture and aspirations of a beleaguered minority while raising the consciousness of the masses by disrupting negative stereotypes of Black people (Abdul Khabeer 2016). Muslim Cool artists working in hip hop music videos today draw on and continue this tradition. They continue the legacy of the Black Arts Movement by presenting Muslim culture in the West, while speaking out against stereotypes of Muslims. African-American culture is a crucial link here. As explained above, references to and then fuller expression of Islamic themes emerged in music videos in conjunction with Black racial consciousness. As a racialized and actually partly Black minority, Muslims have readily taken up this legacy.

Hip hop was born as street music in the 1970s in New York City,

where it was created by African Americans as well as Latinos. It initially referred or alluded to the topics of discrimination and injustice and subsequently developed into a channel for wider expressions of social, cultural, economic, and political issues highlighting the African diaspora. It is no coincidence that the hip hop generation began in the Civil Rights era of the mid-1960s; the most well-known soul singer from that era is Sam Cooke, who wrote the famous song, *A Change Is Gonna Come*, in 1964 (Omidvar and Richards 2014): "I just need some comfort", Cooke sings, "some kind of belief, that this war we're fighting, can really bring some peace."

Like other aspects of Black culture, hip hop was initially excluded from the American mainstream, but then went on to circulate also outside African-American communities, to the point that the genre is now seen in different countries world-wide (Abdul Khabeer 2016). Hip hop, along with the prior forms it embraced and absorbed, now contributes to the cultural capital of other groups, including diasporic Muslims.

The roots of Muslim music videos are best sought, however, in the wider Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s (which is, in turn, the ancestor of what the self-described "scholar-artist-activist" and professor of anthropology Su'ad Abdul Khabeer has termed Muslim Cool, discussed further below). The Black Arts Movement was a loose association of artists of various kinds who emphasized the distinctiveness of Black Art and its necessary connection to the politics of resistance, somewhat in opposition to the integrationist spirit of the Civil Rights movement of the same time. It is in the Black Arts Movement that the themes of protest and resistance are initially linked to artistic production, be that music, literature, or other arts.

At around the same time as the Black Arts Movement in the US in the 1960s, reggae music and Rastafarianism gave birth to a new Black consciousness in the Caribbean. Reggae became a source of inspiration for youth in the United Kingdom in the 1970s and began, along with the now increasingly popular hip hop, to reflect the same messages of anti-racism and Afrocentricity heard in music in the US and the Caribbean. Muslim-British artists readily took up the musical genres and their themes, for instance by combining Caribbean slogans such as "stand up for your rights" and

"knowledge is power" with lyrics on Islam (Suana 2013). This hybridization appears to have been encouraged by the shared disadvantageous position of Afro-Caribbean and Muslim populations in the UK, which bears, in turn, some similarity to discrimination suffered in the US by African-Americans, Muslim or not.

Within or descended from the Black Arts Movement is the movement of Muslim Cool, "the racial-religious performativity by U.S. Blacks and non-Blacks" (Abdul Khabeer 2016, 115). This definition comes from a passage in Abdul Khabeer's seminal *Muslim Cool* that discusses Muslim women in particular, and explains how being Muslim Cool is extending cross-racial solidarities in the United States. Muslim Cool thus offers a way to disrupt narratives of division among Arab, Asian and Black U.S. Americans…. For differently racialized Muslims, Muslim Cool is, then, a means to critique their position as racial minorities in the United States (Abdul Khabeer 2016, 228).

Muslim Cool is therefore born not only out of the post-9/11 context, but also these antecedents. Although it has deep roots in the African-American experience and Black cultures, it currently furnishes a counter discourse for stereotypes of both Blacks *and* Muslims. When linked to stereotypes of Muslims in the post-9/11 era, Muslim Cool represents Muslims as Americans (or Britons, and so on), who, like African Americans, form part of a racial, gendered, and religious White imaginary. "Blackness" comes to represent dismay at discrimination and lack of equality against all ethnicities; and performers use the platform to communicate racial identity, Islam, and demands for social justice all at once.

To put it another way, the style and music of Muslim Cool is inspired by repertoires of Black popular culture; and as an alternative form of popular culture, it stands for a racial-religious self-making intended to counter stereotypes of Muslims (Abdul Khabeer 2016). Muslim Cool contributes to building social identities that counter traits assigned by non-Muslim imaginaries. These include stereotypes related to gender, such as menace and overweening sexuality in relation to men and submissive sex object and tragically oppressed figure in relation to women (Mgadmi 2009).

It is for these reasons that I place Muslim music video artists, including Poetic Pilgrimage and Mona Haydar, in the tradition of Muslim Cool, despite that fact they do not, to my knowledge, use

that label. Pilgrimage and Haydar are particularly interesting examples because Muslim Cool is a platform at the intersection of not only religion and race, but also gender. They also carry on that tradition, for instance, by engaging with the Afrodiasporic practice of head wrapping, addressed in the next section.

Background to Attire as a visual Element of Muslim Cool Music Video

Muslim music video uses not only sound, but visual aspect and aesthetics to address perceptions of Muslims. The videos I have classified as Muslim Cool are thus not only about music and hip hop; they are also about a style, prominently involving attire.

Attire is a *leit motif* of culture and thus equally fundamental to popular culture. Dress also communicates meaning in relation to racial and other hierarchies and responses to those hierarchies; thus Su'ad Abdul Khabeer's *Muslim Cool* includes a chapter on how the sartorial practices of "Cool Muslim dandies" signify race, religion, and masculinity. Since dress codes are symbolic, attire is a real-life, visual and embodied manifestation of one's ethnicity and/or religion that may challenge or confirm perceptions of articles of clothing that are viewed as pointing to a problematic difference. For instance, the criminalization of Black people in the US often involves their dress; the hoodie worn by Trayvon Martin, a seventeen-year-old from Florida who was shot to death in 2012 for "looking suspicious" while walking at night, is just one such example. Partly in response to the negative perception of people who wear hoodies, they have since become an emblematic, worldwide trend. Not surprisingly considering the trans-racial nature of Muslim Cool, we see that style readily adopted by diasporic Muslims.

To give one example, the website Just Trendy Girls features Hoodie sweaters with hijab and publishes a seasonal fashion guide that includes the "Street Hijab. The perception that the attire of Black people marks them as a social problem and even criminals is similar to negative perceptions of Muslim men in turbans, robes, and beards, and to Muslim women in headscarves and other forms of covering. The videos counter these perceptions. As in the Black dandyism mentioned above, the Muslim performers choose clothing and styles that are not only different from mainstream popular culture, but answer to it, for instance by dressing finely and creatively.

Turning to Muslim women's attire, according to *Muslim Cool*, the "hoodjab" is the newest style of hijab worn by performers in the Muslim diaspora. Head wraps, or headscarves, are referred to in different ways by different wearers. There are three kinds of headscarves worn by female Muslim performers. The first kind is a traditional hijab, which involves tying a headscarf around the hairline and wearing a long black dress known as the *abaya.* Then there is "hijab-lite" which is considered to be more moderate and mainstream. Hijab-lite consists of an H&M-type mid-length dress, pants, and a colorful scarf covering the hair and neck. The third kind of hijab is worn with a T-shirt, jeans, large earrings, sneakers, and a Palestinian *kufiya* or colorful scarf. While both the traditional hijab and hijab-lite are tied under the chin, the third kind of hijab, called a "hoodjab" is worn like a chignon and tied at the nape of the neck. It has, as discussed below, a distinct African flavor, although it is not overtly African and freely mixed with American and Islamic or Arab elements. As seen in the rest of their attire such a jeans, "hoodjabis" are less conservative than traditional hijabis and hijabi-lites.

Donning the hoodjab and clothing styles that habitually complete it is a statement not only of Muslim identity and of anti-racism similar to that made by hijab-wearing women in anticolonial resistance movements in North Africa and the Middle East, but also freedom for women within Islam.

The addition of the Muslim Cool hoodjab to styles of headwraps featured in the Muslim music videos discussed in this chapter contributes to new understandings of the attire worn by Muslim women by presenting the hoodjab as "cool" through its association with hip hop and blackness. The "hood" in hoodjab (a neologism formed from "hood" and "hijab") is an aesthetics of self-making through style. Its history can be traced back to African American women who wore head wraps during slavery, an aesthetic continued by women in post-abolition America. The 1960s and 1970s saw the flourishing of the "Black is Beautiful" cultural movement, which included women who wore headwraps to demonstrate and celebrate their African ancestry and resistance to American racial hierarchy. Hip hop in the mid-1980s continued the tradition of Afrocentric aesthetics by featuring head wraps (notably, the strikingly large styles worn by Erykah Badu) as well as other African clothing.

The Afrodiasporic headdress of hoodjab as a cultural artifact challenging hegemonic discourses of Muslim women is an extension from the Black Arts Movement to Muslim Cool. Queen Latifah is considered to be the artist who made headwraps a norm

for women in the industry. Although she is not Muslim, she wears a headwrap to emphasize her Afrocentric ethnicity. In her 1989 music video "Ladies First", Queen Latifah includes images of nineteenth century abolitionist Harriet Tubman and poets Frances Harper, Sojourner Truth, Angela Davis, and Winnie Mandela, hence highlighting a transnational Afrodiasporic consciousness. Symbolic of her stance against racism. Queen Latifah chooses a Muslim name (apparently as a result of the association of Black consciousness with Islam) and wears a hoodjab. The hoodjab finally comes to be used by Muslim American women as an expression of an American Muslim self and intersectional identity. It embodies a resistance that speaks to Muslim identity in the diaspora. The hoodjab is an artifact of American Muslim culture symbolizing the intersection of race, gender, hip hop, and Islam; and in the post–9/11 context, it has become a symbol of resistance to anti-Muslim racism and a stance for civil rights and freedom of religion (Abdul Khabeer 2016).

Poetic Pilgrimage

The members of Poetic Pilgrimage are Sukina Abdul Noor and Muneera Rashida. Muneera Rashida is a poet who has read her work on the BBC Radio 2 show, *Pause For Thought*, which focuses on voices from different religions. The identities and art of Poetic Pilgrimage are forged through a combination of hip hop, Islam, and blackness. Here it is worth mentioning that, although the duo is clearly influenced by American popular culture and is best understood in the context of the originally American aesthetic of Muslim Cool, Afrocentricism has been central to British Black culture as well. Afro-Caribbean sentiment goes as far back as waves of immigration following the breakup of the British Empire after World War Two, and the ideas of the Black nationalist of Jamaican origin, Marcus Garvey, had resonance in Britain, where he lived for some years before dying there in 1940. Abdul Noor, in fact, wrote a PhD dissertation on Marcus Garvey as the founder of Afrocentrism.

Poetic Pilgrimage has taken advantage of the Internet by using video and sound as vernacular to develop their own public and transnational personas, through a Youtube channel and regular activity on MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter, among other platforms. Their activity includes not only performances, but also ongoing dialogue through exchange of text (chat) with audiences. These exchanges illustrate a smooth blending of Islam with Afro-Caribbean concerns. For example, the duo joined a Jamaican Muslim Facebook group that aims to raise awareness of "the historical context of Islam in Jamaica" as well as "children of the diaspora embracing Islam here in the UK". In 2011, Pilgrimage

wrote on their own Facebook profile that, in the UK, "many converts associate Asian or Arabic food as being Islamic when I [unclear which member] know for a fact most Caribbean and African restaurants serve halal meat and have done so for years (Suana 2013). Their reggae music video, "Land Far Away", includes images of a "strictly halal" Jamaican patty restaurant. This is to say that, in Bristol, there are more Pakistani and Arab halal places to eat at than there are Caribbean and African ones. Therefore, in their reggae music video "Land Far Away", the duo includes images of a "strictly halal" Jamaican patty place to market halal food other than Pakistani and Arab.

Abdul Noor and Rashida are heedful of Muslim norms to the extent that they are concerned with positive public reception of their performances by a wide spectrum of Muslims. A 2015 Al Jazeera documentary about Poetic Pilgrimage, *Witness: Hip Hop Hijabis* includes a segment in which they discuss whether a performance with strict Muslims in the audience should consist of only of the spoken word or include musical instruments (the latter being considered "haram", that is religiously forbidden, by some). The documentary ends with their trip to Agadir to explore Sufism and music with Moroccan women and to perform their first show in a Muslim country, where they felt that they were well received.

Thus although the work of the duo addresses or at least implies racial themes, it is centered on Islam and particularly Muslim femininity, as in the following excerpt from the song "Unlikely Emcess":

> *Listen/ This is something you were not expecting/ Muslim chicks with the microphone rapping/ Unconventional /Interventional/ I see the tension in your jaw ... are you ready to party with us?*

The lyrics imply that non-Muslim listeners who come across the video (possible because of wide and rapid access facilitated by digital platforms such as YouTube) will be surprised to see female Muslim rappers, and especially rappers dressed in hijab (in fact, hoodjab), due to the widespread image of Muslim women as submissive and the idea that women in particular wearing the "veil", as hijab is often referred to in the West, are without agency and oppressed. Pilgrimage urges such people to "listen" – to a different, "unconventional" message. The imperative "listen" in a video commands the audience also to look, that is to take in images. The images are of women with their bodies covered and wearing hijabs who manifest independence and confidence; Pilgrimage, in fact, has

stated that they rap in order to "pay our bills" and to "be free" (Suana 2013, 121). The duo uses hoodjab to communicate their idea that Islam allows women to own their bodies by covering them. The images in the video also address the stereotype of Muslim women being compelled to cover their bodies and heads. The audience can see clearly that the artists have chosen their attire; further reflection might lead to the realization that it is a signifier being used to make statements ranging from religious commitment to identification with an ethno-racial group. The presentation of covering and the hoodjab as fashion underlines the message about choice; "We try to make hijab appear the coolest thing in the world to our young fans," say the women (Suana 2013, 118). (referring to population from both areas) In terms of a stance for their ethnic roots, the Jamaican-British artists choose a genre of music that has been embraced by Afro-Caribbean black people in the UK to voice disgruntlement with social inequality and encourage Afrocentricism since the 1970s; and as hoodjabi artists, they extend Muslim Cool "black pride", Islam and gender through music and attire from the US to the UK.

Contrary to mainstream depictions of the hijab, the hoodjab style of hijab is an artifact of 'Black cool' that is identified with Muslims. In other words the hoodjab is considered 'cool' because it signifies hip hop, which stands for 'Black cool' as an experience of marginalization. With Rastafarian-style bright colored clothes, head wraps, accessories and scarves, the Poetic Pilgrimage duo expresses new understandings of being Muslim. Video and sound is a new vernacular language allowing for increasing democratisation of knowledge production in different Islamic contexts (Suana 2013); and performances by Muslim Cool women shapes their ethnographies through"blackness" and muslimness. The music video discussed in this chapter as well communicate ideas about modesty as a choice and an ideal. The Muslim woman is able and prefers to be both cool *and* modest (Abdul Khabeer 2016).

This performative interpretation of hijab, it must be said, is rooted in the idea that Muslim women choose to cover; Pilgrimage, Haydar, and others thus affirm a non-traditional, woman–centered interpretation of covering. They not only present Islam, but re-define it.

By offering their individual interpretations of Islamic dress and modesty, Muslim Cool music video artists engage in performance for the empowerment of marginalized women in the US and UK through a platform where issues of attire become reinterpreted and redefined by wearers themselves. This is a significant move in the

context of hip hop itself. Male-produced hip hop, more often than not, has tended to objectify women, a trend that female musicians such as Queen Latifah, Missy Elliot, Miss Undastood, and Erykah Badu have opposed Missy Elliot, for example, argues in her lyrics for more authority for women in the family sphere and Miss Undastood (a hijab-wearing Muslim) advocates for protection of women from male violence (Khan 2010). Poetic Pilgrimage defines femininity through the lens of their Muslim commitment. They promote the concept of "modesty is the new cool" in hip hop, calling out the sexism and "bling, bling" culture of the industry. According to the Hip Hop Database: List of Muslim Rappers", male-dominated hip hop industry offers more male than female faces of American Islam: hence it is particularly refreshing to see artists re-defining not only what it is to be a female hip hop artist, but a female hip hop artist who is a minority speaking out from the crossroads of racism and sexism. In the Al Jazeera documentary, *Witness: Hip Hop Hijabis,* the duo underlines their belief that modesty is cool by asserting that hip hop is not an art form meant to feature sexuality. As in their music videos, the duo appear in the film wearing various styles of hijab and hoodjab, including a hijab with an actual hood over it, in different colors and tied in various ways.. They wear colorful long skirts, shirts and pants, and big earrings. Through their dress, they exemplify a fashion-forward Muslim femininity that is at once modest and strong.

The importance of visual content is illustrated by Poetic Pilgrimage's first music video, "Land Far Away" released in 2010. "Land Far Away", is a remake of "Satta Massagana" ("He Gave Praise" in Amharic) by the Jamaican group The Abyssinians originally included in their 1976 roots reggae_album. Satta Massagana expounds Rastafarianism; the phrase means "He Gave Praise" in Amharic, the language believed by Rastafarians to be that of an original Bible. Poetic Pilgrimage's version, "Land Far Away", is essentially the same musical composition as the original. The lyrics are for the most part also the same, the chief difference being that references to the "King of Kings" are replaced with "Allah" and "seventh heaven", (which only affects a few lines). King of Kings is a title given to emperors of Ethiopia, which Jamaicans also apply to their Rastafarian leader, Rasta Fari. The duo's choice of song is a conscious move toward their identification as black Muslim women artists, with Afrocentric roots and influences; and they include (among other images), in their video, Kenyan-style pearl necklaces, West African sufi rosary beads , and a West African table cloth as visual tributes to their ethnic heritage.

The Poetic Pilgrimage blog states that the duo chose that specific song (Satta Massagana) to remake because they "wanted to pay homage to our Jamaican roots and acknowledge the universal spiritual energy that exists in certain Reggae music." And it cannot be denied that the lyrics, do speak in a non-specific religious language to "universal" concerns of oppressed peoples, as seen in this brief excerpt:

> I am seeking that land far away,
> You know that place where there's laughter, joy and play.
> No corrupted systems with the innocent victims,…
> And the rulers doing nothing but establishing pain,
> Selling souls and civilians to secure their reign.
> Those who speak up the truth are deemed insane…
> He made us equal as people,
> To seek his life, not to seek no evil.
> And after this light there will be no sequel,
> So praise the Lord - What're you're waiting for (Suana 2013, 70).

The blog also says, however, that "Land Far Away" was "filmed and directed by GlobalFactions in the Shepherds Bush area of London, which has cultural significance to the early Caribbean migrants." The meaning of the video is re-directed through this visual context to the travails of both Blacks *and Muslims* in Britain. Shepherd's Bush has a large population of Muslims of various backgrounds, and the video features Abdul Noor and Rashida going about the neighbourhood in recognizably Muslim garb, including hoodjabs. Their attire, at the same time, exemplifies fashion-forward "cool"; they sport hooded Adidas jackets, T-shirts, sneakers and big earrings. They are depicted buying halal food. The video also includes images of African hair products, Jamaican flags, and books on black consciousness, while the women's hoodjabs are echoed in the dress of Rasta men, with their dreds covered in colourful rastacaps. "Land Far Away" aesthetics are a combination of Rastafari and Islamic. The Rastafarian men sing, play drums and smoke, while incense burns in the background as other participants in the video engage in Muslim-style prayer. The message of the music video "Land Far Away", including Islamic content, comment on Muslim femininity, and the connection of Islam to racial concerns is communicated through images, with the music of the familiar song serving essentially as a soundtrack.

In terms of lyrics, the lyrics in "Land Far Away" only diverge from the original "Satta Massagana" in the sense that the duo replaces

references to the 'King of Kings' with 'Allah' and 'seventh heaven'. Two lines from the original song are modified: *The King of Kings and the Lord of Lords/Sit upon His throne and He rules us all*.. In other words, Poetic Pilgrimage modify the lyrics of a religious hymn, which is one of the most popular reggae songs in the world, from a non-Islamic religion popular in the Caribbean to include Islam. Pilgrimage's understanding of Islam is argued to reflectr feminist Amina Wudud's thoughts on religious empowerment through Afrocentricism, acknowledgement of racism and defining Muslim femininity on one's own terms. The duo thus identifies as marginalized by shaping its artistic persona to reflect black solidarity as a central doctrine of Afrocentric Islam suggesting that marginalized groups should look beyond their differences and unite.

Mona Haydar

Anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod refers to description of women in a culturally and historically specific context as a form of "writing against culture". Writing against culture consists of communicating the everyday realities of individuals that stand in contrast to mainstream, collective depictions dominated by the idea of a unitary, all-pervasive, and often pernicious entity termed "culture". Hijab is a visual symbol and the words hijab and "veil" metonymies in popular culture for the complex of ideas Abu-Lughod terms gendered Orientalism. This explains why it plays such a large part in music videos created by Muslim women with the aim of countering stereotypes.

Other feminists who argue that "the construction of the "Arab and Muslim" as an Other in the dominant "American" imaginary and Islamophobia have marked the *hijab* as negative and threatening;" (Abdulhadi 2011, 4) include Rabab Abdulhadi, Evelyn Alsultany and Nadine Naber, who, in *Arab and Arab American Feminisms*, claim that gender and sexuality are the most powerful symbols constituting an imagined difference between "Arabs" and "Americans". Women of Arab or Muslim background, for some reason, continue to be defined through their appearance and on whether or not they wear a hijab. In the book, Evelyn Alsultany discusses how she has been questioned by both non-Muslims and Muslims about the fact that she doesn wear a hijab. with non-Muslim Americans expressing surprise at her being both a Muslim and a feminist, and with Muslims preaching that a woman is not a "real" Muslim until she embraces the hijab.

In addition to recommending a feminist approach to analysis of

Muslim women's attire that takes into account different backgrounds and social contexts of wearers, the writers of *Arab and Arab American Feminisms* also address the stereotype of "Arab = Muslim", clarifying that their usage of the term "Arab" in their writings is to refer to people whose main language is Arabic and who come from Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, or Yemen (Abdulhadi 2011).

The daughter of Syrian immigrants, Mona Haydar was born in 1988 and raised in Flint, Michigan. Before her success as an artist, poet and activist Mona Haydar studied both Islam *and* Christianity, and her song "Hijabi" reverberates with the right to religious freedom as stated in the American Constitution. Haydar first emerged on the hip hop music video scene with her breakout 2017 "Hijabi", in which she wears a hijab while pregnant with her second child (Haydar 2017). In the image she has put on her website and blog, at http://www.monahaydar.com/, she wears an abaya (a long, loose robe popular especially in the Arab world) and traditional hijab, both black and edged with golden ruffles. She is depicted walking barefoot at a beach. The image in the pop-up advertisement of her Newsletter is of her in hijab-lite at a Cambridge, Michigan activism event. She is carrying flowers. The image in these pictures is of a gentle, friendly chic rather than fashion-forward "cool", perhaps because of the contexts of pregnancy and inter-religious engagement.

Muslim Cool sensibility and representation of a powerful Muslim femininity comes through clearly in the visuals of Haydar's videos, in which she and other female performers are prominently featured wearing various styles of hijabs, some with long dresses or skirts, others with long-sleeved shirts and pants, and all colorfully individualistic and fashion-forward. Female performers such as Mona Haydar choose to wear a hijab or hoodjab to be heard. The message here resembles that communicated by Poetic Pilgrimage, minus the pronounced Afrocentrism, although Haydar employs the African-American dialect usual in rap and her work often includes African-American or Black Muslim women. Many or most of the women appearing in "Hijabi", for instance, are African-American or Black, and Haydar herself seems to present as "brown". Placed within the Muslim Cool Movement, Mona Haydar's music videos continues the American legacy of pushing back against misconceptions and stereotypes of minority groups through rap. "Hijabi", the video I will focus on in this chapter, is Muslim Cool because it expresses dismay at the marginalization of hijabi women

in the US through a specific genre music, style and attire, all trends originally set by African-Americans, including Muslims.

Haydar's music video "Hijabi", also known as "Wrap My Hijab" (an obvious play on words) was named one of the top protest songs of 2017 as well as one of the "Top Feminist Anthems" of the last few decades by *Billboard*, a longstanding and influential American music and entertainment magazine (Stubblebine 2017). Recognition of protest and feminism could not have come without Haydar's expressive lyrics, the skill of which I hope to bring out here. In "Hijabi", Haydar writes against culture by highlighting the diversity of hijabi women and in the hope that new representation and its varying contexts bridge the gap between the many realities of Muslim women and the stereotype of the "oppressed" Muslim woman to which many cannot relate..

Before proceeding to the lyrics, however, it is necessary to note the Islamicising or Arabicising features of the musical accompaniment. The video begins with a short overture in which a violin plays a soulful tune in quarter-tones. The violin comes in at other times, along with the distinctive beat of Arabic music, played, apparently, on the drums used in Arabic music called tabla or derbakeh, Mixed with the rap and rhythm of hip hop, these elements underline the mutliculturality that is a major theme of the song. The introduction of Islamic themes to rap and hip hop, as we saw above, is not new, and Haydar is no doubt aware that she is building on that tradition.

A great deal of meaning is packed into the rapid, rhythmic litany. The opening, "What that hair look like/ Bet that hair look nice/ Don't that make you sweat?/ Don't that feel too tight?", implies lack of choice and oppression and is presumed to be from somebody who is not familiar with Islam. Non-Muslim (mis)understandings of the hijab as uncomfortable and imposed have previously been addressed by other scholars as discussed above; an MA in Theology herself, and to express concern with gendered Orientalism, Haydar draws in her audiences through a statement that hijabis frequently endure in the diaspora.

The comment might also might come from a man who feels that he has the right to gaze at women unhindered by covering. "Women haters get banished / Covered up or not don't ever take us for granted." It might also be a jab at the beauty standards of the wider society that often involve stress and discomfort; this is a topic Haydar addresses in more depth in "Barbarian", where she opens with "If they're civilized, I'd rather stay savage/ We them

barbarians/ I keep it humble and elegant, ah/ Your beauty standard irrelevant/ We gotta be indivisible/ This nose, decolonize/ This hair, decolonize/ This body, decolonize/ This mind, decolonized." (Haydar 2018). The final comment, "You need to get yo life", expresses the common perception that Muslim women don't have a "life" by telling the person stereotyping to get their own life. Haydar's dismissive comment telling people to move on from the same old stereotypes is then followed by examples of everydayness that I address below. "Hijabi" lyrics surely involve the supposition that women wearing hijab are not free; the life Muslim women should have likely also involves a certain model of male-female relations and sexual mores. Who the speaker or speakers of the comments are is left unclear, so that the comments seem to come from everyone who has been exposed to stereotypes about Muslim women, mimicking the experience of women wearing hijab.

Haydar tells the viewer that the repetitive and static Orientalist discourse bores her and makes her uncomfortable. She needs to get her work done. Meanwhile, the audience should question its own knowledge. The teacher then offers viewers new informatioon on hijabis as examples of everydayness. Haydar finds that hijabis born in the 1980s are up-to-date with the modernity of the world; and she reminds the public that Muslim women, "covered up or not," shouldn't be underestimated. "Me and my hijabi ladies/ We was born in the eighties/ So pretty like the Euphrates/ And party like some Kuwaitis/ Deeper than some diplomas/ Current like some hot yoga/ Takin' back the misnomers." The new representation of hijabis offered by Haydar is of young, modern women with regular lives that stand in contrast to common depiction. In this way, *Hijabi* brings to light the fact that stereotypes limit the growth of a deeper feminist exchange and growth of knowledge. Communicating the everyday realities of individual women, the music videos hares knowledge with non-Muslim audiences about Muslim women that reflects more contemporary realities.

Haydar explains that "hijabis" are against the control of women and that they are traumatized by discrimination. As such, they want "no drama". She draws on Egyptian goddess Nefertiti to demonstrate the historical agency of women, adding that what she and her "hijabi" friends want is a world of female leaders that counter eighteenth century stereotypes of Muslim women that mislabel them as culturally inferior. Nefertiti (and the ancient Egyptians overall) are claimed by Afrocentrists. It seems to me that this should be mentioned, In light of the African-American origins of hip hop and Muslim Cool, it is another piece of evidence of Haydar attaching

herself to this tradition – while also giving it her own, Arab and multicultural flavour.

The chorus tells “hijabis” that stereotypes of them are strategies of control. “Power run deep.” Then, the chorus encourages women to “Keep swaggin my hijabis. Swag-swaggin my hijabis.” That is, continue wearing your headscarves with pride even if predominant rhetoric and depiction of Muslim women remains negative.

Haydar engages with more “writing against culture” by citing different locations, styles and contexts of hijabi women that are different from mainstream, collective depictions undermining women's individual agencies and diverse identities. She mentions at least one country from each continent with Muslim populations, from Somalia and Pakistan to Canada; she cites different sects of Islam: Sunni Islam and Sufism; and in terms of style, the artist gives a shout out to 'dreddies', who like Rastas, prefer to wear their hair in dredlocks. This may refer to women wearing hijab over their dredlocks, as it may also be a nod to Rastafarians. (and thus, again, a claiming of he Black heritage) “Hijabi” counters popular, homogenous, and mainstream depiction of Muslim women as Middle Eastern Arabs by pointing out not only the diverse ethnicities of Muslim women but by highlighting different sects of Islam and mixing together diaspora and Muslim-majority population inclusive of races and geographies. “All around the world/ Love women every shading.” In this sense, the variety of themes and diversity of depiction in “Hijabi” makes the music video an educational cultural capital that adds to dominant understandings of Muslim women's locations and attire and offers the non-Muslim viewer new meanings of Muslim women.

To conclude, 2017 music video *Hijabi* is brief, but within the larger context of mainstream popular culture intended to counter stereotypes of Muslims, it stands apart in that it addresses a full range of stereotypes of both “hijabis” and Muslims. *Hijabi* is a direct response to stereotypes of Muslim women that represent them as embodying a problematic “difference”. A form of “writng against culture" consisting of everyday understandings of the individual and “self” (Abu-Lughod 2002), Haydar's lyrics thereby critique imperial propaganda of Muslim women and add new depictions to mainstream portrayal of “hijabis” as oppressed. In this way, by reminding the viewer of discourses on freedom of religion and human rights in the US, **The First Amendment to the US Constitution** gives people the right to practice their religions. By

highlighting the diversity of “hijabis”, *Hijabi* reverses prevalent Orientalist conceptual imaginations of Muslim women and Muslim women's clothing and challenges the wide-spread conflation of the terms “Arab” with “Muslim” by emphasizing the diversity of Muslims around the world. “So even if you hate it/ I still wrap my hijab,” as she angles the spotlight on Muslim women away from the notion of difference to the right to religious freedom.

I have focused on “Hijabi” because it is the artist's first song and because the lyrics directly address the three most common stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims outlined by Jack Shaheen in *Reel Bad Arabs*. Nonetheless, Haydar's stance against discrimination is also clear in other music videos of hers. In “Miss Me”, for example, Haydar highlights the problem of the vilification of minority dress through the line “Divide and conquer is the aesthetic/ Pointing out the difference,” meaning that people use difference in attire as a means of separating individuals from ethnic groups from the majority population. In that same song, she reiterates the popular and comedic message from American-Muslim performers of stand-up comedy on racial profiling by saying, “ If I keep saying "Allah"/ They won't let me on the plane.” Mona Haydar\s music videos are, overall, a Muslim Cool call for solidarity with the marginalized through rap and post-colonial feminism. Interviews with the artist are, lke her music videos, available online, on Youtube.

The emerging trend of Muslim Cool music videos is thus reflective of how religion in the digital moment represents an intersection between race, religion and gender, where hoodjabi women can articulate their own understandings of the attire as relevant to their respective social contexts themselves; and the fast circulation of hate speech is thus countered through the embodied, affective and sensory experiences of audiovisual digital media and religion (Peterson 2019). As a mediation approach to Islamophobia, Muslim Cool music videos facilitate communication of new understandings of religion through their sensory and emotional capablities, and they offer insight into existential aspects of being Muslim. In sum, the Muslim Cool music video platform is a contemporary space for expansion and deeper theorization on social issues impacting marginalized communties, hence allowing individuals to share their own understandings of religion with the public through the capabilities of technologies.

Hijabi
What that hair look like
Bet that hair look nice
Don’t that make you sweat?
Don’t that feel too tight?
Yo what yo hair look like
Bet yo hair look nice
How long your hair is

You need to get yo life
You only see Oriental
You steady working that dental
You poppin' off at the lip
And run ya mouth like a treadmill
Not your exotic vacation
I’m bored with your fascination
I need that PayPal, PayPal, PayPal
If you want education

Make a feminist planet
Women haters get banished
Me and my hijabi ladies
We was born in the eighties
So pretty like the Euphrates
And party like some Kuwaitis
Deeper than some diplomas
Current like some hot yoga
Takin' back the misnomers and
Teleportin' through trauma
I been stackin' my karma
Nefertiti, no drama
Make a feminist planet
Women haters get banished
Covered up or not don’t ever take us for granted

All around the world
Love women every shading
Be so liberated
All around the world
Love women every shading
Power run deep
So even if you hate it
I still wrap my hijab
Wrap my hijab (implying also “rap”)

Wrap my hijab
Wrap my hijab
Keep swaggin' my hijabis
Swag-swaggin' my hijabis
Swaggin' my hijabis
Swag-swaggin' my hijabis

You're just jealous of my sisters
These Mipsters, these hippies
These prissies, these Sufis
These dreddies, these Sunnis
These Shii's, Yemenis
Somalis, Libnanis, Pakistanis
These Soories, Sudanis
Iraqis, Punjabies
Afghanis, Yazeedis
Khaleejis, Indonesians
Egyptians, Canadians
Algerians, Nigerians
Americans, Libyans
Tunisians, Palestinians
Hidden beyond the Mekong in Laos
Senegalese, and Burkina Faso (Haydar year)

Conclusion

Music videos are a form of popular culture combining both visuals and audio; and by combining images with music and lyrics, messages on marginalized communities and social identities are communicated in more than one way. The intent behind combining these two modes of communication is to leave a new impression on consumers of popular culture. By examining Poetic Pilgrimage in the context of images of headwear, and by looking at Mona Haydar lyrics through the lens of anti-colonial feminism, this chapter has attempted to argue that the two creators utilize music videos as a from of communication that continues a legacy of Muslim Cool music that is at the intersection of race, religion and gender. Through the "blackness" of their attire, lyrics and choice of musical genre that represents a call for equality and anti-racism, the two artists continue a tradition of expressing dismay at social injustices faced by minorities and by women in those locations.

Constructions of femininities and masculinities of the Muslim 'Other,' stemming from Orientalist imaginations and from colonial feminist theories have dominated the Western media, and the

consumption and reception of stereotypes of women has resulted in a form of gendered Islamophobia. Consequently, “hijabis” and “hoodjabis” are often discriminated against. Gendered Islamophobia, which is a social justice issue, can only be reversed by ending the language of the Muslim ‘Other’; and there is a need for media representations that include contextual realities reflecting the diversity of Muslim women. In other words, mainstream media and popular culture consisting of repetitive stereotypes prevent the public from alternate knowledge; and in order for the public to learn about feminisms that demonstrate women’s changing roles and attitudes toward the “hijab”, it is important that there be a space in popular culture that hears from women who choose to wear one themselves.

I locate Poetic Pilgrimage and Mona Haydar as Muslim Cool hip hop artists within the Black Arts Movement. Growing styles of Muslim Cool headwear reflect a social identity of people wearing hoodies, empathizing with the Trayvon Martins “looking suspicious”, and people wearing hijabs and hoodjabs, empathizing with Muslim women being “oppressed|”. Contesting stereotypes that come with 'Blackness' (a form of marginalization) by being “Black cool' (a style and way of being), Muslim Cool headwear is a form of visual communication vital to racial-religious performativity highlighting sense of self; and the Muslim identities suggesting subversion of stereotypes of Muslims through musical narrative in the US and UK treated in this chapter foreground the diversity of Muslims.

Although Muslim audiences are already aware of the reasons women wear a “hijab”, that “Muslim” does not always equal “Arab”, and so on, they are acutely conscious that institutionalized modes of representation in popular culture reflect lack of diversity and reality, and the stereotypes are widespread and have resulted in the marginalization of many. Haydar and Pilgrimage music videos also seem to be an appeal to mutual tolerance and unity between Muslims of different origins and persuasions,

In the case of Poetic Pilgrimage, the duo's post-conversion experiences with Arab Muslims has left them feeling neglected as Afro-Caribbean Jamaicans, a feeling triggered by interactions consisting of discussions that revolve around issues such as Palestine, the Arab Spring, and other problems in the Arab world only (Suana 2013). The duo's music represents black Muslim women of Jamaican-British background, reminding us that Islam is

capable of traveling across geographies.

Therefore, it is understood that Muslim audiences are vitally interested in and gratified by reversal of stereotypes of Muslim women in popular culture and have an opportunity, as consumers, to "see themselves" not only as subverting stereotypes but as guilty of discrimination by Arab Sunnis in the eyes of Shiite Jamaican-British converts Poetic Pilgrimage whose style and understandings of piety are different (Suana 2013).

The music videos by Pilgrimage and Haydar, in this way, address the failure to understand differences between religion and ethnicity and the diverse identities of those who identify as Muslim, and they challenge gender inequalities in the hip hop music video industry by being hoodjabis who identify with modesty as cool.

Pilgrimage and Haydar also blur the boundaries that define what is considered religious by making meaning of their existence through a form of media different from televangelism shows and religious websites and blogs. This is reflective of the changing digital world that is constantly in progress as a platform, expanded to include more contexts, which allows for the examination of religious meaning-making in more locations with varying colonial histories (Peterson 2019). Pilgrimage and Haydar thus make meaning of religion in ways that may not always connect to traditional religious institutions by offering a variety of new emotions and identities communicated through the fast-changing nature of digital popular culture (Peterson 2019). Muslim Cool music videos serve as a vehicle for individuals to make meaning of religion in various social contexts that complicate definitions of religion (Peterson 2019); and regardles of differences between backgrounds, Poetic Pilgrimage and Mona Haydar represent Muslim Cool through their choice of hip hop music videos as a vehicle to express concern and solidarity with the marginalized. Their headwear is an artifact of Black cool that is identified with Muslims. In other words the hoodjab is considered cool because it signifies hip hop, which stands for Cool black as an experience of marginalization (Abdul Khabeer 2016). Poetic Pilgrimage and Mona Haydar demonstrate this understanding of the attire as Muslim Cool artists wearing different styles of hijabs in their music videos.

Conclusion

"In the minds of the unprepared or the unalert, Islam calls up images of bearded clerics and mad suicidal bombers, of unrelenting Iranian mullahs, fanatical fundamentalists, and kidnappers, remorseless turbaned crowds who chant hatred of the US, 'the great devil', and all its ways... Is there a style of thought and language that pretends neither to get past the word's embroiled semantic history, nor to restore it, cleansed and sparkling new, for further polemical use?" (Said 1988).

Efforts at pedagogical subversion of myths by artists of Arab and Muslim background have been facilitated by the employment of techniques meant to counter stereotypes in the Muslims diaspora in mainstream contemporary Internet series, stand-up comedy and music videos in the US. Efforts have also been facilitated by the fact that the circulation of digital and digitalized culture on the Internet allows diverse voices to be more easily heard by a wide audience. I highlight representation of women because discourses on Muslim women in the diasporas continue to revolve around attire. Rrepresentations of Arabs and Muslims in Internet series, stand-up comedy and music videos by Arabs and Muslims themselves are creating new space for cultural dialogue by drawing on prior traditions of use of popular culture by minority groups that began in the US. Technology has strengthened relationships between all forms of popular culture by making it possible to make cultural objects digital, while the Internet has strengthened transnational relations between communities and their diasporas.

This on-line availability of popular culture also facilitates transnational circulation, hence creating international popular culture and bringing it to broader viewerships. Persistent stereotypes of Muslims in American media and film are being answered by popular culture produced by diasporic Muslims in the form of films and other digital media. The result is multilingual, multicultural, multi-genres forms of work that create space for new, transnational dialogues between oceans and across diasporas (Alsultany 2013), a good part of which includes subversion of stereotypes. Circulation and translation of narratives across national borders and diasporas offers audiences new transnational perspectives which then create new space for cultural dialogue. Moreover, and in addition to analysis of contemporary representation in actual geographical locations and diasporas, the digital era plays a big role in offering transnational insights into diasporic identities and resistancies. Circulation and translation of narratives across national borders and

diasporas offers audiences new transnational perspectives which then create new space for cultural dialogue (Alsultany and Shohat 2013).

How are these cultural objects created by Muslims themselves, and as facilitated by their on-line availability, creating new space for cultural dialogue today? How are artists, especially female artists, contending with Islamophobia? What techniques of creation are being deployed to subvert, reverse and debunk colonial myths of Muslim women; and through what forms of popular culture is this taking place? To contextualize the works as a form of subversion that is playing out in the digital world of contemporary popular culture, these specific representations of the female Muslim 'other' are different from previous representations and contribute to re-defining definitions assigned to Muslim women in the diaspora by countering the public imaginary in the context of transnational cultural exchange in digital spaces.

Chapters 1 and 2 engage with the idea of film as 'lesson plans', with *Ramy* reflecting new and diverse understandings of |Muslims in the US through everydayness and cultural translation. Chapter 1 and 2 also present omitted knowledge about women with Arab and/or Muslim backgrounds as perpetuation of stereotypes of women, pointing out that film reflecting women in countries such as Egypt has actually always been employed as a tool to address social issues, especially issues of gender. Chapters 3 and 4 discuss techniques deployed in the contesting of Islamophobia through content creation in music videos and stand-up comedy, also quickly available on-line. Offering space for dialogue through relationality between forms of popular culture, artists are responding to Islamophobia and negative representation of Muslims through Internet series, stand-up comedy and music videos; as a pedagogical praxis, this creates conditions of possibility for the public to acquire new understandings that resist conventional ways of thinking of 'Others'.

In this way, my dissertation hopes to have added to previous analysis and documentation of "veiled and oppressed woman", "Arab=Muslim", and "evil Arab" Hollywood representations by offering examinations of series, music videos, and stand-up comedy that serve to contest stereotypes through their subversion, their transnational capabilities, their diasporic popularity, and their online accessibility. I highlight the works as an alternative feminist knowledge in the diasporic abroad that can influence existing hegemonic narratives of the female 'Other' by reflecting diverse realities, ethnicities, and socio-economic conditions of the women.

Considering that the consumption of digital popular culture as everydayness is a cultural revolution in cyberspace, the techniques employed by these artists, informed by media literacy, facilitate a public pedagogy contesting common stereotypes of Muslims by effectively offering previously withheld new knowledge humanizing a group of people.

Contemporary post-9/11 Anglo-American Internet series, stand-up comedy, and music videos in the Muslim diaspora contest stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims in Western popular culture through the employment of various techniques that take history of negative stereotyping into account. By speaking to both Muslim and non-Muslim audiences, the works examined in this dissertation create room for negation of stereotypes as well as for self-reflection by Muslim viewers. The dominant stereotypes that these artists contest are: “Arab = Muslim”, “terrorist”, and “veiled and oppressed woman”.

A knowledge omitted, by including the historical and contextual specificity of a contemporary Egyptian cinema, I present it as a feminist discourse countering dominant representations. The system of representation of women in the Third World by Westerners excludes ethnicities, social classes, and geographical locations. In this way, I offer an illustration of how certain Egyptian cinema production can be knowledge countering dominant Western representations of Arab/Muslim women by sharing representations of women's agency in relation to wearing the veil as communicated to its Arabic-speaking target audience throughout the series. Finally, because locational, contextual, linguistic and individual representation of women continues to be regularly omitted in gendered representation of Muslim women in the diasporas, Alsultany suggests transnational exchange of work by Arabs/Muslims themselves. I examine what technologies of gender and what transnational politics are deployed within the distribution of Egyptian cinema on-line. Egyptian cinema as a digital feminist knowledge accessible to non-Arabic-speaking markets demonstrates potential for a new form of transnational feminist resistance challenging dominant media representations. There are works that have potential to offer cultural knowledge to non-Arabic-speaking audiences that is more reflective of the changing realities of the veil. Egyptian cinema examined has not been circulated outside of Arabic-speaking websites and satellite television networks, and it has not been translated into other languages, making it difficult to open the corpus up to an English-speaking audience and to make it easier to communicate relevant feminist discourse in the cinema as

a form of resistance to dominant imperial rhetoric on Arab/Muslim women.

Digital Everydayness, Non-Movement and Transnationalism

In 1957, the Egyptian film *Al-Futuwwa (The Thug)* by Salah Abu Seif featured a peasant who sells melons at a Cairo vegetable market. The vendor, who pulls his cart through the streets himself because he can't afford a donkey, gets robbed, and the donkey remains a metaphor for class and for the masses who are working like one. On December 17, 2010, fifty-three years after Abu Seif's film *Al-Futuwwa (The Thug)*, Mohamed Bouazizi, a Tunisian vendor set himself on fire after a cop confiscated his belongings. This triggered a people's revolution resulting in Tunisians dethroning President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali on January 14, 2011. The revolution then spread to Libya, Egypt and other countries in the region, and the people unified, summarizing the many grievances that they have in common through the slogan “bread, freedom, dignity”.

What the vending businesses in the 1957 film *Al-Futuwwa (The Thug)* and in 2010 Tunisian streets have in common is that they are both reflective of social movements.

Everyday life practices of ordinary people who are attempting to embetter their life conditions become trends, and the fact that millions of people take part in individual yet similar trends (such as consumption of popular culture on-line) which creates a collective subaltern. What this means is that as new social solidarity trends in the form of new mentalities, lifestyles, and behaviors such as ‘digital everydayness’ grow, and the number of people taking part in the non-movement increases, problems of the masses begin to have a collective voice; and as a form of resistance, trends and exchanges of opinions in public spaces end up giving a voice to the community as a collective. The vending businesses seen in 1957 *Al-Futuwwa (The Thug)* and in 2010 Tunisian streets are expressions of social non-movements, because although the trend of being a vendor is an individual practice and does not form part of a collective plan, the urban street continues to bring people together by serving as a space to express discontent. Street vendors, squatters, street children, protestors, and youth in street-corners are all examples of groups of people engaged in non-movements. In non-movements, the act of 'being-in-the-street' results in communication of people's grievances

and becomes an on-going process of social change (Bayat 2013).

Soon after the Arab Spring, Dabashi made the argument that the effects of the Arab Spring can be seen abroad (where there are other forms of oppression), in the form of anti-imperial and anti-capitalist movements such as the Wall Street movement (Dabashi 2013). This post-Arab Spring anti-colonial sentiment in the diaspora described by Dabashi is also seen in the form of a non-movement manifesting itself through the massive consumption of cultural objects by Muslim artists contesting stereotypes. The world-wide popularity of the series, stand-up comedy and music videos discussed in this dissertation is, in my opinion, reflective of a non-movement by audiences engaged in the acts of circulating and consuming the material, not because they planned it, but because it speaks to them. The series, music videos and stand-up comedy discussed in my dissertation are serving as fast and easily accessible exchange of contextual realities; the on-line availability of popular culture facilitates circulation; and circulation and translation of narratives across national borders and diasporas offers audiences new transnational perspectives which then create new space for cultural dialogue.

Cultural objects in the digital world provide transnational insights into diasporic identities and resistances. “The encounter of multiple diasporas whether within actual geographical or digital spaces, meanwhile, has come to form part of an ingenious artistic dialogue generating new diasporic and transnational cultural work. On the international scene, we find hybrid music featuring multilingual lyrics, mixing multiple musical genres, rhythms, and systems (for example, half-and quartertones). What was marketed in the 1980s as “ethnic music” morphed in the 1990s into “world music” (Alsultany 2013, 13). Alsultany examines Brazilian Telenovela *El Clon*, (The Clone), which follows the adventures of a Moroccan family living in Brazil and aired worldwide from 2002 to 2010. *El Clon*, which is originally in Portuguese, was dubbed into Spanish for a Latin American audience, and subsequently into Turkish, Hebrew, and Russian. The Telenovela was criticized for its Orientalist imagery similar to that found in European and North American productions, i.e harems, veils, belly dancing, and “fascination with a distant Moorish/Iberian past” (Alsultany 2013, 13); but it also encouraged global trends in belly dancing and a new fusion music, called Belly-Samba. Thus space to expand audiences was created by drawing on already-existing cultural elements and introducing new ones from new geographical locations. Exchange of digital popular culture is

exchange of contextual realities across countries and diasporas, some of which serves to contest and break down stereotypes, or at least present newer and more diversified images of Arabs and Muslims. “The globalized nature of contemporary political discourse and media representation calls for a cross-border transnational analysis (Alsultany 2013, 12).

Digital everydayness increases cultural dialogue by facilitating wider understandings of marginalized identities by majority communities. *El Clone* is important because depictions of Muslims in the West are usually generated in Europe and North America; *El Clone*, to the unfamiliar familiar, creates awareness of a Latino-Arab culture rarely portrayed in popular culture.

The digital era has enabled and accelerated this exchange of cultural objects across countries and diasporas. Transnationalism opens up room for new cultural dialogues on diasporic identities and resistancies and includes analysis of contemporary representation in actual geographical locations and diasporas as well as in the digital world. From the lens of Evelyn Alsultany's theory on transnationalism, that circulation and translation of narratives across national borders and diasporas offers audiences new transnational perspectives which then create new space for cultural dialogue: transnationalism opens up room for new cultural dialogues on diasporic identities and resistancies and includes analysis of contemporary representation in actual geographical locations and diasporas as well as in the digital world.

My final example of the potential for transnational exchange against stereotypes through digital media consists of a series which has not yet been dubbed or culturally repackaged and concerns representations of Muslim women in Egypt, a Muslim-majority country.

My dissertation thus ends with contextualizing representations of the veil in 2014 Egyptian Television series للأعلى سعر (For the Highest Price) in the debate on stereotypes playing out in the digital world of contemporary popular culture; when dubbed or culturally translated, I would recommend the series as an alternate ‘lesson plan’. From the lens of Evelyn Alsultany's theory on transnationalism, that circulation and translation of narratives across national borders and diasporas offers audiences new transnational perspectives which then create new space for

cultural dialogue (Alsultany 2013): if translated or culturally-repackaged, the series could offer audiences new space for new transnational dialogues on definitions of the veil as well as offer new cultural knowledge to non-Arabic-speaking audiences that is more reflective of the changing realities of the veil. I find that Egyptian TV series أغلى سعر (For the Highest Price) is most reflective of contemporary interpretations of the veil by its wearers.

Produced by El Adl Group, it stars Egyptian-Russian actress and ballerina Nelly Karim, and the story-line draws on her own life-story. The main protagonist is a ballerina who has given up her career for marriage. After seeking refuge in a veil, she tells her father that the less she dances, the more she turns to spirituality. However, the father, who is a musician, believes his daughter should focus on dancing. The ballerina's spouse, like her family and friends, is also against her wearing a veil. This leads to the couple's divorce. Following a child custody battle, the veiled ballerina transforms back into an unveiled one. At the end of the series, she uses her veil as part of a dance.

The descriptive transformation of a female protagonist, and her journey from ballet to the veil and from the veil back to ballet, is reflective of the plurality of meanings of the veil (Abu-Lughod 2002). أغلى سعر (For the Highest Price) offers new descriptions of the female 'other' to a non-Muslim viewership by adding newer understandings of the veil through more contemporary and contextual representation; and, if translated, or culturally re-packaged, it is ideal for the transfer of contemporary cultural knowledge relevant to the veil to non-Arabic-speaking, non-Muslim audiences. By focusing on commonalities such as career, marriage, class, and divorce, the story-line identifies with viewers on an emotional level, hence de-constructing predominant representations of a stereotyped group.

Egyptian TV series and melodramas became popular in the Arabic-speaking world from the 1980s onwards; nonetheless, the majority focused on upper class women, and Egyptian female viewers who were interviewed said that they could not relate much to the lifestyles of women depicted (Abu-Lughod 2004). More recent series, however, such as سجن لنساء (*Sign el Nisa)*, about a women's prison, and 2014 Egyptian Television series أغلى سعر (For the Highest Price), where the protagonist's father is a poor musician, point toward a change in class depiction.

To conclude, depictions of Muslim women are changing in both

Hollywood and Egyptian cinema, the two main cinemas depicting Muslims; and the digital era facilitates transnational exchange of contemporary digital popular culture that has potential to counter stereotype.

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