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Muslim Women in Cape Town: A feminist narrative analysis

Leila Davids
DVDLEI001

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
award of the degree of Master of Arts (Research Psychology)**

**Faculty of Humanities
University of Cape Town
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Supervised by Professor Don Foster

UT 150 DAVI

763132

University of Cape Town

COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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University of Cape Town

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ABSTRACT

Given the amount of literature on Islam in South Africa, very little has been written about the roles of Muslim women and their contributions to the development of Islam in this country. In addition, there is a dearth of academic work on the ways in which Muslim women in South Africa identify themselves. Of the writing that does exist, there is an almost exclusive focus on a binary distinction between modern and traditional women, which limits the multiplicity of expressions available to these women. This thesis examines through the analysis of narratives, the diversity of experiences and the fluidity of subjectivities for Muslim women, without conforming to binary divisions for analysis. Instead, the range of identities and the shifting processes of gender constructions are prioritised.

Nine participants including the researcher took part in the interview process. The narrative life histories of the eight interviewees were analysed to ascertain moments of connection and disconnection between and across participants. Individual accounts and common experiences provided a platform for the analysis of women as individual social agents and to focus on the contextual processes embedded in the narratives. The purpose of the analysis was to investigate how Muslim women in Cape Town construct their sense of selves, to what extent their subjectivities are influenced by context, and to what extent they felt connected to Muslim communities both locally and globally.

The narratives revealed that in as much as many experiences are common to all participants, there is a high degree of variation between personal accounts. While gender is claimed as a salient identity category, it is considered only one of a number of identifications to which the women feel connected. The situatedness of subjectivity was emphasised, as was the necessity for a holistic understanding of identification that includes race, religion, class, education level, culture, nationality, and age. Narrative themes and clusters included *ummah*; gender roles; gender discrimination; feminism; education; dress code; sexuality and weddings. Within these narrative clusters a range of discourses, opinions and experiences were identified.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Section</i>	<i>page</i>
Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Table of Contents	iii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1. Motivation for the study	1
1.2. A note on terminology	2
1.3. Structure of this thesis	2
Chapter 2: Theoretical Background: Women, Islam, South Africa	5
2.1. Slavery, emancipation and routes to freedom	7
2.1.1. Race and sexualisation	7
2.1.2. Marriage and conversion	8
2.1.3. Attempts to limit and reverse women's conversion to Islam	11
2.1.4. Race, gender and religion	12
2.1.5. Women's roles	14
2.1.6. Education	16
2.2. Cultural diversity and leadership	17
2.3. Struggle movements	21
2.4. South African Muslim gender debate	27
2.5. Current developments	29
Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework 1: Academic Representations of Muslim Women	32
3.1. Representations of Muslim women in South African academia in the mid to late twentieth century	32
3.2. Recent academic research on Muslim women in South Africa	35

3.3. Recent academic research on Muslim women in western countries	41
3.3.1. Women's issues	41
3.3.2. Embodied identity	44
 Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework 2: Feminisms	 48
4.1. Liberal, radical and socialist/Marxist feminisms	49
4.2. Lesbian feminism	51
4.3. Black feminism	52
4.4. Third world feminism	55
4.5. Islamic feminism	57
 Chapter 5: Methodological Framework	 64
5.1. Qualitative research	64
5.2. Feminist research	65
5.3. Narrative analysis	67
5.4. The study	69
5.4.1. Institutional and personal contexts	69
5.4.2. Research processes	70
5.4.3. Participants	72
5.4.4. Interviews	73
5.4.5. Reflexivity in practice	74
 Chapter 6: Identification of narratives	 76
6.1. Core narratives	76
6.2. Progressive narratives	77
6.3. Narrative devices	77
6.3.1. Micronarratives	78
6.3.2. Narrative ties and links with others	79
6.3.3. Collaboration with the listener	79
6.3.4. Metaphor and meaning	80
6.3.5. Repetition	80
6.3.6. Dramatic engagement	81
6.3.7. Linking time	81

6.4. Individual narratives	81
6.4.1. 'This woman' in the mosque	82
6.4.2. 'This Muslim woman'	84
6.5. Common narratives	87
 Chapter 7: Common narratives 1: Personal subjectivities; <i>ummah</i> ; gender roles; gender discrimination; feminism	89
7.1. Subjectivities, gender and Islam	89
7.2. <i>Ummah</i>	96
7.3. Gender roles	101
7.4. Gender discrimination	105
7.5. Feminism	106
 Chapter 8: Common narratives 2: Education; dress code; sexuality; weddings	112
8.1. Education	112
8.1.1. <i>Madressah</i>	112
8.1.2. School	113
8.2. Dress code	115
8.3. Sexuality	121
8.4. Weddings	124
 Chapter 9: Discussion	127
9.1. Narrative analysis summary	127
9.2. Limitations to the study	134
9.3. Researching Islam and gender in South Africa	135
9.4. Concluding remarks	136
 References	137
 Appendix 1: Glossary	151
Appendix 2: Coding	152
Appendix 3: Interview schedule	153
Appendix 4: Core narrative summaries	154

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Motivation for the study

In 2000, while rereading transcripts of interviews that I had conducted for an Honours research project on the construction of identities for young Muslim Capetonians, I noticed a marked difference between the discourses employed in the constructions of these identities, both religious and cultural, between women and men participants. The Honours project was limited to the negotiation and constructions of race and ethnicity, and the gendered aspect to the study was sidelined.

Academic constructions and popular representations of Cape Muslim women often render them invisible and powerless. Women's studies have attempted to counter the trend of a hegemonic view of the world through men's eyes. In South Africa, in as much as very positive strides towards this goal have occurred, there still remains a dearth of literature and focus on black women and Muslim women in particular. Discussions on South African Muslim identities tend to focus almost exclusively on male identity, with women occasionally receiving a separate mention. Although this study is not the first to look at Muslim women's experiences specifically in the Cape (see Edross, 1995, 1997; Shaikh, 1996; Lee, 2001, 2002) it is unique in this context in that it presents a view of Muslim women beyond the traditional/western split into two competing groups. The implications for work that positions Muslim women as either religious and traditional, or modern and western, is that stereotypical and limited theories about the way in which these women are constructed are reinforced. Instead, the thesis situates women's personal experiences as indicative of the multiple possible positionings of Muslim women that takes into account the patriarchal discourses specific to Muslim women in South Africa and locates those discourses in the wider social context emphasising class differences and racialism; while also recognising how their everyday lives, like those of all individuals, are constituted through intersecting discursive, material, and social formations (Dwyer, 1999).

This thesis is in no way a comprehensive and exhaustive account of the complex interactions between religious ideology and practice, and processes of social and political change within which women collectively and individually attempt to shape their lives. An attempt of such a presentation tends towards essentialising the experiences of women, an approach maligned within the literature (Kandiyoti, 1991a). Nevertheless, an overview is given on differing

themes and issues, with examples from particular contexts where appropriate. This thesis is a contribution towards the insufficient theory on Muslim women in South Africa, and an attempt to move away from limiting and totalising theories while at the same time remaining cognisant of the specific oppressive and liberating aspects of their lives.

1.2. A note on terminology

Certain terms defy translation. Afrikaans, Arabic and other expressions specific to South African culture and Islamic terminology appear in italics in the body of the text, and appear alphabetised with a brief translation in Appendix 1: Glossary.

Concepts of race and ethnicity have moved radically away from scientific notions of separate, hierarchical races (Foster, 1991). Culture, like ethnicity is sometimes used to justify discourses of separateness, providing “a gloss and legitimising function along with a whole set of other euphemistic substitutes for ‘race’ such as ... peoples, volk, population group and nation” (Foster, 1991, p. 9). This thesis rejects racist and racial classification, while noting that “blackness, whiteness and colouredness exist, but they are cultural, historical and political identities” (Erasmus, 2001, p. 12) that are pervasive in South Africa. These terms litter our vocabulary and are the discursive tools with which we shape our fluctuating identities.

Throughout this thesis, the terms black, white and coloured appear in small caps and without cumbersome quotation marks. I take heed of both Jeppie’s (2001) discussion on the reclassification of Muslim identities in South Africa, and Ebrahim-Valley’s (2001a) argument for the use of the term Indian in quotation marks when referring to South African Indian communities, but note that for the purposes of this thesis the terms Indian, Malay and African appear and retain their upper case nomenclature for grammatical motives and for the sake of clarity.

1.3. Structure of this thesis

Chapter 2 provides an historical overview and theoretical background on Islam and Muslim women in South Africa. Muslim women at the Cape were and are constructed in terms of race, geographical origin, and class; with very little focus placed on the gendered aspects of their lives. A gendered approach to historical Islam at the Cape allows for the articulation of a localised religion and culture fraught with disconnections and reconnections. A feminist

analysis of historical evidence and academic constructions of historical subjects and cultural practices opens up the debate around the notion of passive and subservient Muslim women who took a backseat in the development of Islam in South Africa. Questions are raised as to the unchanging nature of social practice through the examination of marriages as political and cultural tools. Questions are also raised as to the leadership roles that women played and their social and economic power. The heterogeneity of Muslim communities in South Africa is discussed as evidenced by the varying roles women have played from slavery through to the anti-apartheid movements, and presently. The chapter details some of the challenged and challenging aspects of Islam for women in South Africa.

Please note the Chapter is ambitious in that it spans many disciplines and eras, and that it does not profess to be a comprehensive account of the historical processes for Muslim women at the Cape. Rather, an attempt is made to interrogate a series of connected moments in history that creates its own reassembling, in order to situate the following chapters.

Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 provide theoretical frameworks for the analysis to follow. Chapter 3 focuses specifically on the academic representations of Muslim women in South Africa in the mid to late twentieth century and more recently. The chapter also includes a brief literature review on international academic representations of Muslim women in western countries with minority Muslim populations. Chapter 4 expands into feminisms as key concepts to the theoretical framework of the study. The chapter traces the movement of feminisms from a western centric set of philosophies to a more inclusive grouping of philosophies, with an emphasis on black, third world and Islamic feminisms.

Chapter 5 focuses on the methodological framework, and links with the previous chapter by including discussions on epistemological choices and feminist research. A discussion on narrative analysis forms the core of this chapter as it is the chosen method for this study. The study is then considered in terms of research processes, contexts, participants, interviews, and reflexivity.

Analysis of the interviews is presented in Chapter 6, Chapter 7, and Chapter 8. Chapter 6 details the way in which the interviews were analysed into core narratives, progressive narratives, individual narratives and common narratives. The identification of narrative devices is clarified with the use of narrative examples from an interview. Chapter 6 also

includes the presentation of individual narratives, which while important do not conform with the general trend common to most of the narratives. Chapter 7 and Chapter 8 offer an analysis of common narratives, that is, narrative themes that occur in most if not all the participants' interviews. Chapter 7 focuses primarily on the construction of gendered subjectivities within the interview situation, issues of community, gender roles and gender discrimination, and feminism; while Chapter 8 explores issues around education, dress code, sexuality and weddings. The final chapter draws the entire thesis together, provides a discussion around the work presented in the previous eight chapters; includes reflections on alternative ways in which the work could have been written; limitations to the study; and concluding remarks.

A thesis is a sustained line of argument, and while this chapter has briefly sketched the outline of the topic and research question, the following chapters explore this in greater depth and detail.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

WOMEN, ISLAM, SOUTH AFRICA

'To my sisters in history in Cape Town's past
Attached to the slave, the slave ship's mast
Saartjie van de Kaap and Cissie Gool
Muslim women who re, who redefined the rules
And to my sisters on the frontlines of the UDF
Where scarves were a way of saying *voetsek*
Know that I make it my business not to forget'

(Davids, N. *Ms Islam from At Her Feet*)

A limitation to the general literature on Islam in South Africa is the ignorance surrounding the roles and life experiences of Muslim women. The historical approach to the subject taken by most researchers has tended to sideline identity issues, particularly the fluidity of culture and the position of women. By sidelining identity issues and marginalising gender, the literature reveals the social dynamic. The fact that most scholars who have published or written on the subject of Cape Islam are men lends a specific gendered slant to the information presented about women's lives. In most cases, issues pertaining to women are either relegated to the periphery or written from a male's perspective. In general, male historical figures from outside of the Cape like *Sheikh Yusuf* and Tuan Guru are credited with instigating and consolidating Islam in the Cape. This "precludes the possibility that the spread of Islam was attributable to factors internal to either the slave community or Islam itself" (Bradlow, 1984/5, p. 12); and also dismisses the contributions of women in the unfolding and proliferation of the religion.

Women like Saartie van de Kaap and Cissie Gool, who have played a significant role in the development of communities, have not received similar historical, cultural or religious status as Muslims. In addition, very little is known about the lives of early Cape Muslim women and very few contemporary studies have been undertaken to assess the particular needs and experiences of Muslim women presently living in the Cape. This chapter explores some of these issues with particular emphasis on the marginalisation of Muslim women in historical texts and the prevailing resistance to ongoing marginalisation. It challenges the idea of all Muslim women as either passive recipients of culture or peripheral players without recourse or resistance in a marginalised community. Instead, by tracing the arguments concerning the

roles of Muslim women in the Cape from slavery through to the present day, diversity is unfolded.

Most histories of the Cape focus on geographical origin, class and religion as the dominant schisms. Gendered colonial historical “literature is [often] recuperative, that is bringing women into the narrative, and the explicit link between ‘race’ and sex and the power relations which underpin these are seldom focused upon” (Hendricks, 2001, p. 31). Academic constructions which inform popular notions of eighteenth and nineteenth century Cape women render them either invisible, powerless, or frame their contributions negatively (van der Spuy, 1996). The confluence of racist and orientalist colonial depictions of Muslim women and the paucity of literature uncovering the lived experiences of these women, make a feminist critique of these histories imperative. African Muslim societies outside of South Africa are examining the relationships between power, gender, religion and politics with specific reference to colonial experiences (see Margot Badran’s (1996) work on the negotiations of gender identity in colonial Egypt), yet a vacuum on this specific subject exists in current South African academia. Examining the historical accounts of Cape Muslim women’s lives and representations of Muslim slave women by colonialists, Muslim men and current academic work, can contribute to the recovery of these women’s experiences. Detailed analysis of cultural events can also assist in the understanding of religion and society as fluid, and thus encourage progressive changes in current gender politics in South African Muslim societies. Feminist analysis of the historical evidence and cultural practice could explore myths of the passive, subservient Muslim woman; focus on the gendered nature of their realities; and acknowledge that these women’s positions in society have been contested and that their lives have been sites of resistance.

As with most colonial histories on South Africa (van der Spuy, 1996) those focusing on Muslim communities tend to use the hegemonic notion of the division of people along race, geographical origin and class lines, silencing the determinedly gendered nature of colonialism and the patriarchal constitution of most of the cultures represented at the Cape. The context of the lives of Cape Muslim women for over 300 years has been that of living under colonial, apartheid and Muslim patriarchy, all of which have been differently articulated and differently challenged and/or subverted. Of course, women are never only women, we are all positioned according to the interplay between gender, age, race, religion, sexuality, class; making analysis of subjectivities according to any of these factors equally important. My

argument lies in the avoidance of prioritising of any one of these identities over others. Generally, research on South African Muslims implicitly uses 'Muslim' as a non-specific term that can be unpacked as denoting Muslim men, and addresses both oppression and resistance in terms of the actions and ideas of those men. This chapter focuses specifically on the depictions and representations of Muslim women, and the salience of gender as one aspect of their identities in order to redress the imbalance; but refrains from assuming that gender as an identity marker necessarily takes primary importance. The notion of heterogeneity within Muslim societies at the Cape also acknowledges that women had and continue to have diverse experiences contoured by a plurality of subject positions, as well as the fluidity of Cape culture.

2.1. Slavery, emancipation and routes to freedom

2.1.1. Race and sexualisation

Women in colonial times were comparatively scarce [the Dutch East India Company between 1652 and 1808 imported about 15000 slave women and a few hundred European women, compared with thousands of company employees and settlers who were men (Shell, 1994)] and black women although more numerous than white women were inscribed in the colonial psyche as both attractive and repulsive, fostering an ambivalence in both formal and informal power relations (Young, 1995, in Hendricks, 2001). On the one hand, the Dutch East India Company and later the British abhorred the idea of the 'races' mixing, attributed negative characteristics to Khoisan women in particular, and yet found interracial sex expedient, with, as Hendricks (2001) points out, all the power relations implicit in that. Rape and the unequal exchange of sex between white men (slave owners and settlers) and black women (slaves, Free Blacks and Khoisan) was both routine and authorised under the conditions created by colonialism (Scully, 1995; van der Spuy, 1996). In effect, miscegenation at the Cape was in the political and commercial interests of the colonialists- "It created an outlet for the sexual desire and loneliness of their lower class employees, without adding to the financial burden of having to import and support European women, and at the same time reproduced the labour supply needed at the Cape" (Hendricks, 2001, p. 38).

Negative characterisation of black women along with conceptions of miscegenation and the sexual politics of the era mingled to eventually construct discourses around coloured identity (Hendricks, 2001) and, in particular female coloured identities. In the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries, most Muslim women were ascribed with the appellation Malay

which was to become a subset of the coloured category under apartheid rule (Jeppie, 2001). It can be argued those representations were/are vestiges of the constructions of Muslim women in colonial times which, although shifting, need to be examined to reduce the power of negative sexualisation and the associated shame inscribed in these identities (Wicomb, 1998). Women slaves and settler women are routinely and implicitly written about as heterosexual, passive beings whose main purpose at the Cape was to supply children, domestic labour and satiate the sexual appetites of men (van der Spuy, 1996). There is evidence of alternate forms of sexuality practiced by both men and women (Achmat, 1993); as well as work on women who perpetrated violent crimes (van der Spuy, 1989); and while I do not suggest that either form of resistance is in any way comparable (I reject outright the notion of homosexuality as deviant or akin with crime) these are examples of the diversity within women's experiences and the levels of subversion that existed.

2.1.2. Marriage and conversion

Marriage and conversion provided further terrain for resistance. The first Muslim women to arrive in South Africa were the servants and family of *Sheikh* Yusuf, who arrived with him from the Malaysian archipelago in 1694, and returned to their homeland after his death in 1699 (Davids, 1980; Bradlow, 1989; Dangor, 1994; Tayob, 1995b). Although debate ensues about the extent of the *Sheikh's* influence in converting slaves already presiding at the Cape, it seems reasonable to assume some women may have converted to Islam during his exile here. Indeed, it is agreed that outside of the direct guidance of the *Sheikh*, a large number of women converted to Islam because of the influence the religion exerted during slavery and colonial times (Shell, 1989, 1997). Generally though, Muslim women were either forcibly brought to the Cape as slaves, or women converted to Islam because of political, economic, social or religious expediency. Islam was attractive to marginalised people as a tool for resistance to the dominant, enslaving culture; and conversion to either Christianity or Islam had economic, social and political implications for both slave and slave owner (Ajam, 1989; Shell, 1997). On the one hand, slave owners were reluctant to allow their slaves Christian baptism as this would imply manumission, and yet were loathe to allow the practice of Islam by their slaves (Shell, 1997). Muslim slave owners, under a similar religious injunction, were not permitted to sell Muslim slaves and seldom retained in slavery those who did convert to Islam or their children (Shell, 1997). Side by side with the possibility of freedom offered through conversion to Christianity, a powerful anti-colonial motivation for conversion to Islam existed. Elliot, a Christian missionary intent on converting Muslims at the Cape to

Christianity noted “the pleasure which slaves seem to enjoy, in being of a religion different from or opposed to that of their owners...He (sic) wishes to have as little as possible in common with his master” (1829, in Shell, 1997, p. 271). Through their turn to Islam, slaves gained additional private freedoms – autonomous religious identity and intellectual notions free from European influence (Shell, 1997). The complicated and enmeshed social processes of slavery, manumission, emancipation and conversion were interlocked with the gender dynamics of marriages, which had further social and economic consequences.

For women, who occupied a precarious and ambiguous space at the Cape, the relationship between freedom from slavery and religion had additional implications. Women’s value as slaves was measured in commercial terms according to their age, sexual availability, and reproductive capability (Shell, 1994). The disproportionate gender statistic and the prevailing justified notions of sexual relations between owners and young slave girls led to the social legitimisation of marriages between slave owners (who were usually white and at least nominally Christian) and women slaves (who were not white and not afforded any religious status outside of their marriages) (Shell, 1989, 1994, 1997). The use of marriage as a direct route to civil liberty could only be practiced by women slaves. The marriage of slave women to free Christian men meant an immediate conversion to Christianity regardless of their chosen religion, and because of Dutch Reformed matrilineal descent laws the children of the freed women would themselves be freed (Shell, 1997). This option proved advantageous to women who wished to secure both their own and their children’s freedom.

Appealing as this situation proved, and in as much as it was ostensibly accepted social practice, these women were often faced with antagonistic attitudes from settlers probably because of the dynamics of race-based hierarchical social structures (Shell, 1989; Hendricks, 2001). Women slaves were able to secure freedom through marriage to free Muslim men too, but the benefits were not equal to her Christian sisters. The state and the local *ulama* (for different reasons) assigned lower status to married Muslim women than to their Christian counterparts. Muslim marriages were not legally sanctioned and the children of freed Muslim women were not necessarily guaranteed manumission or safety from separation although it was common practice (Shell, 1997). The religious clergy granted divorced Muslim men the right to remarry citing the Qur’anic privilege to marry four wives, but denied Muslim women the same rights (Shell, 1997). Once slavery was declared unjust and illegal and religious restrictions were partially relaxed, emancipated women were not the only ones to openly

convert to Islam. The social conditions under which most women in the territory lived made the Islamic laws forbidding alcohol and gambling, and the improved social and economic status of some Muslim men, seem very attractive to immigrant English women (Shell, 1997). Lady Duff Gordon comments: "Malay here means Mohammedan. They *were* Malay [in origin], but now embrace the blackest nigger (sic) to the most blooming Englishwomen. Yes, indeed the emigrant girls from England turn Malay pretty often, and get thereby husbands who know not billiards and brandy, the two diseases of Cape Town" (1927, p. 27, also quoted in Shell, 1974 and Jeppie, 2001). The race dynamics in this statement cannot be overlooked. Women in as much as they were separated from men in the prevailing discourses, were also arranged in terms of geographical origin and ethnicity in the colonial imagination, which was possibly internalised by many women and contested by others.

There is no certainty of the degree to which this occurred, or the extent of the limitation of choice, but it is clear that women at the Cape employed religious conversion as a strategy of resistance to prevailing social circumstances that negatively affected either her and/or her children. Conversion from Islam to Christianity and marriage to her slave owner guaranteed freedom for certain women and their children. Similarly, Muslim slave women in Muslim households oftentimes received manumission for themselves and their children, and Muslim women slaves in Christian households gained a sense of religious and intellectual freedom. For free women marriage to Muslim men and conversion to Islam represented a life without the effects of alcoholism and gambling, and for some, economic advantages. Islam proved an alternative ideology for those who were socially peripheral and excluded (Ajam, 1989), and provided an insurgent strategy particularly for women who were generally positioned on the periphery of society.

Marriage, a sacred contract between two people, is simultaneously a social and economic contract that reflects the values of a particular society. Muslim weddings at first took place in secret and in great peril without any legal personality gained by either spouse (Shell, 1974, 1989, 1994, 1997; Davids, 1980, 1992; Tayob, 1999) but, gradually, with the formalisation of Islam at the Cape, weddings became publicly symbolic of Muslim culture and society. Much has been written about the attention showered on the bride at Cape Muslim weddings, most of which are paternalistic and orientalist accounts that reduce these rites of passage to quaint ceremonies that reinforce stereotypical images of Malays (see du Plessis, 1947, 1953 for particularly virulent examples; for an excellent critique, see Jeppie, 1988). There is strong

evidence to suggest that Muslim weddings have undergone significant reworking in response and defiance to the broader social realm in which Islam operates. Shell (1974) emphasises the inclusive changes that the Muslim wedding ceremony underwent: incorporating more equality between spouses at the ceremony and reception, focusing attention to the bride, and mixing Islamic, Christian and Javanese customs at the reception. "...In sharp contrast to the orthodox Muslim practice and later Cape developments, the Muslim bride in the nineteenth century was married in the mosque, and sometimes was allowed to retain her maiden name, a curiously contemporary form of equality, which the Dutch settlers still practiced" (Shell, 1974, p. 35). While Shell attributes these wedding modifications to the battle against Christian conversion, I see it as another example of the adaptability and syncretic nature of Cape Islam that belies notions of a fixed culture and static religious interpretation. The marriages and weddings discussed above raise questions as to the unchanging nature of social practice and the investment of cultural acts with political and religious symbolism.

2.1.3. Attempts to limit and reverse women's conversion to Islam

The political ambiguities to conversion were gendered. On the whole the authorities did little to formally promote Islam, yet through their repressive legal systems based in curious interpretations of Christian doctrine, they managed to provide a population of people open to ideas contrary to their own and therefore amenable to Islam. As untenable as the increasing conversion to Islam of general black society was, the apostasy of white, Christian women to the religion fuelled a war of spurious information by the Anglican Church (Shell, 1974). An anonymous pamphleteer claimed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that Cape *Imams* had instituted the rite of female circumcision for converts once they had received their Muslim names (Shell, 1974). While the purported facts of this pamphlet remain unsupported by further evidence, it does serve the purpose of providing us with an indication of the hostility directed towards the notion of women converting to Islam in the Cape.

Education became a further tool for conversion. Muslim girls generally attended state-sponsored Christian schools and were therefore at least rudimentally versed in Christian doctrine. Part of the Anglican missionary tactics were to employ this Christian education as well as infiltrate women's social and medical clubs and meetings for evangelical purposes (Shell, 1974). A few women reconverted to Christianity (Shell, 1974), but it would seem that the effort made by the Anglican Church far outweighed the results of those conversions. The racist, negative depictions of black women in travelogues from the Cape indicate the

gendered nature of these attacks (Hendricks, 2001), and added to that the growing orientalist tendencies of the colonialists, tend to paint a bleak picture of the stereotypes and treatment of women who chose Islam. Muslim women, often inscribed with a supposedly ambivalent body-politic that set them apart from other black people and closer to white, also carried the symbolism of a foreign and despised religion. The possibility of white women wishing to become Muslim and take on this position threatened white identity, and inspired anti-Muslim rhetoric.

2.1.4. Race, gender and religion

Muslim women at the Cape cannot be lumped together as a singular group at any particular time. The prioritisation of one aspect of subjectivity over another inevitably leads to blunt representations. Muslim women in the early years at the Cape were multiply positioned according to their varying geographical origins, class and race. It is imperative to keep in mind the heterogeneity within black society, and the social and political differences between women in Cape society. The overall picture of the Cape slave society is that race divided white slave owners from black slaves; geographical origin and phenotypical features divided the slave population internally (Hendricks, 2001). But this discounts the (albeit small) number of Free Blacks who themselves owned slaves, and while there is much evidence to support the claim that white slave owners attributed differing levels of workmanship to slaves in correspondence with gender and supposed ethnic or racialised features (Hendricks, 2001), I hesitate to proclaim that similar classifications were not utilised by the Free Black slave owners.

As Shell (1994) and Hendricks (2001) explain, slaves were set apart from slave owners; Creole slaves who were born at the Cape were distinguished from slaves from the rest of Africa; and Creole slaves with European ancestry were set apart from those without. Gendered roles operated simultaneously with these race differences and stereotypes so that for example women from West Africa were given differing characteristics and work to women from Indonesia. African women were set to work in the fields; East Asian slave women (apparently phenotypically closer to white women than African women) were employed in the households cooking and sewing; and Creole women slaves stereotyped as more dependable provided domestic labour (Hendricks, 2001).

Furthermore, the dynamics between free white women and enslaved black women is, like the economic contribution of women slaves to the Cape and the relationships between slave women and men, more often than not written about in simplistic terms pitting white women against black women without a thorough examination of the social nuances involved. If we accept that the primary differences between people at the Cape were articulated through race, geographical origin and religion, it becomes easy to gloss over the relationship between Free Blacks and enslaved Blacks; the gender dynamics within slave society and Free Black society; and the relationship between white women and black women in particular. This chapter focuses on uncovering at least to some degree the gender dynamics within one section of the black population of the Cape. However, the multiple roles Muslim women can be argued to have achieved (as literate slaves, Free Blacks who owned slaves and European converts to name a few) necessitates an, albeit cursory, examination of the relationships between different women especially those who differed in class, race and religion.

Although positioned differently from black women, white women did not enjoy the freedoms and rights of white men. Roman Dutch and British law differed in respect to women, but were in agreement on the relative assumption of white women as second class citizens when compared with white men. White women were treated as the property of their fathers and husbands (Ridgard, 1993). With respect to violence against women, white women were afforded an enhanced status when compared with black women in that they were more likely to receive convictions against rapists, but were also unable to freely admit choice in sexual preference or sex outside of marriage (Scully, 1995). Shell (1994) claims that as a minority and because of inheritance practices, settler women were necessarily accorded power, but does not specify how or when they experienced that social power (van der Spuy, 1996). The patriarchal hegemony that all women were subject to makes Shell's (1994) analysis too simplistic a reading as it posits settler women solely in positions of obedience to authority. I would suggest that Lady Duff Gordon's (1927) observation of Englishwomen converting to Islam provides a limited but notable example of the challenges white women are known to have made to the prevailing authority. Women in the colonial Cape, regardless of their class, race and origin have, through academic discourses that normalise the male experience as definitive, been placed in roles of subservience and attributed negative characteristics.

2.1.5. Women's roles

Certain recent historical accounts (perhaps unwittingly) serve to reinforce stereotypical notions of women slaves, by making claims about their supposed relative ease of lifestyle; non-involvement in moments of resistance; and closer relationship to the slave owners than to other slaves. Van der Spuy (1996) repudiates Shell's (1989, 1994, 1997) thesis that the majority of women slaves were nannies, because it removes agency from these women, supports the idea of mild slavery at the Cape for women, and denies the multiple tasks assigned to women and the suffering they endured. She compares the roles attributed to women slaves in other slave histories and finds the slave histories of the Cape particularly lacking in gender sensitive analysis- Cape women do not receive credit as agents of resistance or promoters of consciousness. In fact, these women are depicted as traitors to their slave communities, more inclined to conspire against the enslaved than engage in forms of resistance. Although there is no detailed empirical evidence to support this claim and no reason for the proclamation, "Shell tells us that 'it was the slave women of the settlers who were most likely of all the slaves to betray slave rebellions. It was the slave women who went running to the owner when there was trouble'" (Shell, 1994, p. 312, in van der Spuy, 1996, p. 55).

There is an additional assumption that Muslim women played a passive role in the development of Islam at the Cape. This supposition can be repudiated by recognising the contributions of certain individual women. One such free Muslim woman, Saartjie van de Kaap while "a remarkable woman...who made magnificent contributions to the development of Cape Muslim culture" (Davids, 1980, p. 5 - 6) is not written about in as prolific a manner as her male counterparts. Although I acknowledge the contribution made by the 'great men' of the Cape Muslim history, it seems a blatant disregard of her input and the impact of her actions, that Saartjie van de Kaap is only briefly mentioned in historical texts about Islam at the Cape. This is not endemic to South African history, but true for many histories throughout the world. Women's work and achievements are generally regarded as outweighed by more prominent and important events instigated by men. What makes this case so unusual and pertinent is that the work done by this woman had major social and religious consequences for Muslims in the Cape.

The bastion of Islam is the mosque. It provides a pivotal point of reference for social and religious events, and through the *muezzin* Muslims are reminded of their spiritual duty. It is

almost always the domain of men, the board of executors are generally male, and the clergy are always men. The first mosque in Cape Town, however, was made possible by a woman-Saartjie van de Kaap (Bradlow and Carins, 1978; Davids, 1980; Tayob, 1999). The completion of the first mosque in the Cape marked a pivotal moment in the religious history of the region. Muslims were allowed free worship in an organised setting, further consolidating their emerging position as a distinct and legitimate religious group. For Achmat Davids (1980, p. 5) the Auwal mosque, the first mosque in South Africa is “a symbol of Cape Muslim perseverance in the face of adversity”, having endured slavery and political and social prejudice. It could be argued that the Auwal Mosque is also symbolic of the changing positions that Muslim women occupy, evidenced by the commercial power and contribution that an individual woman made to the Muslim community of Cape Town. My argument does not preclude the effective mobilisation of the local *ummah* in rallying for the mosque, or the subsequent daily management and finances that made it such a point of community cohesion. Rather, what I would like to stress is the important contribution made by Saartjie van de Kaap, and the limited academic and public attention that this important Muslim person receives.

The implications of Saartjie van der Kaap’s ownership of land and her legal request that her house be used as a mosque, not be mortgaged or sold as long as the colonial government permitted the practice of Islam, as stipulated in her will drawn up as early as 1843 and the fact that the property remains in her name (Bradlow and Cairns, 1978; Davids, 1980; Tayob, 1999) show personal characteristics of independence, literacy, determination and deep commitment to Islam and the Muslim community. As far as can be traced, she was the first person to formally request and bequeath her property as a mosque to the Muslim congregation. Another woman, Samida van de Kaap (also known as Salia van Macassar (Tayob, 1999)) made provisions for the establishment of the Palm Tree mosque (Bradlow and Cairns, 1978), showing that free black Muslim women owned and distributed property at a time when very few women had commercial interests or economic independence. Two decades after Saartjie van der Kaap’s will was drawn up, only 12% of the 150 people with Muslim names who qualified to vote because of the extent of their property ownership were women, and most of these women were widows implying that the property came to them via inheritance (van der Spuy, 2002).

Moreover, this raises questions about the extent to which Muslim women contributed to the formalisation of Islam at the Cape. That two of the first three mosques in South Africa were made possible by Muslim women of independent means who through their legal wills ensured that the mosques would be retained by the committees that run the centres, shows a remarkable degree of dedication to their religion and a measure of autonomy which belies the notion of Islam as uniquely repressive to women, and of Muslim women as passive social agents. These acts are, of course, situational. Their relative wealth sets these women apart from their slave sisters who were unable to enjoy this form of liberty. Yet it remains remarkable given the gender dynamics in the region at that time, and also the degree to which women's contribution to the Cape economy has been masked even in current depictions of women's slave labour and subsequent entrepreneurial achievements.

The absence of historical information on key aspects of Cape women's individual, social and cultural identities make surmising on the topic fraught with conjecture. The presence of two prominent and wealthy Muslim women does not necessarily imply as Tayob (1999, p. 42) suggests "a faint echo of what women may have been doing in the community". What is certain is that before the emergence of a male dominated *Imam* leadership, at least two women played key supportive roles as financiers and deliverers of goodwill (Tayob, 1999). Saartje van de Kaap and Salia van Macassar contributed financially to the establishment of the first mosques in the city, but did not play a direct role in the mosque itself (Tayob, 1999). More generally, women were involved in the home-based Islamic schooling system that lasted for most of the slavery era. Some commentators suggest that the elevated slave status afforded women who worked in the households allowed them the scope and space to be both students and teachers in this system (Shell, 1999; Tayob, 1999). However, as previously noted, this assumption of an easier lot for women slaves is not supported by the facts of back-breaking labour in addition to domestic chores and violence in the form of physical punishment and sexual assault.

2.1.6. Education

Shell (1974) does provide concrete historical evidence of the changing and challenged positions of women in Muslim society at the Cape. As noted above, most Muslim girls attended state-sponsored schools where they were educated in secular and Christian teachings; and Muslim boys attended private Muslim schools once they reached puberty (Shell, 1978; Ajam, 1989). Shell (1978) argues that circumstantial evidence attests to the

premise that until the first Muslim school for women was opened in the 1870s, women's religious education was somewhat neglected. However, the assumed participation of women in home-based Muslim education (Tayob, 1999) prior to the establishment of this school, and the surprise of a Zanzibari delegation to the Cape in the late 1800s when seeing Muslim women openly reciting the Qur'an in public (Davids, 1980; Shell, 1994) puts this conjecture into disrepute. It is possible that some women were sidelined from religious education while others operated in leadership positions, yet it is indisputable that the education of women in Arabic-Afrikaans (they were instructed in literacy, duties, dress codes and cooking) placed Cape Muslim women at the forefront of Islamic education for women in the world at that time.

This education has been argued to have been purely a response to Christian missionary attempts at converting Muslim women and the direct influence of Abu Bakr Effendi, a Turk under whose aegis the school operated (Shell, 1994). In keeping with Tayob's (1999) notion of an innovative Cape Islam that is constantly transforming, I would strongly argue in favour of the education of Muslim women as another facet to Cape Islam at that period. Islamic education in domestic settings prior to the establishment of the Auwal mosque and government permission to practice Islam openly, served as an alternative to the hegemonic Dutch Reform ideology (Ajam, 1989). Women slaves could have operated as teachers and students within this educational system. However, the shift from private and secret tuition to a public forum reduced the role of women in, and the acknowledgement of their contribution to, this process. "As in early Islam, however, the institutionalisation of Islam at the Cape led to a relative marginalisation of the leadership role of women in the society. In the twentieth century, women in Cape Town still play an unrecognised but significant role in the mosque and religious institutions, sometimes even as members of mosque governing bodies" (Tayob, 1999, p. 42).

2.2. Cultural diversity and leadership

Culture is often invoked as a symbol of stability and, in some cases as the reason for refusing to change questionable doctrines. Within South African Muslim communities the gradual progression from a colonialist state of slavery to a colonialist state of apartheid was marked by the emphasis on schisms within communities along the lines of culture and/or race. The most prominently documented divide within South African Muslim communities is that of Indian and Malay (Ridd, 1993a).

The changing economic and political climate of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw further diversification in the Cape Muslim community. While the majority of those who had been enslaved and manumitted formed the working class, the tiny landed Muslim middle class increased. The immigrants from India, also known as Passenger Indians, mostly descendants of merchant forebears, to the Cape injected a new group to the existing but small black bourgeoisie (Hill, 1980; Dawood, 1993; Ebrahim-Valley, 2001a, 2001b; van der Spuy, 2002). Dawood (1993) writes that these people generally regarded themselves as middle class and as occupying an intermediary position within Cape society attested to by their culture, religion, and nationality which purposively set them apart from other black people. Diasporic Indian Muslims emphasised common religious bonds with people outside of their group leading to many cases of marriage between Malay and Indian Muslims (Dawood, 1993) and at the same time creating a distance between themselves as Muslims and other blacks (Davids, 1980). In contradiction to Dawood's (1993) thesis, van der Spuy (2002) acknowledges the fluidity of race categories among a tiny group of black elite in District Six, Cape Town, at the turn of the twentieth century, shifting from identifications of Indian to coloured, or Muslim to white, depending on the specificities of the situation.

Dawood further claims that most Indian Muslim immigrants took up shop as hawkers because it was one of the only viable commercial ventures in a restrictive and prohibitive political and economic system. Women played a vital role in the success and running of these businesses, working exceptionally long hours with no pay and enduring the social isolation that can be a product of working from home (Dawood, 1993). While Dawood's work gives a general representation of the roles played by Indian Muslim women and highlights the contribution of these women to the making of the Indian community in Cape Town, it does also contribute to the stereotypical perception of unitary domestic roles for women, the stereotype of Indian shopkeepers, and denies the diversity within Indian communities. There can be no doubt that many women worked in this fashion, but it implies that even with the diversification of men's roles, women remained firmly in the domestic arena. I find this construction of Muslim women problematic. As demonstrated in the previous section of this chapter, multiplicity existed within the marginality ascribed to women's lives. As with Saartjie van de Kaap, other women challenged perceived ideas of women's capabilities and spheres of interest. I argue against the ossification of women's place in Cape Muslim society, and instead put forward the thesis that these positions are constantly challenged and reworked by various women at differing times. The historical evidence provided within this chapter

serves as confirmation of the idea that Muslim women at the Cape have at various times simultaneously occupied economic and political positions of power and privilege, poverty and periphery.

A shining example of a woman who was born to relative privilege and achieved power is Cissie Gool. While only nominally Muslim, Cissie Gool's life achievements attest to the multiple roles Muslim women have undertaken at certain moments and to the shifts in identity markers. She does not often receive acclaim as a Muslim woman, but was to various degrees, claimed by Muslim communities in Cape Town which may have been predicated on her fame, political power and position in society.

Cissie Gool, an astute politician and remarkable trail blazer, while not specifically focusing on Muslim issues, remains one of the most prominent South African Muslim office bearers. She has been honoured in speeches by Nelson Mandela on the eve of South African democracy, her name has been given to a road in Rylands, and the student's plaza at the University of Cape Town has recently been named in her memory; yet only three academic texts, one in 1978 and two in 2002, have focussed solely on her life (Everett, 1978; Paleker, 2002; van der Spuy, 2002). She was a founding member and president of the National Liberation League; President of the non-European Unity Front; Chair of the Committee for Action; Cape Town City Councillor for Ward Seven (District Six) for 25 years; named the Joan of Arc of District Six; the first black woman to receive an MA in psychology from the University of Cape Town; and graduated from law school at the age of 65; and was the first black woman called to the Cape bar (Everett, 1978; Paleker, 2002; van der Spuy, 2002). Cissie Gool undoubtedly made a significant contribution to the socio-political development of the Cape and South Africa, and van der Spuy's (2002) account of her family and early lifestyle attest to the continually transforming nature of families, cultures and communities.

One of the major features that distinguish Cissie Gool's life and achievements is her determined access to and emphasis on education. Globally, education for women has been heavily influenced by the geographical, cultural and socio-political climate. By 1958 in Cape Town, the issue of Islamic education for women divided the *ulama*. Much to the consternation of the majority of the Muslim clergy *Imam* Abdullah Haron, a progressive Muslim leader, started teaching a women's Islamic class on Wednesday nights which he continued until his incarceration. This "unheard of and even unwelcome practice" drew

unwarranted criticism of the *Imam* including spurious accusations of holding the classes to further his romantic interests in a second wife (Haron, 1986, p. 70).

Imam Haron is credited with founding the Claremont Muslim Youth Movement. In keeping with their founder's ideals, the organisation included women as participants and as leaders and although little is written about the specifics of women's participation in the group, it is clear that of the core group of the movement at least three were women (Haron, 1986). The governance by Muslim women took varying forms in the different regions of South Africa. The introduction of increasingly traditional elements in the Transvaal in the 1960s saw women's education and leadership positions removed and placed under the direction of the conservative Tablighi Jamaat who fostered an Islam based on the literal interpretation of the Qur'an and *hadith* (Tayob, 1995b). In contrast to these developments, the Natal Muslims seemed to have more progressive notions of Islam. As early as 1944 the Natal Muslim Council stressed the importance of the emancipation of women through education, and although men dominated Islamic activity in the area, by 1955 a progressive Islamic newsletter was circulated in which all but one of the contributions were made by women (Tayob, 1995b). The articles ranged from explanations of the historical and unfolding nature of the prophet's monotheism, to the importance of public roles for women as illustrated by the Prophet's wives (Tayob, 1995b).

The Muslim Women's Cultural Group, the oldest known Muslim women's organisation, was formed in the 1960s and concentrated on, as the name implies, cultural issues in the Cape where it is located (Haron, 1986). This group did not threaten any existing religious body mainly because it maintained a relatively non-political stance as it did not question Islamic teachings and practices presented by the *ulama*, yet still managed to attract their ire (Jeenah, 2001). It remains an active but regionally isolated group, encouraging women's public activity and prioritising women's work as being the custodians of the family, being strong proponents of the complementary rather than equal relationship between men and women (Haron, 1986; Jeenah, 2001).

Faried Esack (1987) notes that the 1950s and 1960s were decades of community upheaval because of forced removals and the tightening grip of apartheid. With *Imam* Haron's death in detention in 1969 and the *ulama*'s silent response, pockets within the South African *ummah*

felt betrayed and began the search for a more meaningful Islam that could have resonance with the anti-apartheid struggle (Esack, 1987; Omar, 1987).

2.3 Struggle movements

In the early 1970s the Muslim Youth Movement (MYM), the first national South African Muslim organisation, recognised that the Muslim community formulated itself in terms of exclusivity. In order to overcome this exclusivity and to articulate a relevant Islam, an effort was made to include women and black people in the organisation (Tayob, 1995a; 1995b). International Islamic resurgence provided the international and literary impetus for many of the MYM's activities, and in keeping with these world-wide movements, the MYM incorporated the involvement of women as one of its foci (Tayob, 1995a). Multiple approaches to addressing these discrepancies were employed, and included a plan to increase women's accessibility to Islamic practices and literature via the dissemination of Islamic material with English translations; the inclusion of Muslim women and black Muslims as expert speakers at conferences; and prioritising the issue of women's access to mosques (Tayob, 1995b). Various branches of the organisation made specific arrangements and practical consideration for the inclusion of women in all spheres, and in 1972 a Women's Council was established which duly created the space for a prayer centre for *Ramadaan* prayers (Tayob, 1995b). Gradually, mosque sites became regarded as centres for community inclusivity. Prayer facilities for women were, however, separate from the prayer space for men (Tayob, 1995b).

Tayob (1995b) argues that ingrained gender prejudices made for inept MYM policy. The separate development plan resulted in the Women's Councils failing, and the dominant discourse in the organisation was male-centred. Arguments for including women in male dominated spheres were belittling and in itself sexist, focusing on the apparent shortcomings of women instead of the rights of all Muslims to have entry to places of worship. For example, in arguing for women to attend mosques a report from Natal claimed that women deprived of Islamic knowledge lead lives that "pivot around cinema, fashion shopping, cheap love story books, gossip - just to name a few" (Tayob, 1995b, p. 123). The paternalism in this statement has led some critics to describe the MYM's discourse on the liberation of women as ambiguous (Shaikh, 1996; Jeenah, 2001). While purporting to advocate the women's cause, much was done from within the organisation to undermine this policy. The movement's unclear construction of women as simultaneously potential leaders and gossip

mongers served the purpose of discursively positioning women as marginalised members of the *ummah*, the very antithesis of what the MYM proposed to foster. The power dynamics in the MYM were entrenched along gender lines echoing and reinforcing the broader community experience. They comprised a group of mostly men speaking on behalf of women about concerns that directly affect women, without consulting this constituency. In the desire to promote Islamic resurgence in South Africa the MYM committed the error of importing and applying a foreign philosophy without negotiating with the key stakeholders. Women were spoken about and to and very little mutual and constructive dialogue seems to have occurred.

Outside the organisation, sexist forces threatened by this innovative disquisition on (and sometimes by) women made public statements to incapacitate the MYM's gender policy. The traditional *ulama* contributed to the failure of the MYM's gender policy by stigmatising "the presence of women in MYM activities" (Tayob, 1995b, p. 127). Shaikh (1996) explains that the actions of the MYM were in contrast to the images of docile, domesticated women that formed a key component to the orthodox *ulama*'s ideology. As much as criticism of the MYM's gender policy is warranted, it did form at the time one of the only vocal, organised and accessible alternative expressions of Islam for women. The Women in Mosques campaign brought both increased public awareness to the organisation and massive resistance from most sections of the conservative *ummah* and *ulama*, especially outside of the Cape where scant provision was made for women in mosques (Jeenah, 2001). The "MYM were labelled non-believers and hypocrites from the organisations earliest attempts - in the 1970's - to provide a more public space for women" (Jeenah, 2001, p. 14). The organisation posed a threat to the *ulama*'s hegemony over Islamic knowledge as many of its members were themselves versed in Islamic law while simultaneously presenting different and conflictual views to the more conservative clergy (Jeenah, 2001; Tayob, 1995a, 1995b).

Jeenah (2001) claims that the gender rhetoric espoused by organisations like the MYM and later the Call of Islam was based firmly on the notion of gender balance, emphasising complementary roles for men and women. Women's issues and women's full inclusion in the *ummah* were discussed in terms of their equivalence, a euphemism for complementary, not equality (Jeenah, 2001). In 1984, the Call of Islam issued the most progressive statement thus far by any Muslim organisation on the status of Muslim women claiming the necessity of "the equality of men and women and... the liberation of Muslim women from the legacies

pertaining to the period of Muslim decline. We believe that our country [South Africa] will never be free until its women are also free from oppressive social norms" (1984, p. 3 in Jeenah, 2001, p. 10). As challenging as this statement seems, it was not supported by detailed argument or standards for definition of the concepts employed in the rhetoric. The organisation placed more stead in action than written deliberation (Jeenah, 2001). For example, the Call ensured that the sexes mixed at public events by providing women marshals for marches and funerals; and prayed together in private organisational settings (Jeenah, 2001). The leadership of the Call of Islam was vested in its founding members all of whom were male, and even though a concerted effort was made to include women in the leadership, Jeenah (2001) claims that they operated at a secondary level to the original leaders. The Call claimed to forward the notion of conscientising the community, removing it from providing information on its ideological positions (Jeenah, 2001). The focus on women's issues at the Call became less urgent with the increasing need to form at least a nominal partnership with the *ulama*, and gradually the organisation compromised on women's issues to forward the anti-apartheid struggle.

In as much as gender oppression had been discussed and included in these group's statements and actions, it had meagre mention in the writing of progressive Muslim academics on the role of Muslims against apartheid. Shamil Jeppie mentions gender oppression as on the agenda of various organisations along with censorship in the last page of his 1991 paper on Muslims and resistance in South Africa (Jeppie, 1991, p.16). Ebrahim Moosa writing in 1989 about Muslim conservatism in South Africa refers to gender and women's participation as stoking the conservatives' ire. Esack (1987, 1988) mentions non-sexism along with non-racism and democracy as one of the ideals that the Call of Islam aspires to, but does not elaborate on this ideal.

The urgency to overthrow the apartheid regime and mobilise people was central to anti-apartheid movements. Consequently, discourses on race dominated the socio-political arena and women's issues were sidelined as secondary to the popular push towards democracy. Tayob (1990) discusses the South African Muslim community in terms of race, geography, and economics citing relative wealth and urbanity as defining features of these communities, and does not mention gender. His discussion on "Muslims discourse on alliance against apartheid" includes a fragment of a letter from the editor of the Muslim News lamenting the presence of a non-Muslim women among the predominantly male press corps in a mosque in

Cape Town and blaming the influence of liberal politics, especially the United Democratic Front (UDF) for this indiscretion. There follows no examination of the gender discrepancies within this statement and no unpacking of the issues of restrictive access to mosques for women alluded to by the letter. The focus at this time on the politics within and between anti-apartheid organisations generally precluded mention of the injustices suffered specifically by women, and was reflected in the wider arena of anti-apartheid activities. This event and its responses occurred in the same year that the Call issued their ground-breaking statement and is indicative of the contradictory and dynamic debate in Muslim communities at that time. There was a definite push towards a more inclusive understanding of Islam and liberation directed by the minority and a pull from the *ummah* drawing on their authority towards less abrasive political manoeuvring.

The position that the MYM took at that time was contingent on community and political forces that overtook the desire for the total inclusion of women in all spheres of activity. But the escalating political pressure against the government in the 1980s provided the impetus for many MYM members to engage more openly in debate and constructively question the policies that were so far accepted. The student wing of the MYM, the Muslim Student's Association, made no attempt to co-opt the conservatives into their programme; was more radical and politically active than its parent organisation; and did not employ strategies of segregation (Jeenah, 2001).

In the late 1980s the MYM grappled with the idea of contextual Islam and women friendly Islamic interpretations which led to the prioritisation of women's rights; interfaith dialogue; and increased participation in the anti-apartheid struggle (Jeenah, 2001). For the first time there were public displays of the ambivalence some Muslim women felt to certain uncontextual Islamic issues. The scarf is undoubtedly one of the most contentious, gendered, and vocal symbols of Islam. In the early eighties, MYM women, mostly from the Western Cape, chose to publicly wear headscarves as a symbolic gesture of defiance against apartheid, but by the late eighties in the wake of a move towards a more contextual Islam, began questioning the necessity of this type of covering up (Jeenah, 2001). Women entered into the debate by expressing in physical symbols and personal-political positions their diversity of opinion. Jeenah (2001, p. 18) recalls that "at the [MYM's] national Islamic Training Programme in December 1988 there was acrimony even between female activists from the Western Cape on the headscarf issue as - for the first time - women without regulation

headcoverings were chairing sessions and speaking". The discourses on women in Islam had shifted from a male-dominated and often patriarchal perspective to more democratic and self-defining assertions of womanhood. The political deliberation and institution of new structures in the 1990s nurtured an inclusive worldview that provided an increasingly productive consideration of the relationship between Islam, women and the *ulama*. Muslim women were not only active in Muslim religio-political movements during the struggle. The gradual inclusion of women in these structures indicated a corresponding internal struggle for equality and equitable representation.

One of the features of apartheid in the mid to late 1980s was the Tricameral parliament, a further attempt to reify the apartheid classification system and divide South Africans along race lines. A minority of South Africans partook in the electioneering for the Tricameral parliament, and the UDF, a transcultural conglomeration of different and differing local anti-apartheid organisations, grew in strength particularly in Cape Town. Many liberal Muslim activists were members of the UDF and the introduction of the South African Law Commission's questionnaire on Muslim Personal Law presented a major challenge to those enunciating a commitment to Islam as a tool for liberation (Moosa, 1988). This law threatened to isolate Muslims who were fighting against apartheid, and to co-opt those who saw it as an opportunity to gain an elevated status for Islam in South Africa with the government (Moosa, 1988). Central to this body of law are proclamations that directly and often unjustly affect women. The MYM and Call of Islam jointly hosted a conference to debate these concerns in 1988 (Tayob, 1995b). A separate women's caucus headed by Fatima Meer (a prominent anti-apartheid activist in her own right) drew up an accompanying set of resolutions that distinctly rejected the *ulama's* stance and called "on the organisation to look into instituting a commission to investigate the status of women and the laws of divorce according to the Qur'an" (Tayob, 1995b, p. 165). Women were now formally staking their rights in the political arena, calling for a contextual analysis of Islamic scriptures and law, and making a direct challenge to the sometimes stifling andro-centric power of the *ulama*.

With the increasing anti-apartheid action in the mid to late eighties, the MYM chose to fix their attention on that struggle to the neglect of the question of women in Islam. The group continued to develop what it deemed relevant strategies, and resumed intense concentration on women's issues by the early nineties. "Whereas in 1987, the participation of women was sacrificed for the new political direction of the MYM, by 1990, women became part of the

executive and concerns for a parallel women's organisation disappeared" (Tayob, 1995b, p. 174).

The MYM embraced a contextual Islam and with it were forced to re-examine socio-political issues including gender analysis. The MYM radically changed its position on women's dress code by removing the expectation that women should dress according to strict Islamic dress codes, instead opting for an approach that prioritised free choice (Tayob, 1995b). By 1990, the group had adopted a new approach, opening membership and adopting women's rights as one of its major strategic interests (Tayob, 1995b). The movement did and does not enjoy massive support from South African Muslims, but its contribution to the gender debate is invaluable in as much as it (along with the Call of Islam) conscientised Muslims of the possibilities for living a just Islam that included gender sensitivity and women's rights. The pressure from the conservative clergy and the fractured position of the MYM on women led to internal confusion and no centralised approach to the implementation of their objectives. Jeenah (2001) points out that the Cape seemed more liberal in its attitude towards men and women mixing freely at gatherings, whereas their Natal and Transvaal counterparts were circumscribed by their concern about the *ulama's* reaction. There seems to have been no active national programme for the participation of women in the MYM, but an overriding factor in the separation of physical space between men and women at MYM gatherings (they went as far as to arrange masses of sacking to maintain complete separation) seems to have been to prevent attracting the wrath of the conservatives (Jeenah, 2001).

Although an emphasis was placed on the role of women in the MYM and the Call of Islam, women developed along parallel lines to men (Tayob, 1995b). The MYM's notion of women as an 'integral part of the programme' meant for women mostly participation in Women's Councils while men were mobilised in all of the branches of the MYM (Tayob, 1995b). In keeping with the notion of parallel existence, the Women's Islamic Movement which leaned heavily on the male MYM structures for support was formed in 1980 (Tayob, 1995b). The attendance figures at a 1992/3 training programme reveals equal representation of men and women (Tayob, 1995b) showing that although women were not included as equals, larger numbers of women were being exposed to Islamic ideology in an organisational setting. With the establishment of democracy in South Africa in the mid and late 1990s, came a growing awareness of gender issues as human rights issues. The issues around women and Islam in

South Africa shifted significantly from notions of inclusivity, parallel development and equivalence; to debates around and a movement for equality.

2.4. South African Muslim gender debate

The general South African gender debate is located within race and class hierarchies. When transposed to the Muslim community, those same issues are located within a broader religious framework. As Moghissi (1999) points out, the post-colonial, post-modern discourse celebrates difference and defies hegemonic viewpoints, sometimes at the expense of victims of, for example, gender oppression. The South African gender *jihad* places these debates into sharp relief. In the context of a fledgling democracy the national task at hand was one of balancing a constitution that respected differences of culture and promoted harmony, but at the same time upheld very strongly certain indisputable values like gender equality. A number of events occurred in the first few years of democracy to challenge notions of diversity of belief and value systems from within the gender equality lobby that was gaining in confidence (Jeenah, 2001) and from ultra-conservative forces that wished to see their interpretation of Islamic law supersede state policy.

In the early 1990s, the Muslim organisations that first publicly embarked upon questioning socialised gender norms, refined their positions. The MYM adopted twin projects of Africanisation and gender equality which emerged in part because the women members used their political voices to back the institution of African and women leaders (Jeenah, 2001). With growing awareness of their marginalised status in the MYM, women members committed themselves to the pursuit of gender equality after witnessing the leadership debates and having been exposed to regular instructive workshops that examined the Qur'an and *hadith* (Jeenah, 2001). In 1993, following a vigorous debate and activism around entrance to mosques for women in the Transvaal area, the MYM set up its Gender Desk which was successful in promoting gender equality and the agenda of Islamic feminism within the organisation and the Muslim community as a whole (Jeenah, 2001). Jeenah (2001) provides a comprehensive and sensitive account of the machinations of this group, suffice to say, the Gender Desk's (under the guidance of Shamima Shaikh) contributions to the lives of Muslim women throughout South Africa was invaluable.

A seminal event occurred at a Friday sermon in Cape Town in 1994 that shook the gender dynamics in the South African Muslim community (Esack, 1999). The significance of the

year should not be underestimated. After the first democratic elections in this country had successfully been completed, a respected woman was invited to speak at the Claremont Main Road mosque. At the time, Amina Wadud had been a Professor of Islam at two universities, one in the United States and another in Malaysia, was an international lecturer, and had written her 1992 book Qur'an and Women. The Wadud lecture marked the first time in South Africa (and arguably one of the first in the world) that a woman had been invited to speak in front of a congregation at a mosque (Shaikh, 1996). The main hall of the mosque, usually demarcated for men only was occupied by women, separated from the men by a thin rope (Shaikh, 1996, Tayob, 1999). At least one other mosque in South Africa has followed suit and continues this practice of worship side-by side (Esack, 1999). Esack (1999) hypothesises that the fury ignited by the Wadud incident is an expression of intolerance in the Muslim community, along with a fear of a rebalance of power. The space dominated by men had been publicly occupied by women and this had been broadcast throughout the country. It was a challenge to the gender status quo that was not left unanswered. The Forum of Muslim Theologians was set up by a number of conservative clergy "to coordinate ...resistance to the entry of women into public religious leadership"; and a number of verbal and physical attacks took place outside of the Claremont Mosque (Shaikh, 1996, p. 40).

The presermon lecture given by Amina Wadud in 1994 at the Claremont Main Road Mosque resulted in divergent views from the mainstream newspapers and the religious scholars (Tayob, 1999). Both women and men attended the lecture in the main section of the mosque. Although protocol was observed in that men and women were separated, they shared the same space; and the symbolic entrance of a woman in front of men followed behind by women listening to her with the men, did not go by unnoticed. The event was appropriated by the press to be a symbol of the new South Africa, a symbol of increasing democracy and freedom (Tayob, 1999). The majority of the Muslim community took the pre-sermon lecture as symbolic of the deterioration of Islamic morals and a victory for the west, going so far as to denounce the event as the desecration of the sanctity of the mosque and an exhibition of defiance against Islamic codes (Tayob, 1999). This radical innovation served the purpose of recalling the "suppressed and marginalised place of Muslim women in Cape Muslim society" (Tayob, 1999, p. 42). Amina Wadud was prevented from delivering a lecture at another mosque the following evening by conservative theologians and a vocal group of women in *hijab* (Shaikh, 1996). Tayob (1999) argues that both those in support of and against the

lecture miss the point of the incident in that Imam Omar, the leader of the Claremont Main Road Mosque, worked within an older Cape tradition that included women.

In a similar vein, an ultra-conservative Islamic radio station attempted the literal silencing of women by claiming that it went against their religious beliefs to have women's voices aired on radio (Esack, 1999). The community radio station, while independent of the state, is also bound like all other entities to uphold the constitution and the Bill of Rights. A group of Muslim youth and the Commission for Gender Equality sued Radio Islam, which eventually was denied rights to broadcast (Esack, 1999). The significance of these events for the South African Muslim community is manifold. The fact that a group of fundamentalists was free enough to express their opinions that a woman's voice is primarily a sexual tool that should be regulated is both frightening and encouraging. The current political atmosphere that ensures human rights also fosters the right to freedom of speech. Somewhat ironically, a number of women voiced their support of this archaic religious injunction attesting to the diversity of Muslim women's opinions in this country (Esack, 1999). The group of Muslim youth who initially opposed Radio Islam is another positive factor, indicating the existence of free-thinking independent people willing to utilise the legal system to oppose rhetoric that is demeaning and sexist. In addition, the presence of a Muslim theologian on the Gender Commission in the mid to late 1990s attests to the representation of Muslims in South African leadership and the respect afforded Islam and Muslims in the new South Africa.

2.5. Current developments

Currently, the debate around gender and Islam is informed by a local intra-cultural critique and by responses to the global representations of Muslims and Muslim women in particular. The debate has moved out of majority Muslim and academic circles, and enjoys widespread coverage.

A recent research project, *Religion, Culture, and Identity in Democratic South Africa* funded the South Africa Netherlands Projects for Alternative Development (SANPAD), and a subsequent special edition of the Annual Review of Islam in South Africa (2003) are examples of the platforms currently emerging for the publication and articulation of an array of differing South African Muslim identities. It is important to note that located in one issue are papers on gendered Muslim identities (Abdullah, 2003; Davids, 2003; Hassim, 2003;

Tayob, 2003) and African Muslim identities (Sitoto, 2003; Mathee, 2003); which until a few years ago received scant attention.

A number of progressive public events have helped to showcase the multiplicity of Muslim women's beliefs and experiences. Closely linked to this thesis, is a new play, At Her Feet written and directed by Nadia Davids and performed by Quanita Adams, which has received enormous public and critical acclaim within and outside Muslim communities in South Africa. The piece is a commentary on the ways in which Muslim women were portrayed after the events of September 11 2001, and the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan. It also deals with the localised and global socio-politics and challenges that face Muslim women. Susanna Lliteras (2002, p. 6) in her article on the play entitled 'Taking the gender *jihad* to the stage' explains that the play is "unlike other current art forms about Muslim women, this play does not fall into simple dichotomies between modern and traditional, liberated and suppressed; rather it shows with unrivalled depth the complexities and ambiguities within each of the characters".

This chapter has provided an overview of the historical processes involved in the constitution of Muslim women's subjectivities in South Africa and at the Cape in particular. Evidence has been presented to support the hypothesis that Muslim women have played influential roles and made significant contributions to the development of Islamic culture and Muslim communities; and have also contributed to the wider debates around gender and society. A number of extraordinary women, including Saartjie van de Kaap, Cissie Gool and Shamima Shaikh, have been presented to highlight the diversity within Muslim women's experiences in South Africa over time.

The chapter began with situating the confluence of gender, religion, race, geographic origin, and class for Muslim women in the early period of the Cape's history. It argued that depictions of Muslim women at this time render them either invisible or powerless, and are informed by the lens through which the subject is observed. An attempt was then made to reread the existing literature on Muslim women at the Cape with a feminist perspective, understanding that identities are multiple, and that taking power dynamics into account reveals the possibilities for alternative interpretation. Issues around gender, race and sexualisation were explored to highlight uneven power relations. Women at the Cape are often described as passive beings, who lived one-dimensional domesticated existences. It is

argued that certain social acts, however domestic in nature, can be construed as sites of resistance. For example, some women married Christian men in part to ensure freedom from slavery for themselves and their children. Other women converted to Islam which for black and enslaved women provided a counter to the dominant, pervasive Christian philosophy that positioned them as inferior by virtue of their gender and race; and for white women provided the opportunity to escape a society of alcoholism and gambling. Women's roles were also explored and the myth that women did not contribute much to the development of Cape society was repudiated through the assessment of Saartjie van de Kaap's pivotal role in the establishment of the first mosque in South Africa.

The notion of leadership by Muslim women was continued in the following section of the chapter with an examination of Cissie Gool's remarkable achievements and contribution to the political landscape of the early to mid twentieth century. The gradual development of a progressive Islam at the Cape for women was traced through the work of *Imam* Haron, the MYM and Call of Islam during the anti-apartheid struggle and then the gender *jihad* that occurred once democracy was established in South Africa. The argument linking these periods is that while Muslim women are most pervasively positioned as passive recipients of change, there are examples of individuals and moments of resistance that emphasise the agency of these women. In addition, the way in which Muslim women are represented is indicative of the political positioning of whoever is doing the representation, and not a value free depiction of what it is to be a Muslim woman at any point in history in South Africa.

The following chapter provides a theoretical framework for the analysis of the experiences of Muslim women in South Africa and internationally. It includes a clarification of the representation of Muslim women in South African academia in the twentieth century; a literature review of recent academic research on Muslim women in South Africa; and recent research on Muslim women in selected countries with minority Muslim populations. The argument is sustained that although Muslim women are represented in particular negative and subservient ways, alternative accounts that foreground subjectivities, the fluctuating nature of identities and the diversity of expression for Muslim women provide richer, more nuanced, and valuable representations.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK 1

ACADEMIC REPRESENTATIONS OF MUSLM WOMEN

'I take Islam very seriously, Islam mixed with a little bit of black consciousness, Biko, Baraka, Malcolm, big up to the feminist theorists, Spivak and Butler, and of course, my own personal hero – Edward Said – with a little bit of Lauren Hill in the mix'

(Davids, N. *At Her Feet*)

Academic representations of Muslim women in South Africa in the mid to late twentieth century tend to conform to racist and orientalist stereotypes of submissive women, and to describe Muslim women in terms of appearance and docility. Muslim women, as participants and analysts are underrepresented in South African research. The dearth of literature on and by the subject is mostly due to hegemonic male views of history and social realities, but even when women do write about Muslim women, biases are clearly evident. The overriding analytical framework within which many academics, both locally and globally, discuss Muslim women is in terms of conflict between western and Islamic influences. This binary formation of identity is extended to the notion of the inherent and internalised conflict within Muslim women between modernity and tradition, predicated on the assumption that Islamic cultures are unchanging.

3.1. Representations of Muslim women in South African academia in the mid to late twentieth century

As noted in the previous chapter, the depiction of Malay people as a self-designated, homogenous group with characteristics, customs, and features peculiar to that group is generally accredited to I.D. du Plessis (1947; 1953) and the more conservative depictions of Islam at the Cape (Jeppie, 1988, 2001). Academic texts building on du Plessis' work held general currency, and depicted Muslim women in particular with shallow characterisations. The insidious stereotyping of Cape Muslims as a separate Malay group with distinctive racial and cultural characteristics continued from the 1940s and still holds currency in certain communities (Jeppie, 2001). The literature review that follows shows the persistent use of du Plessis' conceptualisation of Malays as a separate race group.

Weiss, an Austrian woman researching factory labour, devotes a chapter of her 1950 thesis to the *problems* created by a female labour force, and divides the labour force into coloured and

women, and those engaged in alternative work. In her 1980 Masters thesis, Hill mentions that women from wealthier families are occasionally afforded the opportunity to pursue professional studies abroad, without any detailed analysis of the socio-economic implications for these women. For this author, the overwhelming evidence collected about Muslim women in Cape Town is that they fulfil domestic roles within their community.

In 1993 and again in 1994, Rosemary Ridd writes retrospectively about the gendered aspects of life in the central Cape Town suburbs of District Six, Woodstock and Walmer Estate in the late 1970s, based on evidence and information gathered for her 1981 PhD thesis. Her hypothesis is that the women in the study temporarily contradict the model of women as a muted group. Ridd (1993b) claims that the oppression experienced by coloured people under apartheid produced an alteration in the male/female dynamics. She continues the argument by explaining that racial oppression is felt more strongly by men in a traditionally patriarchal society, and that therefore the home and private space, which is the domain of women, becomes a place of refuge that allocates women greater power (Ridd, 1993b). Ridd (1993) places women in positions of power according to specific circumstances and in specific moments, yet these moments are themselves far from being liberatory or invested with power. The women that Ridd (1993b, 1994) imagined operate in a strictly binary world, where men represent and occupy the public space, and women occupy the private space.

Binary distinctions dominate Ridd's work. She describes Islam at the Cape as "an exotic alternative to Western culture" which confers a new self-respect to women who convert as they are no longer "just coloured" (1993b, p. 189). A number of hegemonic themes are operating in this piece of discourse. The juxtaposition of traditional/religious/exotic with western/normal/secular; the conflation of religion with race; as well as the assumption that only coloured women [as opposed to other groups] would convert to Islam; highlights this author's preconceptions about the women that she researched. Ridd makes the observation that "it was not *shari'ah* law, but apartheid law that restricted people's lives" (1994, p. 90). This statement illustrates Ridd's understanding of racial oppression as somehow of greater consequence than gender oppression to women's lives. In a section on changing gender roles in the new South Africa, no mention is made of Muslim women's attempts at gaining equal access to mosques; instead Ridd (1994) pontificates upon how Muslim women in a democratic and secular South Africa will compete with men to be publicly heard. Clearly

Malay workers, and then further subdivides these categories according to class. She writes that only lower class (sic) Malay women worked in factories because their upper class (sic) contemporaries remained at home; and in accordance with religious injunctions the Muslim women factory workers did not participate in social events and were passive onlookers in the factory environment (Weiss, 1950). Weiss (1950, p. 67) employs a racist strategy to divide coloured workers from the Malay workers: "When looking across the factory floor, one can pick out the Malay worker at a glance....In spite of racial intermixture over the generations, the Malay woman and girl is of a much more slender build than the average Coloured girl. Large black eyes, almond shaped, high cheekbones, light ivory skin colour, finely chiselled bone structure is often to be found among them, which gives their faces a dignity and repose which seems incongruous with the [factory] surroundings". The research positions these women as passive objects, observed in terms of physicality and not as workers who are contributing to the economy.

Midgley, writing in 1967, explains that most Muslim women are treated as inferior by virtue of belonging to Muslim societies. He cites the example of orthodox Muslim women refraining from eating meals with male family members as normative and pervasive. Midgley stresses that certain "more western[ised] families" have discarded this ritual and that "the average working-class Malay girl has accepted modern fads and crazes almost as rapidly as has her Coloured and European counterpart", but not without eliciting some community protest (1967, p. 124). Islam is construed as an inherently misogynist, traditional religion with no mention made of the patriarchal nature of apartheid. Muslim women are implicitly divided into traditional or western, and working-class; set apart and against coloured and white women; with no mention made of black women. This particular juxtaposition - western vs. traditional - still enjoys massive support in academia and popular expression. I will argue later in this chapter and the chapters to follow that useful as these categorisations may have been in the emerging literature on the multiplicity of Muslim women's experiences, these terms have become both stifling and reductionist.

Rosemary Anne Hill's 1977 thesis, entitled The Role of Muslim Women in Cape Town, presents Muslim women's function in Cape Town as mostly domestic, with some skilled and semi-skilled workers. Hill (1977) positions the women in her study in terms of domesticity and traditional division of labour, and neglects to place focus on the reasons informing these behaviours and roles. In addition, inadequate space is given to the fact of educated Muslim

Rosemary Ridd's essays published on the eve of democracy were far removed from the debates taking place at the time, within the communities that she writes about.

In earlier work, Muslim women are discussed as the maintainers of cultural traditions and as the promoters of a sense of separate identity – custodians of the faith and Malay tradition (Ridd, 1994). In addition, women are described as tolerant of men's religious shortcomings while steadfastly completing their own religious duties (Ridd, 1993b). Muslim women are depicted as carriers of the symbolism of Islam because they wear *burkhas* while praying, remain outside of the mosque, and refrain from touching the Qur'an while menstruating (Ridd, 1993b). This unitary construction of Muslim women solely focussed on and responsible for the home and the continuity of their cultural identity, negates the notion of Muslim women as having any agency outside of strictly defined parameters. It is also indicative of a mindset that while on the surface acknowledges the complexities of race, religion, gender and class, manages to simultaneously employ stereotypical and harmful depictions of groups of people as innately different to one another, and of all Muslim women in particular areas at specific times as broadly identical.

More recent academic works on South African Muslim women are inclined towards sustaining the binary distinction model that manifests in earlier work. Deniz Kandiyoti (1991a) notes that most research on the roles of Muslim women in both Islamic and non-Islamic societies is dominated by two competing and equally problematic paradigms. The first is the use of the Qur'an and early Islamic history to reclaim women's rightful and divinely sanctioned place; and the second is the uncritical examination of the conditions of Muslim women's lives without linking women's oppression and Islamic ideology (Kandiyoti, 1991a). All but one of the recent research studies on Muslim women in South Africa falls into one of the two categories described above.

3.2. Recent academic research on Muslim women in South Africa

The construction of a unitary Muslim woman either caught up in the battle between the modernised west and the traditional east or as a symbol of Islamic oppression is a pervasive stereotype. Edross (1997) notes that these dangerous stereotypes are perpetuated by the limited literature and research on Muslim women by Muslim women. As Edross (1997) points out, the construction of identities should be placed in their socio-political and historical contexts. However, her work, while innovative also imposes binary categories on the women

in her study. The participants, and the researcher herself as she implicates herself in her work, define the world through dichotomous categories - modern or traditional, which Edross (1995, 1997) justifies as being culturally based and belonging to the vocabulary with which the participants are comfortable.

Edross (1995) undertook an exploratory study to ascertain the social identity of ten Muslim women from Cape Town, of a similar age, who identified themselves as coloured or Malay and were educated at the University of Cape Town. The study revolved around their perceptions of identity in terms of religion and gender, with these experiences divided into opposing categories of traditional and modern; feminist and non-feminist; Muslim and westernised (Edross, 1995). Edross (1995, 1997) acknowledges the inappropriateness of these categories as reducing the variance and complexities of identity, and employs the categories as a tool to assess the participants' use of these terms. The results show that while these terms were employed frequently as units of expression, the women in the study did not construct themselves solely in those terms. Instead the women interwove categories. Muslim women were regarded as traditional in terms of domestic affairs and gender dynamics; and modern in relation to education and career (Edross, 1995). Nine out of ten of the participants described themselves as neither completely modern nor completely traditional, and as having strong identification with both modern and traditional women (Edross, 1995). Markers of identity were invoked as symbols of difference. Dress code repeatedly came up as significant in distinguishing between modern and traditional women - the modern woman wore western clothing and was less veiled than the traditional Muslim woman. The central thesis of Edross' study is that the women participants, while straddling two worlds of Islamic and western influences in South Africa, maintain their religious identity.

In her excellent exploration of religious identity, Saadiyah Shaikh undertakes a feminist analysis of gender ideology and religious texts in contemporary Muslim society. Shaikh (1996) examined the stories of a group of eight battered Muslim women in terms of Islamic gender discourses in texts and the community. Shaikh (1996) writes from a feminist Islamist perspective and explains that the marginalisation of women in Islamic texts and Muslim societies has resulted in the concealment of certain traumatic experiences faced by Muslim women in the Western Cape. She suggests that the use of patriarchal and misogynist religious discourses and symbols to manage and perpetuate gender relations, has in turn, led to the silencing of women and hindered any opportunities to disclose the realities of their situations.

However, Shaikh (1996) also implies that Islam, if understood in terms of social relations can provide these women with tools for empowerment. In this study, Shaikh provides an Islamic feminist perspective to the discourses around gender violence, and contributes to a growing global literature on Islamic feminism.

Shaikh (1996) exposes the role of the religio-social arguments to legitimise domestic violence. For the women in Shaikh's study "the salient elements of her religious identity are relational and contingent on either children or husband"; there is no autonomous religious identity (1996, p. 163). These women also internalised the concept of an "embodied religious morality" (Shaikh, 1996, p. 164), whereby their dress code indicated the level of their Islamic commitment. The veiled, fully covered woman is synonymous with the morally chaste and honourable woman. This chastity is expected in terms that are more concrete too. Shaikh (1996) describes how one participant relates her experience of managed sexuality: "social and religious norms prioritise virginity as the primary virtue for unmarried women" resulting in the participant's parents pressurising her into marriage at a young age. Unlike Ridd (1993b) who reports similar concepts in terms of women as the bearers of culture in Muslim families, Shaikh (1996) prioritises women participant's first hand account of experience as the unit of analysis.

Social units like the family are complicit in the battery of women. The participants in Shaikh's (1996) study give accounts of a lack of support from their families after the abuse is reported. This collusion to silence women's testimony of violence extends to institutional structures like law enforcement where police are loathe to interfere in the private family domain (Shaikh, 1996). Shaikh (1996) demonstrates the many ways in which religio-political discourses reduce women to objects who 'belong' to their husbands, and who ideally should be submissive and obedient. These discourses work in tandem with general social beliefs about the sanctity of the private space and the relationship between husband and wife to create and sustain an environment in which violent abuse is tolerated and dismissed as the norm. Shaikh (1996, p. ii) also argues strongly in favour of a relevant Islam that "provides numerous resources for the pro-active empowerment of women and the promotion of the full humanity of women".

Shaikh's (1996) emphasises that the research should not be regarded as a reflection of the entire Muslim community in the Western Cape. Discourses on the subordination of women

are pervasive, but the extrapolation of these women's experiences to most other Muslim women in Cape Town is unwarranted.

Shaikh's (1996) study highlights the need for counselling and ready access to support mechanisms for women in situations of domestic violence and abuse, as well as the necessity for a liberatory form of Islamic practice that empowers women in situations of abuse. Abdullah (2003) notes that the focus of Islamic counselling in South Africa is on marital counselling, with women constituting the majority of the clients. Although Abdullah (2003) notes that most marital difficulties are linked to violence against women and children, lack of maintenance, substance abuse and financial difficulties; there is no detailed exploration of the discourses used to frame these challenges. Islamic counselling is *shariah* based, is often performed by members of the *ulama*, and advocates the integrity of the family as sacrosanct. Women who seek counselling because of the violence they endure within their families are most often advised to maintain the family structure and not seek divorce (Abdullah, 2003). Abdullah (2003) points out that this advice can sometimes cause re-traumatisation of the person seeking counselling, and places them in direct physical danger, but attributes domestic violence solely to the vestiges of apartheid with no exploration of the possible link between a patriarchal practice of Islam and domestic violence.

Physical and mental abuse and divorce are critical concepts in Tayob's (2003) study of the influence of Muslim Personal Law on South African Muslim women. The investigation provides greater depth than Abdullah's (2003) somewhat shallow commentary on Islamic counselling. This piece of research places women's accounts at the forefront, and details the negotiation of the women's relationship with Islam once they have had encounters with Muslim Personal Law. Tayob (2003, p. 31) writes that all the women constructed their lives around Islamic principles and rules, and that once "involved in the crises, developed a clear sense of individuality and identity... [and] projected a sense of self-confidence in themselves, their relationships with their children and their relationship with God". In addition, the women's stories showed the contradictory application of religious doctrine as applied by the men who initiated either divorce proceedings or took another wife.

While Tayob and Shaikh tend to emphasise the importance of agency when researching women, Hassim (2003) takes the position that the lives of the women in her study are marked exclusively by socialised subordination. Hassim (2003) argues that South African Indian

Muslim communities are inherently traditional and antithetical to reflexive freedom for women. It is clear from the piece that the women in Hassim's study do indicate varying levels of subordination, but the author makes no reference to any agency or reflexive action on the part of the participants. She claims that "this study then essentially explores the perpetuation of gender and family stereotypes in South African Indian Muslim society and assesses the degree to which this affects people from traditionalists backgrounds" (Hassim, 2003, p. 42), giving no credence to the possibility of subversion of stereotypes within these communities, or by the participants.

Dangor (2000) conducted a survey to examine the divergent views held by a group of Muslim women of varying ages, socio-economic and educational backgrounds from Johannesburg and Durban; and claims that the data compiled applies to a significant number of Muslim women in South Africa. Of the 50 respondents, 76% claimed that women are treated unequally in Muslim societies, and 62% believe that Islam confers equal rights upon men and women (Dangor, 2000). With regards to marriage, over 90% of women respondents considered women's roles as more than just being a wife and mother; and over 80% regard the traditional method of divorce as unacceptable. Strangely, concerning veiling, a pertinent and topical issue for Muslim women, the author mentions only that none of the women support confining women to the home. Nothing is said of the women's views on veiling, wearing scarves or *hijab*. All respondents agreed with the notion of education for women, with the vast majority in favour of women's participation in politics, but only a quarter supported women as heads of state or leaders of political parties (Dangor, 2000). More than half the participants supported women's rights movements, but none of them gave full support to feminism (Dangor, 2000). Dangor (2000) regards the differences between life circumstances (age, marriage, education, employment, education) of the women in the study to be marginal and therefore claims that their attitudes are reflective of the changes in society and new opportunities. Underlying this claim is the idea that Muslim women are alike to some degree, and have similar views of the world. The differences between these women are discounted, and the similarities are instead encouraged and elaborated upon.

In the early 1980s, Abrahams (1981) in an unpublished honours thesis noted the growth and spread of Islam in Cape Town's informal settlements. More recently, Rebekah Lee (2001, 2002) undertook a sensitive study of the conversion of African women in the Cape to Islam, showing the diverse strategies these women employed to marry their religious and social

identities. Lee places the spotlight on the gendered nature of any lived experience. Although the numbers of African women converting to Islam in the Western Cape are relatively tiny, Lee (2002) notes that this trend is a significant factor in understanding the syncretic nature of Islam, and the changing face of religion in South Africa. Lee's (2002, p. 54) work is fascinating in that it shows clearly the links between Islam and rural Xhosa traditions, and the way in which these women "map [Islam] onto an existing [cultural and spiritual] framework". While noting the similarities between these cultures for the women, Lee (2002) continues to dichotomise Muslim and Xhosa identities even though the women in the study clearly identify themselves as Xhosa Muslims.

Lee (2002) identifies the areas where Islamic culture and ideology shows congruence with Xhosa culture and ideology: circumcision; animal slaughtering; burial rituals; rituals of cleanliness; and gender relations. A key attracting factor for these women to Islam was the restrictive gender relations practiced in the Muslim communities with which they had contact (Lee, 2002). The practices of veiling, modest clothing, separation of the sexes, respect for women and protection of women are constructed by the participants and the author as a natural extension of Islamic ideology. One participant declares "it is also very rare to find a Muslim girl raped" (Lee, 2002, p. 55). Lee (2002) analyses this statement in the light of extraordinary high levels of domestic violence and sexual abuse for African women in South Africa; yet there is no mention made of the high levels of domestic violence and sexual abuse in Muslim communities in the Western Cape, or the way in which interpretations of Islamic discourses contribute to this violence and abuse (Shaikh, 1996).

Lee's (2001, 2002) study is a valuable and necessary contribution to the growing literature on South African Muslim women. It is however flawed in its lack of analysis of the discourses around gender relations for both Muslim and Xhosa cultures. In addition, care should be taken to avoid reinforcing what Sitoto (2003) describes as the analysis of African Muslims in terms of the Muslim other. Sitoto's (2003) critique claims that the emphasis placed on issues of conversion when talking about African South African Muslims distances these Muslims from supposedly entrenched groups of non-African Muslims in South Africa and stresses long embedded notions of the racial nature of religion.

Issues of race and class play salient roles in the academic constructions of local and global Muslim women. The theory of race, gender, class, sexuality and age as prominent for the

construction of subjectivities is an inclusive and progressive approach to the investigation of identities. The following set of literature is analysed from this perspective.

3.3. Recent academic research on Muslim women in western countries

The South African *ummah* is unique in that it developed in a relatively isolated geographical and political space, yet was influenced by a diverse set of cultures and traditions.

International literature on Muslim women focuses mainly on women in the narrowly defined Islamic world of the Middle East, North Africa and South East Asia to the exclusion of Muslim societies in other parts of the world. Some literature does exist on Muslim women in western countries, most specifically Australia and Britain. There are distinct parallels between Muslim women living in these two countries and Muslim women in South Africa. The comparison is not ideal, as there are a number of significant divergences between western nations and South Africa, north and south. However, given the particular nature of Islam in South Africa and the parallels between Islam as practiced for women in Australia, Britain and South Africa, this literature warrants mention.

3.3.1. Women's issues

Santi Rozario (1996) describes Muslim women in the western world in terms of being in a state of dilemma between loyalty to the *ummah* and the desire for gender equality. In a similar vein to many of the studies above, she claims that the politics of communal identity and the identification of women as symbols of that identity and bearers of Muslim culture shape the responses of Muslim women to Islam (Rozario, 1996). In minority situations, women unlike men are tasked with the symbolism of Islam (often expressed through dress) in addition to being carriers of a minority culture (Rozario, 1996). In a reductionist attempt at categorisation, Rosario (1996) states that Muslim women in western countries conform to two broad groups: outright rejection of Islam and acceptance with Islamist elements. The first group is in the minority, are generally younger and tend to reject Islam altogether. The second group, older and more traditional, tend to strongly identify as Muslims and criticise flawed customs as cultural as opposed to Islamic.

In Australia, Rozario's (1996) work centred on issues of Islamic identity and relations with the 'host' community, that is, white Australians. Most of the participants were either first or second generation Australians, yet felt alienated from that nation partly because of their Islamic identities. Core issues that the women divulged were the negative attitudes of [white]

Australians to Muslims; the negative media representations of Muslims; and that gender rights for Muslim women were written into Islamic law (Rozario, 1996). Rozario (1996) notes that the political position that garners the strongest support from Muslim women in Australia is one that identifies problems experienced by Muslim women as based in culture with the remedy in 'true' Islamic law. She notes that "in Australia there are few dissenting voices among Muslim women and attempts to express reformist positions are clearly unwelcome" (Rozario, 1996, p. 216).

An incident in Sydney in 1992 parallels the episode at the Claremont Mosque in Cape Town in 1994 when Amina Wadud delivered her seminal pre-*khutbah* speech. In the Australian case, a Fijian Muslim feminist, Imrana Jalal gave a talk critiquing certain practices and urging a moderate reformist position. She became engaged in a violent argument with a group of Muslim men whose wives and daughters had attended the lecture (Rozario, 1996). As with the Cape Town incident, the space for debate was closed down in a display of regressive hostility by male community leaders.

Rozario (1996) argues that in the Britain there are older, larger and more established migrant Muslim communities than in Australia. In certain Muslim communities in Britain, oppositional politics is practiced, with an emphasis on women's issues. Muslim women's organisations in Britain "openly contest religious practices and cultural values, mounting an active struggle against what they see as the oppression of women by their own communities" (Rozario, 1996, p. 217). These groups address issues pivotal to women's lives like domestic violence, immigration problems, childcare and homelessness; and heavily criticise communities that are willing to speak out about racism and yet remain silent on gender abuse (Rozario, 1996). British Muslim women's groups have been severely criticised in their own communities as westernised and labelled as home wreckers; have been routinely attacked as not expressing authentic community issues; and have met with general resistance to their activities mostly from established male leadership within the Muslim communities (Rozario, 1996).

Rozario (1996) reiterates the contextual nature of these debates. The communal and national political context of minority Muslim communities in Britain is such that anti-racist and multiculturalist efforts prioritise culture and religion, over class and/or gender interests. Organisations in Britain that oppose the oppression of women in Muslim communities, like

the Southall Black Sisters, come under attack from both privileged male community leaders and Islamist women. Rana Kabbani, an Islamic feminist who accused the Southall Black Sisters of contributing to the racist backlash against Islam in Britain, was quickly criticised as a woman in a privileged position with a Cambridge education who does not live the patriarchal reality of establishment Islam (Rozario, 1996).

Werbner (1997) writes about the role Pakistani women's groups in Britain play in their communities by giving articulation to Muslim women's collective voice. The women in this study are mostly middle class and politically active, but negotiate their political involvement in terms of socially accepted parameters. These women restrict their meetings to women only, and are careful to avoid being labelled unIslamic (Werbner, 1997). Werbner (1997) theorises that the rise of political Islam world-wide has opened up a space for the formation of young women's organisations (as evidenced by their proliferation in Britain) that focus on the rift between cultural practice and religious conduct. This "desacralisation of custom and culture has opened up a new discursive space for women to define their rights ..." (Werbner, 1999, p. 64). Much of the women's work represents an intra-cultural critique of women's roles in traditional Islamic and Pakistani societies. In addition, concerns about the mistreatment of Muslim women globally and the violation of women's rights are voiced through protests against the rape and torture of women in countries like Bosnia and Kashmir.

Women in the Al Masoon group featured in Werbner's research, actively invoke their multiple subjectivities as British women citizens; Punjabi's with a specific cultural heritage; Muslims who belong to the global *ummah*; and Pakistani nationalists; to accomplish their collective goals (Werbner, 1999). It is not possible to box these women into a closed monolithic identity, or to discuss them in dichotomous terms. As Werbner (1997) writes, the opposition that this group faces from within its communities testifies to the multiple, diverse and often conflictual aspirations of Muslims in diaspora. There is no such singular category as Pakistani immigrants in Britain, in the same way as there is no one Muslim community or Muslim response in South Africa, or for that matter Cape Town.

The Muslim communities of northern England provide a fascinating glimpse into the mesh of culture, ethnicity, and religion, as well as local and national politics. There are a host of issues that serve to ossify Muslim women's positions in areas where Muslims are in the minority. Yasmin Ali (1992) gives an account of those intricacies, through her examination

of the place assigned to women in the Muslim communities of rural north England. She clarifies that there exist situations of oppressive gender dynamics in Muslim communities in this area, citing the example of girls who are forced to abandon their education at 14 years old on the basis of cultural precepts that are invoked as religious law. While acknowledging the varying levels of oppression within these communities she ascribes the differing levels of agency to the women. "Subversive – or, more often, submerged – acts of defiance nevertheless do continue to occur in the daily lives of Muslim women in Northern England. Even in the tightest, most vigilant of communities, women make love, or their own form of war, practice 'illicit' contraception in a variety of relationships, make unlikely friends, have abortions" (Ali, 1992, p. 120).

3.3.2. Embodied identity

The political significance of veiled, reveiled and non-veiled women is thriving as a practice and an academic critique. It has been a symbol of status; a dividing marker between Muslim and non-Muslim; a source of female power; an ideology espousing women as objects in terms of shame, honour, pollution and purity; and used to maintain gender hierarchies (Jeffrey, 1979, El Saadawi, 1980, Rozario, 1982, Stivens, 1994 in Rozario, 1996). The symbolism of the veil, like the situation for Muslim women worldwide is contingent on many factors and specific to class, socio-geographic, national, and cultural dynamics. "However, more recently in the context of widespread international migration, socio-economic changes, Islamist revivalism as well as the ever tense political divide between the Islamic world and the west, most Muslim women around the world have had to confront the issue and take a position on relation to it" (Rozario, 1996, p. 211).

Muslim women in the west respond to veiling in differing ways. Some take up the veil and embrace the garment as a symbol of faith and/or community and avoidance from being treated as sex objects; while others adopt a non-veiled option (Rozario, 1996). The underlying assumption is that these women are exercising free choice and are determining their own identity. However, there are at times and in certain places dual pressures (or freedoms) at work: community pressure can exist simultaneously with legal freedoms. Islamic feminists also focus a great deal on veiling as a symbol of freedom (Mernissi, 1985; Ahmed, 1992; El-Guindi, 1999). Moghissi (1999) illustrates, through discourses of this kind the veil becomes emblematic of women's freedom of expression and freedom from the sexualised gaze of men; it ceases to be an instrument for limitation but becomes a tool of

empowerment. For her, the redefining of the veil as a creative alternative and democratic choice obscures the reality of millions of women for whom dress-code and veiling is not a matter of choice- there is no alternative. She positions the work of Islamic feminists like Leila Ahmed (1992) as giving us “privileged snapshots from the much larger, often troubled and undoubtedly, multidimensional life drama of women in Islamic societies...” (Moghissi, 1999, p. 42).

Ali (1992) notes that in rural north England very few women are in a position to be able to withstand the community pressure to veil. The opposite may also be true. The demands of western society to embrace the notion of a ‘free’, ‘empowered’ womanhood may exert stress on Muslim women in minority situations to not veil. For some academics, the variety of women’s responses to Islam may be summed up in their position on veiling, but Rozario (1996) and Dwyer (1999) point out the more subtle and deeper complexities involved. Wearing the veil does not necessarily translate into a given ideological position, but is determined by time, place and circumstance.

Claire Dwyer undertook a study in 1999 to study how embodied differences are negotiated among young British Muslim women. Her argument is that dress is an “overdetermined signifier” of identity and that “because dress is a contested signifier for young Muslim women, the construction and contestation of their own identities often requires an engagement with the multiple meanings attached to dress” (Dwyer, 1999, p. 5). The women in Dwyer’s (1999) study actively engage in the construction of their own subjectivities, producing alternative identities by reworking the given, traditional symbolism of dress and challenging the meanings attributed to dress code and style.

Two main threads of discourse link the use of dress as an overdetermined signifier of identity for young British Muslim women. Clothing and veiling are often construed as markers of identity for South Asian Muslim women, identifying them as either western or traditional, supposedly binary oppositional stances (Dwyer, 1999). The women in the study reveal the ways in which they subvert these unstable categories, forging what Hall (1992a, in Dwyer, 1999) would describe as alternative hybrid identities. The veil itself is bagged with discourses, attaching from the outside meanings that may not correspond with the wearers understanding of her dress. Dwyer (1999) documents the manner in which these women modify the meanings associated with dress to fashion their own identity. The clothing that

these young British Muslim women wear and the manner in which they wear the clothes can be read as a marker of boundaries between and within different groups (Dwyer, 1999). Using Hall's (1992b in Dwyer, 1999) notion of identity as contextual and relational and as produced in different spaces and at specific moments, she notes that the identities expressed by the participants are not fixed but in process.

The cultural conflict model that of the fragile Muslim women caught up between two irreconcilable cultures has been applied to the situation of Muslim women in most western or westernised countries. The dominant paradigms used to explain and theorise about Muslim women in Britain are dichotomous and oppositional - west/traditional and religious/secular (Dwyer, 1999). British Muslim women are also theorised in orientalist, gendered and racist terms; depicted as passive recipients of oppressive culture, highly sexualised, exotic, and dirty (Dwyer, 1999). British law protects the South Asian Muslim woman's right to wear a headscarf as it is a symbol of ethnic identity (Dwyer, 1999), thus conflating religion, ethnicity and culture. In Germany, as in most other places the interpretation of Muslim women wearing the veil or scarves is fraught with multiple meanings. The assumption of the veil as a symbol of 'otherness' negates the complexity of its negotiation. For Turkish Muslim women in Germany the veil has numerous meanings, possibly signifying resistance to the Turkish government and/or detachment from German society (Mandel, 1989, in Dwyer, 1999).

More recently, the French government in an attempt to ban religious symbolism from public spaces has declared illegal the wearing of scarves or veils by Muslim school children and Muslims in the workplace. Davids (2004) notes that the French injunction to ban the veil is a ten-year battle, and that this type of fashion facism has taken place before in Iran by the Shah and then in an opposing gesture by the Ayatollah. In her article, Davids (2004) explores the uses of the scarf as religious symbolism and fashion accessory and makes clear the point that by banning the scarf and its alleged immediate religious symbolism, the French government has also unwittingly made illegal one of the strongest symbols of French fashion and culture.

This chapter has offered an analysis of the ways in which Muslim women have been represented in South African and global academia. The reliance on binary distinctions between tradition and modernity, Islam and west is clear in the South African literature and the literature from abroad. While the earlier studies focussed on race and class issues, all of the recent studies presented above have used the problematisation of gender as a theoretical

framework to discuss the lived experiences of Muslim women. As argued earlier, many of these representations are somewhat flawed and reductionist, and simultaneously speak to the varying ways in which different types of feminisms or gender analysis can be deployed in academic texts. This thesis also uses a feminist framework for analysis, and Chapter 4 turns to the examination of the various relevant intersecting and competing feminisms to date.

University of Cape Town

CHAPTER 4: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK 2 FEMINISMS

The research review of the previous two chapters was informed primarily by a feminist theoretical framework that understands the situatedness of gendered experience without prioritising one identity marker over another. Correspondingly, most of the study undertaken in this piece of research is underpinned by feminist epistemology. This chapter presents some of the key issues and debates in post second wave feminism, and the differing intellectual and political contexts of feminist theory (Lewis and Mills, 2003).

Feminism has recently been shown to be engaged in a self-critical project that allows for the inclusion and affirmation of all women's experience. Feminism is not a unified body of scholarship, political movement, or a discipline in itself, and has become increasingly complex and contradictory (Flax, 1990). There is no one definition of feminism, rather it is a contested and complex field that shifts with time, focus and argument (Burman, 1998). Generally, feminism challenges the reification of gender roles and power relations in societies, as well as problematising the concept of gender (Flax, 1990). Competing and parallel theoretical approaches to the notion of gender as a salient model for the critique and understanding of societies leads to the distinction between differing modes of feminist thought.

This chapter is divided into a discussion about the strands of second wave and beyond feminist thought pertinent to this study. Each strand is discussed in terms of its history, definitions and politico-ideological stance, as well as the international and South African contexts. The separation of feminist strands is a somewhat messy enterprise as each is connected to the next, and the boundaries are occasionally artificial. As such, use has been made of Lewis and Mills' (2003) suggestion to view feminisms as in dialogue with one another, to assess commonalities and divergent points of view. Liberal, radical, socialist/Marxist feminisms and lesbian feminism are included briefly and cursorily for background purposes to frame the discussion of the subsequent and more relevant feminisms. The following interlinking feminisms are discussed in further detail: black feminism emerging in opposition and as an alternative to mainstream [white] middle class feminism; third world feminism; and Islamic feminism.

4.1. Liberal, radical and socialist/Marxist feminism

These three feminist trajectories of thought form part of the second wave of feminism in that there is an expansion of the primary rationale for the women's movement – enfranchisement. Second wave Anglo-American feminist theory assumed the universality of women's experiences and generalised theory from a white middle-class position (Lewis and Mills, 2003). The formulation of these ideologies occurred mostly between the 1960s and latter end of the 1980s and initially mostly in the west.

Liberal feminism is premised on the notion that women should be accorded the same rights as men because both sexes/genders have an equal capacity for reason and should be afforded equal status (Flax, 1990). The origins of this feminism can be traced back to Europe to the first attempts at equal education in the eighteenth century, and the nineteenth century struggle for civil rights and equal economic opportunities (Tong, 1989). Twentieth century liberal feminism posits that the socialisation of women into feminised gendered beings limits the range of behaviours, attitudes and ultimately life choices that girls and women are able to make (Tong, 1989). Liberal feminist strategies for ensuring the equal rights of women and changing the limiting socialisation of women calls for reform to existing structures with the emphasis on the accommodation of women, not change to socio-economic factors and structures that create and sustain women's oppression (Tong, 1989).

As the name implies, liberal feminism has strong links with liberalism, which Kitzinger (1987, p. 125) notes is "typified by its reluctance to identify itself as ideological". The liberal feminist goal of equality of women with men has been dismissed by some theorists as inadequate and an attempt to draft women into men's domains and behaviours, in effect to make women into men (Flax, 1990). This feminism is also strongly critiqued for its lack of a solid theoretical foundation as it does not forward any ideas as to why men should require the socialising institutions that do not support the full development and participation of women. It has been dismissed as a white bourgeois movement that overemphasises the importance of individual freedoms, and promotes a gender-neutral humanism over a gender-critical feminism (Tong, 1989).

Radical feminism positions patriarchy as central to the argument that the oppression of women is the most fundamental form of oppression (Tong, 1989). Radical feminism claims that women have always been oppressed, across cultures and over all time; that women's

oppression is widespread and existing in almost all known societies; and that gender oppression is the most difficult form of oppression to eradicate because it is so entrenched and prevalent (Tong, 1989). Radical feminism places great stress in the embodied experiences of women as symbols of power and domination, and it politicised sexuality, child-bearing and reproductive biology. Radical feminism argues that the differences between passive female sexuality and aggressive male sexuality results in patriarchy and is one of the root causes of women's subjugation. Tong (1989) explains that radical feminism highlights the possibility that even with the realisation of a liberal state with equal opportunities for women and men, women's oppression as women may still continue. However, radical feminism failed to take into account the varying experiences of women across time, geography, class and culture and instead claimed that "gender is analytically independent of other sources of oppression...the oppression of women is universal" (De la Rey, 1999, p. 57). This essentialist and simplistic philosophy constructed all men as oppressive and patriarchal and all women as oppressed, and therefore disregarded any differences between women in terms of race, class, and ability.

Socialist/Marxist feminism prioritised both class and gender structures in society using a historical materialist basis for its critique of patriarchy, and represents a combination of socialist/Marxist theory and radical feminism (Tong, 1989). Unlike radical feminism, socialist/Marxist feminism theorised patriarchy as shifting and having multiple articulations over space and time (Flax, 1990). Although opening up the debate about compound sites and means of oppression, socialist/Marxist feminism confined itself to gender and class as primary units of analysis, again limiting the platform for debate about women's experiences of patriarchy. In addition, the location of feminist questions in a socialist/Marxist framework obscures the masculinist bias of Marxist theories and conceals many aspects of gendered experience outside of class dynamics (Flax, 1990).

Critiques of the limitations to these western-centric and race blind theories signalled what has come to be known as a crisis in feminism. Challenges to the notion of a unified sisterhood opened up the space for debate around differences in terms of privilege, race, culture and colonialism, religion, and sexuality. What seemed like self-evident and universal freedoms to radical feminists, for example the sexual liberation of the 1960s in Anglo-American circles, "seemed to Muslim feminists to be a degradation of women's sexuality and a misguided defining of women's freedoms in terms of men's interests (a view with which many western feminists may today concur)" (Lewis and Mills, 2003, p. 4). Generalisations of women's

feminist yearnings and totalising notions of 'woman' were heavily critiqued from lesbian feminists, black feminist theorists, third world feminists and Muslim feminists.

4.2. Lesbian feminism

The increasing fragmentation within second wave feminism as a response to the disappointment with a particular brand of sisterhood that excluded feminists who were not white, middle-class, able-bodied and heterosexual, is echoed in the development of lesbian feminism. Along with issues of race and class, sexual orientation or sexual identity has caused a split within the feminist movement between lesbians and heterosexual women (Kitzinger, 1987). The patriarchal response to both first and second wave feminism was to label all feminists as lesbians. The reaction of the feminist movement was one of embarrassment, an implicit acknowledgement that heterosexuality was considered the norm (Kitzinger and Wilkinson, 1993). Due to these rifts in feminism, lesbian women were often left with the dilemma of having to choose between joining the feminist movement or the gay movement – to fight their oppression as either female homosexuals or homosexual women, rather than as lesbian women. (Kitzinger, 1996). Often, lesbians choosing to distance themselves from the women's movement because of the marginalisation of lesbian issues, encountered sexism within the gay movement (Whelehan, 1995).

The assertion of lesbian rights and the critical analysis of heterosexuality as a cornerstone of patriarchy was met with accusations of divisiveness from within the women's movement (Kitzinger, 1996). As Celia Kitzinger (1996) explains, the lesbian-heterosexual split within the women's movement was political. It was predicated on the feminist movements' refusal to engage with lesbian issues and lesbian oppression; the perpetuation of heterosexuality as the norm and therefore lesbianism as deviant; and the antagonism displayed when lesbian theories of the relationship between heterosexuality and patriarchy were expounded (Kitzinger, 1996). Many heterosexual feminists reacted defensively to the critiques of heterosexuality, viewing the analysis of heterosexual power relations as an attempt by lesbians to claim that lesbianism is the only way in which to equal the gender power differential. Myron and Bunch (1975, p. 12) explain however that they were "less concerned with whether each woman personally becomes a lesbian than with the destruction of heterosexuality as a crucial part of male supremacy... straight feminists are not precluded from examining and fighting against heterosexuality as an ideology and institution that oppresses us all".

Similarly within the South African women's movement lesbian feminism has been relegated to a side issue couched in terms of sexuality and not women's rights. There is a perception that academia and non-governmental organisations tend to overlook lesbian issues when grappling with women's issues (Hanes, 2003). Mary Hanes explains that the 1996 Constitutional Clause that prohibits discrimination on the basis of (among other things) sexual orientation was lobbied for by the gay movement, with little input from the women's movement. The African National Congress Women's League has been consistently silent about the structural, social and economic discrimination confronted by lesbians (Hanes, 2003). This silence is echoed in progressive Islamic circles, where little to no mention is made of gay and lesbian issues.

4.3. Black feminism

Globally the issue of race and racism in feminism has proven to be persistent. It has been damaging to the notion of a unified sisterhood (Cross, 1996), and enlightening for debate about differences in experience and ownership of complicity (de la Rey, 1997). The recognition of race and other appellations as an equally significant contributor to subjectivity encourages an open approach within feminism, ensuring that no hegemonic notion of what it is to be women remains (Chow, 1996). The contingency and relational aspects of identity have taken the forefront in the approach of most feminists to issues of subjectivity. "An inclusive feminist vantage point sees gender not through one lens but through a multiplicity of lenses that form a prism for analysing the social construction of race, class and gender" (Chow, 1996, p. xix). Adrienne Rich (1979) concedes that white feminists who do not take race and class into consideration may not believe in racial hierarchies but do practice "white solipsism"; thinking, imagining and speaking "as if whiteness described the world" (p. 306 in West and Fenstermaker, 1996, p. 359). Patricia Hill Collins (1990) notes that the restraint of black feminist thought is a result of both white feminists who chose to gloss over and support problematic representations of black women, and black feminists' reluctance to participate in white feminist organisations.

bell hooks (1981) writes that there is a long and rich tradition of black feminism in the United States which can be traced back to women's verbal articulation about gender and race oppression in the era of slavery, a time before either the civil movement or the women's movement. However, "black women's ideas have been honed at the juncture between movements for racial and sexual equality... Afro-American women have been pushed by their

marginilisation in both arenas to create black feminism” (E. Francis White, 1984, in Hill Collins, 1991, p. 36). Black feminism is specifically concerned with addressing racism within feminism and stressing the importance of self-definition. Racism is complex, it allows for the positioning of a person as both dominator and dominated within a racial hierarchy (Cross, 1996). The fragmentation of the global sisterhood made it necessary to confront the uncomfortable issue that just as white women were oppressed by white men; they in turn oppressed black women within the women’s movement by either silencing issues of race and racism or speaking to and on behalf of black women (Mama, 1995). hooks (1984) theorises that one of the reasons for white feminists reluctance to acknowledge race as a significant factor in gender oppression, is that it would destabilise white elitism and dominance in the feminist movement. This critique struck a chord and debates on feminism moved outside of western circles to validate the academic theories of women globally.

The changes in global feminist theory, from the notion of a global sisterhood who shared the burden of patriarchy to a more relational view of gender and power relations have been paralleled in South African feminist theory (Hendricks and Lewis, 1994; Lewis, 1996; de la Rey, 1997, 1999). The gendered subject is now understood in South African feminist circles as having overlapping subjectivities that include race, class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, regional or other affiliations (Hendricks and Lewis, 1994; Lewis, 1996; de la Rey, 1997, 1999). The “prescriptive, western-centric, middle-class and white” (Hendricks and Lewis, 1994, p. 64) feminist framework has become one part of the wider and more inclusive feminisms at work in South Africa presently.

The introduction of feminism to South Africa occurred as late as the 1970s, characterised by small groups of white middle-class women who were ridiculed by the media and generally viewed with mistrust (Levett and Kottler, 1998). De la Rey (1999) argues that most of the work that had been done on feminism and women had been researched by a small number of mostly white women social scientists. Hendricks and Lewis (1994) posit that the resources available to white women academics and the domination of whites in politics ensured that black women were represented by white women. Women academics who benefited, by virtue of being white, from apartheid regardless of their political affiliations were in a position to write about and chose to speak for all women as an oppressed collective. Because of the foremost influence of apartheid and the anti-apartheid struggle, “the development of feminist theory was to a large extent shaped by racial divisions” (de la Rey, 1999, p. 12).

Levett and Kotler (1998) note that an alignment with feminism would have been met with disapproval from within the struggle movement. Many black women active in the anti-apartheid struggle felt that feminism undermined that struggle because it was viewed as an intellectual imperialistic notion and a potentially divisive issue in the liberation movement. "...race relations form the core of the political debate and concern about gender relationships is either irrelevant or overshadowed by the more pressing problems associated with relationships between different races, ethnic groups, cultures, tribes and so on" (Ramphela and Boonzaier, 1988, p. 153; also quoted in Levett and Kottler, 1998). Feminism was seen to be rooted in the race divisions in South Africa that saw to it that white academics positioned black women as their intellectual pursuits and subjected them to an academic gaze.

These sentiments were echoed and reinforced in the early nineties. Writing about the first South African conference on women and gender held at the University of Natal in 1991, Lewis (1996) highlighted some of the antagonisms within this country's feminisms. The important shifts that feminism had undergone in the seventies and eighties, including understanding women as located within a nexus of class, race and situational politics, seemed to have bypassed the conference. The heterogeneity of women was not evident, in so much as the organisers and participants were mostly white, middle class women in academia speaking for and about 'other' women (Lewis, 1996). This makes for white, middle class women being understood as the norm. "White middle class woman provides the basis for defining gender identity, establishing feminist goals, developing political strategies and isolating common experiences. 'White middle class woman' simply becomes 'woman'" (Lewis, 1996, p. 97).

Just as issues of race dominated struggle rhetoric, culture and identity came to dominate the formulation of the new South African constitution and the development of post-apartheid policy and public discourse. Remarkably, the shift to democracy in South Africa and the emphasis on gender equality occurred without a unified, coherent feminist lobby; but rather because of pockets of women with feminist agendas of equality (Levett and Kottler, 1998). The South African constitution ensures women's rights to equality and freedom, regardless of cultural injunctions which may wish to curtail those rights. Women enjoy positions of power in the private and public sectors yet are subject to increasing levels of crime. There exists an obvious disparity between policy and practice (Zietkiewicz and Long, 1999).

Gender reached the national democratic struggle comparatively late (Shefer, Potgieter, Strebel, 1999). The difference debate in South Africa is predicated mainly on issues of race and racism, and the relations between black and white women (de la Rey, 1997). It is a necessary and more inclusive corrective to the exclusive feminist politics that went before; and parallels a national debate around issues of race and representivity. This type of debate opens up spaces in which subjectivities can be explored and presented without necessarily being regarded as inclusive in one overarching category of feminism. The difference debate within South African feminism does much to provide a counterpoint to the national discourse on rainbow nationalism, where race and difference are seen as differences that must be kept, recognised and overcome.

Black feminism opened up the debate for a more inclusive idea of feminism and created a theoretical feminist platform for discussions around third world women and women in Islam. Audre Lorde (1983), herself as a black lesbian feminist writing for the necessary inclusion of black, lesbian, and third world feminist theories, states that the decision not to acknowledge differences as a potential source of strength for the feminist movement as a whole, is a failure to reject the patriarchal power play of divide and conquer.

4.4. Third world feminism

The synonymy between black feminism and the third-world woman has resulted in some reductionist notions of black being equivalent with third world and 'underdeveloped', and by virtue of these shared characteristics, a kind of monolithic derivative understanding of women in the third world is perpetuated. For Chandra Mohanty this type of writing serves to reproduce colonial depictions of third world women in order to sustain western self-presentation (1988). "Universal images of 'the third-world woman' (the veiled woman, chaste and virgin etc), images constructed from adding the 'third-world difference' to 'sexual difference', are predicated on ...assumptions about western women as secular, liberated and having control over their own lives...Without the 'third world woman', the particular self-presentation of western women ... would be problematical. I am suggesting, in effect, that the one enables the other" (Mohanty, 1988, p. 81 - 82).

Sara Suleri (1992) strongly cautions against positioning third world women only in terms of victimhood, as being the receivers of racist and gendered colonial and indigenous oppression. Certain western feminist texts represent third world women as a singular monolithic subject

and “discursively colonise the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world, thereby producing/representing a composite, singular ‘third-world’ woman” (Mohanty, 1988, p. 67). Mohanty (1988) elaborates this argument by introducing the concept of third world difference, that most if not all women in the third world experience homogenous gender oppression, as a key concept in hegemonic western liberal and radical feminist academic representations. This sameness of women’s oppression reduces the third world woman to being defined as “sexually constrained, ...ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, religious, domesticated, family-oriented, victimised” and without agency (Mohanty, 1988, p. 69).

Third world feminism struggles against western feminist notions of women in the third world, and is concurrently challenged by theories that feminism lies outside of the experiences of third world women. Third world feminism is also a type of ‘diasporic identity’ (Brah, 1996), that operates both outside and inside a discursive and geographical space and location that is the third world. Uma Narayan (1997) explains that identifying oneself as a third world feminist is an unsettling and unsettled affair, it is one that demands an account of itself. She notes that one of the criticisms flung at women who identify themselves in this manner amounts to being labelled as “one more incarnation of a colonised consciousness, the views of privileged native women in whiteface” (Narayan, 1997, p. 7). Third world feminists are often accused of westernisation and inauthentic or irrelevant politics (Narayan, 1997). Narayan (1997) counters by arguing that feminism is not foreign to the third world, in fact, she notes that feminist outlooks can be considered indigenous and not merely a result of westernisation. She explains that from a very personal point of view, her mother and grandmothers gave her the insights into the peculiarities of her Indian culture that they found to be unfair to women. The cultural dynamics of her childhood home fostered a sense of the inequality between men and women. Narayan (1997) gives equal space to her mother’s pain as a tool of education, as to her book and academic education. For example, her sense of marriage as an oppressive institution was learned outside of academia, through the narratives of her female family members. Narayan’s (1997, p. 13) argument opens a space for the negotiation of women’s place by acknowledging that “third world feminist critiques are often just one prevailing form of *intracultural* criticism of social institutions”. These rejections of certain third world practices or traditions are not solely as a result of westernised schooling, they are as much part of third world culture as those practices. The apparent similarities between third world feminism and western feminism are not as a result of copycat action, but

because of the widespread and pervasive maltreatment of women in both western and non-western cultures (Narayan, 1997).

What Narayan (1997) labels the “myth of continuity” does much to explain the selective indictment of westernisation. The belief that the indigenous culture has deep and ancient roots that must by virtue of their age be revered, obscures the fact that cultures are dynamic (Narayan, 1997). In order to dispel this myth, it is important to look carefully at what receives the westernisation label, and which products and practices outside of the culture are steadily and absorbed without controversy. Narayan (1997) explains that in many third world contexts the rejection of westernisation is extremely selective, inconsistent and problematic. She notes the disordered use of television by fundamentalists as a tool to voice their opposition to feminism on the grounds of it being a western project.

While noting that feminism has many incarnations and is contextual, Moghissi (1999) disavows the idea that feminism is of no practical or theoretical use to women in developing countries. She advocates the elaboration of feminisms, albeit competing and dissonant, as vital to the struggle for gender equity world-wide. Feminism is not the exclusive domain of the privileged, and can be successfully renegotiated and moulded into viable, alternative strategies for change for women in many countries and diverse cultures.

4.5. Islamic feminism

Islamic feminism is “a feminist discourse and practice articulated within an Islamic paradigm...deriv[ing] its understanding and mandate from the Qur’an, [it] seeks rights and justice for women and for men in the totality of existence” (Badran, 2002). Islamic feminism, defined as a particular feminist branch or standpoint, has no clearly demarcated boundaries (Moghissi, 1999). Yamami (1996) notes that just as there are differing feminisms, there are different strands within Islamic feminisms. Margot Badran (1996) explains that the common thread through these strands is the interest in empowering Muslim women through a re-examination of Islam. She later notes that Islamic feminism is a global movement that cuts across cultures and so doing disavows the traditional binary distinction between east and west, orient and occident (Badran, 2002). Islamic feminism places women at the centre of the reassessment of Islamic texts, practices, culture and institutions; and emphasises the multiplicity of Muslim women’s experiences (El-Solh and Mabro, 1994).

The history of Muslim feminism is long and complex, and closely linked with colonial encounters in the Muslim world (Samiuddin and Khannam, 2002). Islamic feminism began to emerge in the mid-80s and gained wider acceptance and more prolific use in the 1990s. The Islamic feminist movement took root to various degrees in countries as diverse as Iran, Turkey and South Africa in the 1990s (Badran, 2002). It was from its start a movement mainly outside of Islamic societies, initiated and perpetuated by diasporic Muslim feminist academics living and working in the west (Moghissi, 1999). In the late 1990s very few rights activists in Muslim countries used the term Islamic feminism as a measure of their identities (Moghissi, 1999) but this does not necessarily place them outside the sphere of feminist politics.

El-Solh and Mabro (1994) explain that Islam is practiced across a number of societies and communities with divergent traditions and customs, which combined with Qur'anic interpretations and *shariah* define Muslim women's roles. Islamic feminism as a response to Muslim women's experiences must therefore taken into account the multiplicity of cultural influences that inform interpretations of Islam. It could be argued that there are a number of Islams practiced throughout the world, each distinguished from the other in important cultural and ideological ways, but linked through the Qur'an and *shariah* (Al-Azmeh, 1993). One must beware of using Islam as an umbrella category to analyse all cultural constructs in Muslim societies and the lives of Muslims (Kandiyoti, 1991b). By examining the strategies employed by women in Muslim societies, it becomes clear that types of gender biased practices differ, in as much as they differ between societies in any part of the non-Muslim world. It is important not to lump together all Muslim societies as necessarily oppressive, and all *ulamas* as maintaining those gender relations. Concepts about gender vary within Muslim communities and between Muslim communities depending on class and generation, and over time (El-Solh and Mabro, 1996). In order to provide relevant strategies of resistance to forms of cultural and Muslim patriarchy Islamic feminisms take this diversity into account. Within Islamic feminism there exist different analytical approaches including new feminist traditionalists; secular feminists; modernist Muslim feminists; pragmatists and neo-Islamists (El-Solh and Mabro, 1996; Yamani, 1996).

Fatima Mernissi, one of the first academics to examine Islam from a feminist perspective, theorises that the regulation of Muslim society is based on the regulation of women (1985). Fatima Mernissi's 1985 book critiqued the prevailing position of women in Islam by arguing

that Qur'anic texts or *hadith* must be read in the historical and sociological context, and not only as static divine texts. She does not subscribe to Islamic feminism but is certainly one of the forerunners of secular Islamic feminism. Mernissi (1985) examines the roles traditionally ascribed to women as passive recipients of Islamic culture, and explodes those notions with an in-depth analysis of early Muslim women in relation to the prophet. She places culture and the treatment of women firmly in its historical and geographical context, noting that the divinity of laws is also subject to its interpretation. Speaking about Islamic societies from earliest Islam to modern day Muslim societies she claims that "the entire Muslim social structure can be seen as an attack on and a defence against the disruptive power of female sexuality" (Mernissi, 1985). Mernissi (1985) explains that social laws predicated by religious decree and divine principle are enforced to direct and limit the space allowed women.

The critique of the regulation of women in Islamic societies is continued into the colonialist encounter. Ahmed (1992), another secular Islamic feminist, describes the early nineteenth century as a period of massive social and intellectual change in the Middle East precipitated by, to various extents, colonial encounters, western economic encroachment, and the formation of nation states. Issues concerning women became interlinked with issues about nationalism, national advancement and cultural change. An attitude that backward Islamic culture was in need of catching up to a forward-thinking superior western culture resulted in the gradual dismantling of 'the social institutions and mechanisms for the control and seclusion of women and the for their exclusion from the major domains of activity in their societies' (Ahmed, 1992, p. 127-8). Gender issues became inextricably linked with notions of progress, political development and nationalism. The dichotomous nature of the debate was the dominant mode of thought and the western woman became the symbol of modernity, the veiled Muslim women the symbol of oppression (Ahmed, 1992). This colonialist endeavour served to re-enforce racist and orientalist discourses, with western liberal patriarchy constructed as corrective treatment for eastern patriarchy. "Yet in the debate about women in the Islamic world, as in other parts of the non-western world, those proposing an improvement in the status of women from early on couched their advocacy in terms of the need to abandon the (implicitly) "innately" and "irreparably" misogynist practices of the native culture in favour of the beliefs of another culture- the European" (Ahmed, 1992, p. 129). Ahmed (1992), like Mernissi (1985) before her argues against the notion that Islamic cultures have inherently misogynistic tendencies greater than other traditions, rather claiming that feminism is an anathema for all cultures. Leila Ahmed (1982, p. 162) drives the point

or nearly all currently entrenched ideologies. It is in conflict with the dominant ideologies in the west to the same extent that it is with the Islamic”.

Modernist Islamic feminism has echoes in certain manifestations of earlier western feminism with its emphasis on rights and equal opportunity. This is not to say that modernist Islamic feminism understands women's roles and status in western terms, rather, that less emphasis is placed on the restructure of a patriarchal Islam. Modernist Islamic feminists reject notions of androcentrism and locate Islam as non-sexist (El-Solh, and Mabro, 1994). Modernist Muslim feminists, like Amina Wadud, call on the egalitarian and ethical message of Islam. Wadud (1992) argues that Qur'anic text and Islamic law are in fact not gender biased or sexist, but that it is the interpretation over time and in varying cultures following the revelation of the text, that restricted women. For Wadud (1992), Islamic texts and practice are liberatory tools for women. “If [the Qur'an] had been truly implemented in the practical sense, then Islam would have been a global motivating force for women's empowerment” (Wadud, 1992, p. v). Ahmed's work (1992) locates women as social and political agents because of, and not despite, Islam. The religion is revised as being partly an ethical voice and partly a legalistic voice for Muslims, where the ethical aspects take preference. Ahmed (1992, p. 238 - 9) explains that Islam “instituted a sexual hierarchy, [but] it laid the ground, in its ethical voice, for the subversion of the hierarchy”. The argument is that Muslim women, unaware of their Islamic ethical rights have been oppressed and exploited; and that Muslim women armed with their Islamic knowledge and in a Muslim society aware of their ethical rights should suffer no oppression or exploitation. Similarly, the idea put forward by Wadud (1992) is that a post-patriarchal Islam will, by definition, grant women secure legal and social rights, but that this can only occur once scriptures have been liberated from male-centred readings and interpretations and male dominated *ulamas* have been challenged and transformed.

Moghissi (1999) makes clear her doubts as to whether Islam is indeed that superior socio-legal system espoused by many Islamic feminists. She notes that most of the work by this group of academics, while ground-breaking in their ability to shatter strongly held racist and patriarchal notions of Islam, occasionally “slip[s] into a defensive, refractory position vis-a-vis Islam and its treatment of women” (Moghissi, 1999, p. 40). In their collective attempt to destabilise the image of Muslim women as mute and domesticated these academics have presented another, albeit more resilient and vocal, but none-the-less, essentialised version of the Muslim woman. The image of the liberated Muslim women presented in the work of

authors like Ahmed and Wadud, denies the nuanced and differing manner in which Muslim women in all and any societies live. The non-westoxicated image of the liberated Muslim woman empowered by the tools of Islamic ethical rights, makes for an all too easy rereading of certain gendered practices (Moghissi, 1999). What Moghissi (1999) succinctly describes as 'the construction of the new Muslim woman' is an ongoing project with which many women are involved, to decode and present the nuanced, multi-positioned space Muslim women create and occupy. The complexity of Muslim women's lived experiences is sometimes discarded or modified in favour of simpler explanations. Entanglements between religion, patriarchy, class, global and local social and economic interest impact on the lives of women in real ways, and are often glossed over in Islamic feminist texts (Moghissi, 1999).

Islamic feminists argue that the colonial regulation of women reduced western notions of Muslim identity to appearance and moral conduct (Ahmed, 1992). Anti-colonial thought and practices focussed mainly on these same themes, but subverted the colonialist depiction of women (in scarves for example) from being symbols of oppression to symbols of liberation (El Guindi, 1999). Moghissi (1999) poses the possibility that just as the supposed 'liberating' colonial gender policy was ultimately oppressive; certain streams of feminist thought about the positive symbolism and effects of veiling can be oppressive too. There is no suggestion of perfect parallel, but the similarities are clear. Totalising feminist arguments about the positive effects of veiling are similar to colonialist arguments in that they speak *for* a gendered experience.

Rejecting the monolithic and essentialist conceptions of both Islam and patriarchy, Kandiyoti (1991b) argues that patriarchy is an inadequate blanket term which cannot explain the articulation between Islam and different systems of male dominance, grounded in distinct material arrangements between genders. She places her emphasis on the variations in policies, legislation and practices, which represent the diverse cultural complexities Islam encounters. The argument is that Islam is neither "all there is to know", nor "of little consequence in understanding the condition of women" (Kandiyoti, 1991b, p.24). Hatem (1993) also stresses the need to "deconstruct the categories of Islam, modernity and women" and to "begin a more fruitful discussion of the changing lives of women of different classes, of different ethnic groups, and different regions". She argues that a limit has been reached to the dominant discourse on women in Islamic societies- shared by both modernist-nationalists and conservative-Islamists- that use "Islamic/Arab culture as basis for their political

legitimacy” and make “women’s rights a secondary commitment”, thus crippling women in different ways (Hatem, 1993, p. 41 - 42, in Moghissi, 1999, p. 39).

To a large degree, most writing on women and Islam is predicated on inherent patriarchy, cultural or religious. The task for some Islamic feminists is to separate out the patriarchal cultural ideology from what they view as a liberatory religion for women. In Kandiyoti’s (1991b) estimation, Muslim patriarchy is an imprecise and biased term that relies on a hegemonic blanketing of the notion of patriarchy. This leads to insensitive readings on the way in which forms of patriarchy are practiced in communities that also happen to be Muslim (Kandiyoti, 1991b). She regards this conflation of ideology, practice, Islam and patriarchy to be a major flaw in the way in which Middle Eastern women’s studies are approached. Instead, Kandiyoti (1991b) traces the varying forms of patriarchal lifestyles in two areas of the world that have Muslim populations: countries bordering the Mediterranean and sub-Saharan Africa; and finds that varying strategies are employed by both men and women to reinforce and subvert cultural negotiations. Her argument is firmly based on the principle that all forms of patriarchy are dependent on temporal and spatial aspects and are susceptible to renegotiations and subversion. Kandiyoti (1991b, p. 27) denies the “often implicit assumption that there is such a thing as a unitary and universal system that we may call patriarchy, and that the differences in the character of women’s subordination concretely encountered are merely the outcome of different expressions or stages of the same system”. The intimate and detailed workings of gender relations are obfuscated by such monolithic assumptions, which in turn leads to a reading of women’s agency solely in terms of patriarchy.

The emergence in recent years of a new inclusive brand of South African feminisms has opened the way for an indigenous South African Islamic feminism. The term Islamic feminism is itself open to debate. There are many women writers on Muslim women, and Muslim women activists who prefer not to be labelled feminists and do not use the term as a self-identification. For some, the imperialist overtones of feminism remain the most salient reason. For convenience and clearer analysis, Jeenah (2001) while noting that certain scholars openly use the term and others purposively steer clear of it, nevertheless names the activists and academics that he regards as Islamic feminists in South Africa.

The emergence of South African Islamic feminisms has been popularised as the gender *jihad* (Esack, 1999; Jeenah, 2001; Lliteras, 2002), with Shamima Shaikh at the head of the Muslim

Youth Movement's Gender Desk having been its undisputed leader (Esack, 1999; Jeenah, 2001). The Muslim feminist movement has focussed on two main areas in its work: access to mosques (Ismael, 2002) and Muslim Personal Law (Moosa, 2002).

Najma Moosa (2002) writing about Muslim Personal Law (MPL) in South Africa does so from an Islamic feminist position arguing that a return to original Qur'anic injunctions and *shariah* laws would propagate a fair and just understanding of the rights due to women in Islam. She notes that the use of various forms of MPL are rife throughout South Africa, and that recognition of MPL at least allows for the problematisation of some of its more difficult and dangerous applications. At the same time, Moosa (2002) does not advocate for the notion that the implementation of a just and fair MPL will necessarily deliver real equality to Muslim women.

Often secular discourse to promote gender equality is disparaged as being elitist, modernist and white (Moghissi, 1999). Gender equality is demonised as a western tool to bring about the destruction of traditional societies. When advocacy for equality becomes the opposite of any other ideology, be it political or religious, warning bells should ring. Problems that are constructed in binary opposition are often over simplified attempts at silencing the uncomfortable. Obfuscation of nuances occurs when things are reduced down to essentials. When Muslim women are theorised only in terms of their 'Islamic' identity, or Islamic feminism is declared the sole vehicle in which Muslim women will find a route to gender equality (Moghissi, 1999), the differences between Muslim women, become less than their supposed and often imposed similarities.

This thesis is an attempt to present narrativised versions of Muslim women's lives in a specific context, particular time, read by a Muslim woman utilising a number of reflexive lenses. The theoretical framework of feminisms presented in this chapter has been included in order to illustrate the types of academic tools available to analyse women's experiences. The differences and similarities between and within feminisms have been highlighted to continue the argument around the differing ways in which women's subjectivities are formulated at different moments and places. The following chapter provides the methodological framework for how that work, presented in later chapters has been done, with specific reference to feminist methodologies.

CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

“And now I must stop saying what I am not writing about, because there’s nothing so special about that; every story one chooses to tell is a kind of censorship, it prevents the telling of other tales...”

Rushdie, S. (1983, p.7).

Epistemological choices in the research encounter have much bearing on the methodology employed (Mama, 1995). De la Rey (1999) makes the point that the separation of chapters into a literature review of theory, method and analysis seems in opposition to the epistemological options chosen for this type of qualitative research, but that practicality necessitates the almost arbitrary division of these chapters for clarity of focus and conformity to thesis structure. The preceding chapters outline the degree to which this study relies on qualitative theories of knowledge production, while a definite feminist political tone underscores the project. The position that I have taken in this thesis is that subjectivities and knowledge are situated and contextual. My position in the reiteration of that knowledge and my interpretation of it is context-driven and guided by my positioning as researcher/participant. Using Mama’s (1995) guidance, care has been taken to avoid reaffirming the race, gender and class status quo that positions Muslim women generally as passive and religious members of an imagined homogenous *ummah* (Ebrahim-Vally, 2001b).

This chapter serves to make the methodological, ontological and epistemological frameworks for the study explicit, as well as providing detail around the research methods used. Harding (1987) defines method as “techniques for gathering evidence”; methodology as “theory and how research should proceed”; and epistemology as “adequate theory of knowledge” (1987, p. 2). She explains that distinctions between these three concepts are often blurred. The structure for this thesis is a qualitative methodological design from a feminist perspective utilising narrative analysis. In an attempt to separate out these intertwined strands and in keeping with Harding’s (1987) suggestions section 5.4. focuses on the method of research, that is, the research strategy or technique employed.

5.1. Qualitative research

Qualitative methods of research are used to examine questions that can be best answered by describing how participants in a study perceive and interpret various aspects of their environment and lived experiences. Qualitative methods are therefore particular research

procedures. It is often placed as an opposing methodological paradigm to positivist and quantitative methods of research, yet as elucidated elsewhere in this thesis, dichotomous distinctions are often shallow interpretations of difference. Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p. ix) note that the term qualitative research “means different things to many different people”. Punch (1998) prefers to conceptualise qualitative methodologies as an umbrella term encompassing changing and contested methodologies and research practices, with multiple and multidimensional paradigms.

Within the social sciences and humanities disciplines, psychology has only recently turned to qualitative research as a valid and reliable method of enquiry (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor, Tindall, 1994). Until the 1980s most academic psychological research had a distinctly empiricist flavour, which prioritised the use of quantification and measurement alongside experimental-type methods of investigation (Henwood and Pidgeon, 1994). Qualitative methods were initially unwelcome in the social sciences, debased as being unscientific, not academically rigorous, politically motivated, and biased by that political motivation (Jayaratne and Stewart, 1991). With the increasing legitimisation of qualitative research there was a gradual acknowledgement of the contributions that qualitative enquiries can and do make to the social sciences and psychology.

5.2. Feminist research

Research styles and the choices made in the research process are political. “Research styles are not neutral but employ implicit models of what the social world is or should be like, and of what counts as knowledge and how to get it” (Punch, 1998, p. 140). Feminism stresses the political nature of research and the role of power relations between researched and researcher. Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 focussed on the variation within feminist approaches to research, and the differences between various strands of feminisms. There is a strong and deliberate link between the literature review and methodological sections of this thesis, again stressing the artificial boundaries between the categories of method, ethics, methodology, and knowledge production.

Feminist research first started making an impact in academia in the 1960s, with a significant contribution to the subsequent turn to interpretative methods (Punch, 1998). Chapter 4 outlined the differing feminisms relevant to this study and argues strongly for the acknowledgement of feminisms as contested terrain. Just as there are different feminisms,

there are different and differing feminist approaches to research methods (Punch, 1998). Jayaratne and Stewart comment that “the initial dialogue on feminist methodology originated from feminist criticism of traditional quantitative research” which was critiqued for its “selection of sexist and elitist research topics”; biased research designs; emphasis on the positivist approach of objectivity; “overgeneralisation of findings”; and “inadequate data dissemination and utilisation” (1991, p. 86). In 1983, Mies suggested the development of research methodologies consistent with feminist values. Early in the debate, feminist research methodologies were compartmentalised from positivist epistemologies, as one of the core values of feminist research was the rejection of scientific approaches that were associated with androcentrism.

Although the rejection of patriarchy and androcentricism is of central importance for most feminists, other feminist values including the recognition of class and race as important to subjectivity were not always included in research methodologies. Erica Burman writes in 1998 that feminist psychology in the early 1990s seemed to be taking root, but the work remained in the hands of white psychologists, who were “increasingly challenged to address the marginalisation of working class, black, and lesbian perspectives... feminist psychology has yet to address these claims consistently although the work is now beginning” (1998, p. 4). Within the South African psychology academy, Levett and Kottler (1998) report that a number of postgraduate theses focused on feminism, but very few papers specifically related to feminism, feminist issues, or feminist methodological issues, were published or platformed at conferences prior to the mid-90s. The advent of *Agenda*, a feminist journal; increasing presentation of feminist papers and theses; and the establishment of women’s studies courses at tertiary institutions contributed to ongoing mainstreaming of feminism in South Africa.

More recently, feminisms and associated feminist research methods have widened to include feminist empiricism for one, but with the core underlying opinion that gender power relations must be addressed regardless of the research methodology employed. “Thus, the feminist debate on these issues can be seen to have evolved from one defined by opposition to all aspects of mainstream research to an argument for use of a broad range of methods in pursuit of research reflecting feminist values and goals” (Jayaratne and Stewart, 1991, p. 91). Sandra Harding “argue[s] against the idea of a distinctive feminist method of research” (1987, p. 1), and encourages the detailed and purposeful analysis of the way in which research is conducted, and the underlying assumptions about knowledge production. “There may, then,

be a feminist methodology without any particular feminist methods” (Jayaratne and Stewart, 1991, p.92).

Reflexivity is a critical aspect of feminist methodologies and qualitative method. Reflexivity holds the researcher accountable for acknowledgement and awareness of the power dynamics within a research situation. Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002, p. 158) hold that reflexivity is of special magnitude because of the “interrelation of politics, ethics and epistemology in feminist research”. These authors argue that making the power relations in research explicit includes a thorough examination of the social location of the players within the research project; the relationships between the researcher and researched; ethics; access and informed consent. The researcher needs to be reflexive – to make the process of data collection and analysis explicit and to acknowledge himself or herself as central (in collaboration with the participants) in the production of knowledge - and needs to be aware of this position whilst conducting the research. Section 5.4.5. expands on this notion and identifies particular aspects of reflexivity relevant to this study.

5.3. Narrative analysis

Narrative analysis is a research method that can be used to interpret the stories people tell about their lives, as it traces the way in which people make sense of their experiences. The exact definition of this method is debatable. In its simplest form narrative analysis “refers to talk organised around consequential events” (Riessman, 1993, p. 3). It is a way of interpreting and analysing the stories people tell about their lives. Ochberg (1994) notes that often those stories are themselves formulated in a culturally sanctioned manner, the intersubjective codes of communities shape what is legitimate to be spoken about, and how to speak about it. It is the researcher’s job to interpret those narratives in terms of persuasiveness; “linguistic and cultural resources”; and structure (Riessman, 1993, p. 2); while maintaining a sense of self-reflexivity.

Narrative analysis is an interdisciplinary research tool. Like most interpretive methods and methodologies there is a strong focus on individuals, agency and subjectivity. It first appeared in 1969 as narratology (Riessman, 1993) with a strong focus on story forms and language. Mishler (1986) suggests the use of a core narrative framework or plot to clearly delineate the way in which the narrative moves and the point of the story. Although this type of analysis is quite formal and structured, its “power lies in its generalisability” (Mishler,

1986, p. 241). In the 1990s greater emphasis was placed on the style of narrative employed by the storyteller (Ochberg, 1994). Three main questions formed the backbone of a particular approach to this type of analysis: “what images or turns of phrase do they employ; what larger structures organise their accounts; what purposes do their choices serve?” (Ochberg, 1993, p. 113).

As noted above, narratives are located within a particular cultural environment. That environment is in turn reflected in the representations of the narrative. Although narrative analysis “gives prominence to human agency and imagination” (Riesman, 1993, p. 5) those interpretations may be located within a cultural framework that delimits which stories can be told, how stories can be told, and to what end those stories may be told. “...Feminist interpretation has shown how the stories women tell about their lives may be constrained by the narrative forms – and the forms of living – that our culture currently legitimates” (Ochberg, 1994, p. 116). Riessman (1993, p. 5) puts it beautifully: “culture speaks itself through an individual’s story”. Narratives represent culture ‘through an individual’s story’ and simultaneously represent the teller’s subjectivity to the perceived audience. The construction of a narrativised subjectivity occurs whenever someone relays a story. For the purposes of research it is that particular story and the specific way of telling of it within the research encounter that constitutes the focus of the research. The narrative analysis of life stories reflects the teller’s current situation-bound theories and construction of self (Alasuutari, 1995).

Among the criticisms aimed at narrative research is that of the relative newness of the technique. There is a difficulty in identifying standards for good practice as well as common definitions and criteria for good narrative enquiry (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). Like most qualitative research that requires detailed transcription, the work is also time-consuming and laborious. The illusion of causality poses a potential threat to the reliability of the study as it infers that the participant’s sequencing of a story has cause and effect linkages, which may not be accurate (Marshall and Rossman, 1995; Connelly and Clandinin, 1990), but may also not be relevant. Within the tradition of qualitative analysis, causality and validity are not considered concepts of great importance when looking at the value of the subject of study, in this case, the story told by the interviewee.

Chapters 6, 7, and 8 present my analysis of the participants' narratives. The following section of this chapter is arranged to give a clear view of the study – method; contexts; processes; participants; interviews and reflexivity in practice.

5.4. The study

The interpretive turn in methodology that so many write about opens up a space for a more engaging type of research process, one in which the author or researcher is not a passive hidden character but an explicit participant within the research process. De la Rey (1999) notes that by necessity a thesis requires a detached academic voice to fulfil certain criteria. This voice can be altered at the appropriate moment to reveal the insider status of the researcher on the project. In the writing up of this thesis, I have attempted to present my voice appropriately throughout the work process. The following part of this chapter deals specifically with the research process and it is therefore fitting that along with discussing the characteristics of the participants, I make even more overt reference to myself and my positioning/s within the research process.

5.4.1. Institutional and personal contexts

After completing Honours in Psychology in 2000, I was awarded a place in the Masters Degree in Research Psychology at the University of Cape Town (UCT) for 2001. Successful completion of the Masters degree requires in part a thesis on a topic related to the mini-thesis required for Honours. My Honours project looked at issues of race, culture and identity for young Muslim Capetonians (Davids, 2000). From that piece of research, a strong gender component was uncovered. Of the 10 participants in the study it was found that all five women participants felt a strengthening disassociation with their respective communities. Time constraints; my own reluctance to explore an issue that had not been anticipated in the preliminary stages of research; and the hesitation to investigate that which has deep personal echoes for me ensured that I mentioned but did not delve into the topic.

The research question was formulated in terms of the UCT's institutional protocol. Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) note that the institutional context for a research project structures the expectations, possibilities and reality of demand for the project. The research question was thus designed in terms of my own implicit and explicit values; theory; ontology and epistemology; as well as in reference to the institutional setting that reinforced and supported my methodological and theoretical positions. Within the Department of

Psychology at UCT, the timeframe for the project was initially set at one year (this was later prolonged), at a small scale necessitated by the type of work being undertaken, limited resources afforded to students, and the word maximum of 50 000 for a Masters thesis. The university also requires that prior to the initiation of any research that deals with 'human subjects', the research proposal must undergo a thorough ethics approval.

Following from the findings of the Honours project, a central research question evolved around the lived experiences of Muslim women in Cape Town. Simply put, the question asked how Muslim women in Cape Town constructed their identities. It was anticipated that issues around gender, race, culture, class and religion would emerge. The research was intended to analyse how the women in the study formulated their subjectivities in the interviews, and to assess whether the narratives echoed any existing literature. A further aim of the research is to analyse what structures support and detract from the way in which the women identify themselves.

5.4.2. Research processes

Over the months between the end of Honours and the beginning of Masters, I began engaging in more depth with these issues, speaking with Muslim women in informal settings and beginning to pay more attention not only to the socially constructed elements of our lives, but more importantly to the ways in which we engage with our Muslimness and gender.

Although I have presented this narrative as a linear series of events, in truth, the process was more convoluted. As a girl and then woman I had been dealing with these issues for as long as I can remember, but had not afforded myself the opportunity to formally piece together both my and others interpretation of our lived experiences, the dramatic and banal aspects of life. With issues of identity and race playing such an important role in South Africa, focusing on those issues were for me the soft target, both in my academic, career and personal spaces. I had uncertainties about beginning the project even once the proposal and ethical considerations had been passed. It seemed to me at that time that it was not my place to look at these issues and ask these questions of others when I could barely ask them of myself.

A number of extraordinary events occurred to spur the project on at times and debilitate it at others. The interviews themselves provided me with a rich, textured and varied way of looking at Muslim women. It opened up my mind to my own prejudices and those we engage with outside of us each day. At the same time, I experienced an unexpected amount of

support for the project from men and women. The second extraordinary event was the attacks on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001 and the subsequent crystallisation of anti-Muslim sentiment worldwide. The invasion of Afghanistan which on the surface seemed to open up the debate about Muslim women in the world actually managed to close it down – apparent liberation of Muslim women was subsumed by a plethora of western, racist, imperialist and domineering viewpoints that shifted discourse about Islam from orientalist terrorists to orientalist misogynists and now back to orientalist terrorists. Thirdly, a play based on conversations I had with my sister and other women during this time was conceived and staged to critical and public acclaim. “At Her Feet” (Davids, forthcoming) explores many of the core issues that this thesis intended to cover, and in a sense I felt stumped by the popularity of the work and silenced myself.

I had already gathered a substantial amount of literature on the topic of Muslims and Islam in South Africa that served as a background from which to examine Muslim women’s positions in these societies over time. Due to the particular local focus of the subject many of the relevant publications were readily available at university libraries, and the experts in the field proved very generous with their time and knowledge. When researching the historical aspects of women’s experiences at the Cape I had the fortune to traverse the tomes of the National Archives, National Art Gallery and National Library. This type of archival research provided richness and texture evident in Chapter 2 which I believe strengthens the current argument around issues of the changing and contested nature of agency, gender, religion and culture. Most of the works on research and feminisms have also been readily available and while I attempted to read most of these pieces of research prior to and during the interviews I often have had to revisit publications as the need arises and as new work is published. De la Rey (1999) clarifies that the non-linear nature of qualitative research supports the reading of sources after interviews and as the process unfolds. She uses Bogdan and Biklen’s (1992, p. 58 in de la Rey, 1999, p. 105) analogy of the qualitative researcher as the ‘loosely scheduled traveller’. This analogy proves quite apt as both the process of gathering literature and the interviewing process evolved in a semi-planned way.

Between July and December 2001 I interviewed eight Muslim women in Cape Town. All the interviews were scheduled to have taken place by the end of September 2001, but because of 9/11, the invasion of Afghanistan and the global spotlight placed on Muslim women, the work took a different turn. Participants called me up independently to decry what had

ask for an additional interview to voice their opinions. Another round of interviews took place with those women willing to engage again in this process. I chose to alter my guideline of once-off interviews because of the magnitude of the events and the persistence of the women's requests to speak about it. In keeping with my beliefs about democratic, participatory research processes in this context and acknowledging the shift in power dynamics within the research situation I consented to a further round of interviews. However, these pieces of talk and conversations have not been included in the thesis because none of the second round interviews conformed to narrative structure, and actually fell outside of the research methodology. This is discussed further in Chapter 9, in a discussion on limitations to the study.

5.4.3. Participants

Nine women participated in this research – eight interviewees and myself as the researcher/interviewer. The interviewees can loosely be grouped as Muslim women. One of the participants although born into and raised by a Muslim family no longer identifies herself as Muslim. Another participant was not born Muslim, but in her words, reverted to Islam. The women ranged in age from 24 to 44. They had all completed at least undergraduate tertiary education; and all the women identified themselves as middle class. These women are students, teachers, writers, software programmers, artists, mothers, widowed, married, single, chefs, business people, activists and physiotherapists.

Qualitative research has no precise rules on sample size. Riessman (1993) explains that narrative analysis research is more suited to smaller studies because of the intense attention to subtlety and the quantity of detailed information usually provided by narrators. In order to do justice to the stories and because of the availability of participants I made a practical decision to interview all eight women who had expressed interest in the study.

Pseudonym	Age	Occupation	Family Status
Jamielah Johansen	23	Masters student	Living with life partner
Fatima Sadie	25	Medical practitioner	Single, living with mother and siblings
Shakira Jacobs	44	Business woman	Married with three children
Zainu Arief	27	Artist	Single, living at home
Rukaya Desai	24	Postgraduate student	Single, living at home
Ilhaam Hiddingh	40	Business woman	Married, 2 children
Natasha Hassim	40	PhD candidate/ Educator	Widowed with 2 children
Mariam Mohamed	30	Artist/Poet	Married with one child and pregnant

Participants were contacted through a general friendship/family network. I approached women who I thought may be interested in participating and they either consented to hearing more or referred me to someone else who they thought may want to engage with the project. I communicated via telephone and in some cases in writing, the broad gist of the project, the ethics to which I was committed, (especially that at any point the interviewee could refuse to participate) and explained the entire interview procedure including the requirement for informed consent prior to starting the interview, and that anonymity would to the best of my ability be ensured.

5.4.4. Interviews

Certain features of the research process were pre-planned. All interviews occurred at the participants chosen location and at their convenience. The interviews were all audio recorded, lasted between 40 minutes and an hour and a half; and were fully transcribed including intonations, pause lengths and non-word expressions like sighs and giggles¹. The interviews were face-to-face and interactional. Fluidity characterised the interviews and in keeping with notions of participatory research the structure was determined to a large extent by the

¹ Please see Appendix 2: Coding, for a list and explanation of transcription conventions.

participant, within a flexible framework. I kept with me a list of guiding questions, for use in case there was a need for clarification². Most of the time there was a free flow of information between interviewee and interviewer. I responded openly to any questions posed to me, and the interviews acquired a conversational quality.

As already mentioned, a narrative framework informs the interviews. This research approach allowed for participants to tell their stories in whichever way they felt comfortable. The narrator or participant forms the creative focal point of the research exercise. She is the main speaker, and while the researcher chooses the topic and general flow of the interview, it is the participant who directs the order of the story. The participant responds to a question or comment and selects from an array of possible experiences, "those moments that [she] deems significant and arranges them in a coherent order" (Ochberg, 1994, p. 113). In this type of research the researched is the protagonist and the storyteller; and the researcher frames the process and the final product.

5.4.5. Reflexivity in practice

One manner of incorporating the challenge of reflexivity, if conducted respectfully and with sensitivity, is to conduct within-group research. For Mama (1995) her commitment to egalitarian power relations within the research process is reflected in her use of this type of research. But she warns that "choosing a multiply oppressed group to research does not in itself ensure that one's research does not affirm the status quo, however, even if one is a member of that same social group" (Mama, 1995, p. 67). In addition, it also does not necessarily ensure a more democratic power relation between researcher and researched. Hurd and McIntyre (1996, p. 81) make a valuable contribution to the debate of representation and reflexivity noting that the representation of participants marked more by sameness than difference can also be problematic in that the researcher must necessarily guard against the seduction of the "silent privilege of similarity" that can reinforce critically unexamined discourses and assumptions.

I have found during conducting and analysing the interviews that power relations shifted constantly. My generally similar 'identity package' as a young Cape Muslim woman allowed for instances of recognition between myself and various participants; and also highlighted

² Please see Appendix 3: Interview schedule, for a list of guiding questions.

instances of difference in which one of the two of us was positioned differently to the other in terms of power. My current education status and position as researcher was sometimes furiously ignored (mostly by me); retreated into the background (especially during lively or emotional discussion) but was always present. The research process itself reflects this. The constant presence of the dictaphone, no matter how unobtrusive, remained an ever present entity and symbol of the research encounter.

The women who participated in this study formed the backbone of the work. Their willingness to participate and share their stories provides the actual information without which there would be no thesis. I was very much aware of the social, gender and class dynamics that operate within the research situation. The participants were approached with this in mind, to ensure that reflexivity and the acknowledgement of power relations was built into the research structure. While I believed that I had taken measures to counter the effects of power dynamics within an interview situation, not all participants were approached or interviewed in the same manner. I became aware only during the transcribing process that my tone, inflection and manner around one of the older participants was markedly different than with the rest of the interviewees. I treated her as an 'aunty', even calling her aunty at times in keeping with cultural traditions of respect between people of differing age groups.

Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002, p. 157) rightly point out that research towards an academic qualification or career advancement no matter how ethical always has a measure of self-interest. It is important to report that while seeking informed consent from the participants prior to the interviews almost all of them commented that they would be happy to help me fulfil my degree requirements. It was clear that the benefit would be mostly mine.

This chapter has outlined the epistemological choices, methodology, and method employed in the thesis. The research has been formulated to adhere to the theoretical thrust of the argument, that in order to understand how Muslim women are positioned, it is imperative to give voice to and prioritise first-hand accounts of subjectivity. The following chapters form the crux of the thesis, an analysis of various narratives provided by the participants in dialogue with the researcher. Chapter 6 details the identification of narratives, and examines individual narratives; while Chapters 7 and 8 present the common narratives across and between participants.

CHAPTER 6: IDENTIFICATION OF NARRATIVES

The methodological framework discussed in Chapter 5 provides the architecture for the choices made in the research process, from the inception of the research topic through to reflections of the end product, the thesis. Chapter 6 clarifies how narratives were identified, and which narrative devices were common to the participants. In addition, two individual narratives are presented.

Narrative analysis as discussed in Chapter 5 can be used as a methodological tool to trace the way in which people make sense of their lives, as well as the way in which people construct their subjectivities. Analysis is the representation by the researcher of the narratives told by the participants and requires specific representational decisions (De la Rey, 1999). Two major decisions about the depiction of the information were made:

- The level of detail of the transcriptions;
- The type of narrative analysis.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, all the interviews were fully transcribed, and intonation, pauses, and audible expressions were included in note format³. The transcriptions provide a rich but manageable text for analysis, working in tandem with the decision around the use of a particular form of narrative analysis. Through the process of transcription and careful reading, all the first-round interviews seemed to comply with the criteria for narrative: the events moved through some form of sequence most often chronological, or grouped according to themes. As there is no set method for doing narrative analysis, I chose to adopt Reissman's (1993, p. 43) suggestion to combine "Bell's textual approach with Ginsburg's plot/story distinction". In this way common story lines could be compared, and variation in story line distinguished. Concentration on similar and varying textual aspects of the narratives provides counterpoints and convergences in the detail of the talk. These decisions were predicated on the requirement to represent the women as individuals while also focusing on the contextual processes (De la Rey, 1999).

6.1. Core Narratives

Once transcribed, read and reread, each interview was summarised into a core narrative, which following Frankenberg's (1993) advice are presented in Appendix 4. Core narratives

³ Please see Appendix 2: Coding

are reductions of the full narratives in which basic plot lines are outlined but numerous parts are deleted, such as description, evaluations and explanations. The information in the core narrative excludes details that do not relate directly to the central question of the research. These narratives are of particular use when examining the similarities and differences across a number of narratives, as well as for the presentation of substantive content in a summarised form.

6.2. Progressive Narratives

It is clear from the core narratives that all interviewees told their experiences in the format of a life story, or a narrative characterised by a particular movement towards a valued endpoint (Gergen and Gergen, 1984). The main line of the plot and the progressive narrative move along a chronological format in part shaped by the telling and in part guided by the interview schedule asking the interviewee to relate her story over different periods of her life. In addition, the participants telling of their stories showed the ways in which they each felt that they had over time, developed emotionally and grown psychologically. For example, Jamielah Johansen's core narrative shows her development from birth to her present understanding of her identity. Between these two points in time she recognises key events in her life that have shaped her current understanding - relocation to a private Christian school from a government Christian school; the death of her grandfather and his funeral; her mother's feminist influence throughout her high school years; the acquisition at university of academic tools to name and confront gender prejudice; and exposure to different expressions of Islam on a holiday in the Middle East and a period of time at a university in the USA. These critical events are described and positioned in terms of how they contributed to or detracted from her current understanding of self. All the participants constructed their current positions as a valued end point, implying that all earlier events moved or progressed towards that particular moment, and the particular shape of their subjectivities as told in the interviews.

6.3. Narrative Devices

Within progressive narratives lie a number of other discursive assemblies. The following extract from Mariam Mohamed's interview illustrates the complicated nature of all the narratives in the study, and the most common uses of narrative choice. This narrative explains how Mariam came to declare her faith in Islam. She moved from a new age position of spirituality to an understanding of synchronistic events that led her to becoming a Muslim,

while fending off the proselytising efforts of her brothers who had already converted to Islam. The narrative maintains a general trajectory towards a goal, thus identified as a progressive narrative; it also includes a number of smaller and significant pieces of talk and uses discursive tools that can be clustered under the headings that follow.

MM: *Ja, well, you know what happened at that time was I was at a place of having, I would call it dabbled because I can't say I was fully walking the path, but dabbled with Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, various what is called new age often old age umm, philosophies and therapies and had come up with my own delicious combination of all these things which had a clear synchronicity for me. It was a you know very clear progression. For them [Mariam's brother's] it was a concocted comfort zone that was obviously happy days, all inclusive. Didn't mean I had to draw any lines, didn't mean I had to practice any, make any sacrifices on a personal level. Not that you must be suffering in order to do what God desires, but in a way that for your growth just staying in your comfort zone and creating more and more comfort zones it's, it's, growth involves friction. It involves inner conflict at some level. It's a place of questioning, not just complacent. So that's how I mean I'd come up with these really lovely convoluted, very poetic places for my self. ...For me they weren't taking cognisance, that journey was just some flowery, airy trip. It was a very difficult process to keep searching and exploring looking for home, you know that had taken effort and process and pain and for them that was, that had no relevance. It was not valued. ... I was saying earlier that, you know that its taken me a while to recognize that even what seems like pointless exercises with my brothers was actually also part of it. Umm and that in a way kind of first rumblings when I actually had to articulate and debate what it is that I do believe, you know your sense of where I come from that was an important process. Umm, about seven no five years later, when they had pretty much given up on me, [laugh] I had had a series of experiences, and at some levels because I feel that they are private, they are not stories, but whether it would be a synchronicity of events, sometimes even dreams where I [pause]. I will tell you one beautiful dream [laugh]. And this happened way, my brothers were out of the country, this was in 1995? And my official, as in verbal shahaada happened in 2000, in May 2000, in Japan [laugh] but we will get to that.*

6.3.1. Micronarratives

Micronarratives are pieces of conversation that describe setbacks in the progressive narrative which still maintains the general trajectory towards a goal state (De la Rey, 1999). The

unsuccessful attempts by Mariam's brothers to convert her to Islam over a period of five years represent an impediment on her path to reversion. She explains that their efforts negated her struggles to find a 'home' because her personal path was not valued. Only after her brothers had 'given up on' her did her movement towards Islam take up momentum. Mariam does, however, through her telling of the unfolding events resolve this micronarrative and incorporates it into the dominant progressive narrative by stating 'that even what seems like pointless exercises with my brothers was actually also part of it [her journey towards Islam]'.

6.3.2. Narrative ties and links to others

All participants in this study spoke about the personal identifications and subjectivities and without fail always included the narratives of others in their talk. These convergences of part of life stories occasionally took the form of micronarratives like Mariam's experiences with her brothers, above; and sometimes formed a seamless whole with the major progressive narrative.

6.3.3. Collaboration with the listener

Bell's interests lie in the language used by the participant – "the structures and language narrators use in collaboration with a listener" (Reissman, 1993, p. 36). The interview process is complex, and as noted before involves levels of representation and reflexivity. In some of the interviews there is a sense that the only listener is the interviewer, and in others there is a sense that potential audiences are addressed. Towards the end of Mariam's extract, she draws the interviewer into the narrative by directing a question towards me: 'this was in 1995?'. This narrative device serves to ensure the attention of the listener by direct engagement after quite a long retelling of a significant series of events. The participant also uses two other indications of listener-teller collaboration by stating '[pause] I will tell you one beautiful dream' and '...but we will get to that'. In the first example, after stating that she experienced a series of private events, Mariam pauses and then draws me in by telling me that she will relate one dream. However, Mariam maintains the impression of privacy and agency by juxtaposing the personal pronoun 'I' with the normative pronoun 'you'. After placing those distinctions into the narrative, Mariam then invites me back into the story with the phrase 'we will get to that' indicating that she has shifted our relationship back to the collaborative state, and once again emphasises her agency in the research process.

6.3.4. Metaphor and meaning

One of the most frequently used linguistic tools is figurative language as it conveys meaning in an easily digestible format. All the narratives in this research are sprinkled with similes, analogies, imagery and metaphors. Metaphors may be particularly useful and revealing if they are considered in terms of cultural contexts as they may assist in the identification of values, shared knowledge and cultural domains that are familiar to members of the group (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996).

In the extract above it is clear that Mariam understands her conversion to Islam and her spiritual development as a 'journey', that for her was a 'very clear progression' even though at first she claimed 'I can't say I was fully walking the path' of spiritual living. Her brothers dismissed this progression as 'just some flowery, airy trip'. There are multiple levels of meaning at play in this metaphor. From a narrative analytic methodological point of view the phraseology reaffirms the identification of the text as a progressive narrative with sequence and movement. From a cultural and religious perspective, the metaphor is significant as Islam is often referred to as 'the path' indicating the practice of the religion as a lifelong journey. The Muslim Youth Movement's slogan 'Islam is a way of life' underscores the notion of living all aspects of one's life in terms of Islam, be it personal, social or political (Tayob, 1995a). By using these metaphors in relation to her spiritual development, Mariam is asserting her notion of 'reversion' that all people are born Muslim and must find their way back to Islam.

6.3.5. Repetition

Repetition is a much used linguistic tool to stress the importance of meaning, an event and/or phrase. Reissman (1993) explains that Bell's (1988) textual approach pays specific attention to detail and notes the use of examining words, phraseology, and the structure of sentences and statements to locate the intrinsic meaning of a narrative. In this way, an analyst is able to look into the text to find meaning above and beyond the plot line. Repetition carries power in that it signals the importance to the narrator of what is being said. In Mariam's narrative above, the continual emphasis on the metaphor of a journey and trip conveys the deep significance to her. A closer examination of the text, shows a repetition of the phrase 'didn't mean' when Mariam refers to her spiritual journey with Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and various new age philosophies and therapies. Taken in context of the entire interview being about Mariam's search for meaning and her path to Islam, these phrases point to a certain

lack of meaning within her eastern and new age wanderings, that she does not explicitly state but implies through repetition.

6.3.6. Dramatic engagement

One of the features of story telling is the use of plot line to keep the listener interested and connected to the account. Key turning points can enhance dramatic engagement. Together with metaphor, dramatic features like plot twists and tragedy and comedy can convey meaning (De la Rey, 1999). In the extract above, Mariam uses a climactic delay tactic to convey the importance of her utterance of *shahaada*, the initial act of declaring her faith. She builds up the tension to revealing in quick succession that her brothers, positioned as obstacles on her path to Islam were out of the country, and that she had experienced a number of synchronistic events, leading to her making *shahaada* in June 2000 in Japan. She then reigns back claiming 'we will get to that', creating a denouement in the pace of the talk. This particular piece also illustrates the following narrative device, linking past, present and future.

6.3.7. Linking time

Mariam effectively jumps from period to period, linking both the present and the past with the future desired end state, *shahaada* that symbolises her official conversion to Islam. Mariam also links her previous spirituality and belief journeys with her present Islamic faith by invoking the metaphor of journey and path for both periods in her life. Progressive narratives by definition are sequential, and all the interviews in this study comply with a chronological format and so link past and present. De la Rey (1999) explains that in order to have a successful goal point within a narrative, there must be allusion or direct reference to the future. All the women interviewed noted the contextual and changing nature of their self-perceptions and cultural positioning. It was clear from all the narratives that there was an expectation of future change or development.

6.4. Individual narratives

All interviews and subsequent transcripts were analysed and core narratives were extracted from the full text. Further analysis of the transcripts revealed that all the interviews followed a progressive narrative sequencing, and employed specific narrative devices common to all participants. Identification of the narratives embedded within an interview is tricky. From the hours of transcripts, only a handful of narratives can be identified. Most of these pieces of

talk were linked thematically to the other interviewees, showing common experiences or ideologies. However, a couple of important narratives fell outside of the familiar, and were specific to those participants alone, and are presented below. Both experiences are distinguished by the fact that the participants encountered negative incidents with other individual Muslim women who are ostensibly inscribed with more power than the participants. These narratives do however conform to the common element discussed above in section 6.3.2. in that these stories are linked to the stories of others, but the themes fall outside of all the other common themes in the study.

Another distinctive feature is that in both Rukaya Desai's discussion of the woman in the mosque, and Zainu Arief's incident with the Muslim psychologist, the participants use the pronoun 'this' when specifying the particular women with whom they have had negative experiences. The determiner 'this' is used when referring specifically to one thing over another, as a distinguishing and emphatic marker. In both cases the participants use the pronoun when referring directly to the women about whom they are speaking in relation to the communities that the women symbolise. Chapter 2, Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 each make mention of the way in which Muslim women are often discussed in terms being carriers of their culture, or symbols of their communities (Ali, 1992; Dwyer, 1999; Kandiyoti 1991a, 1991b; Moghissi, 1999; Mohanty, 1988; Narayan, 1997; Rozario, 1996; Werbner, 1997). In these narratives, both Rukaya and Zainu invoke the discourse of women as carriers of culture by their use of the determiner 'this' when talking about specific Muslim women.

6.4.1. 'This woman' in the mosque

In the course of our interview, Rukaya Desai began relating why she no longer feels comfortable attending mosque.

RD: *And I have been to mosque a few times and the few times that I have been to mosque, I haven't been in years. The last time I went, it was actually just for me. What did it was, I was at the mosque down the road, there was this woman who umm, was talking the whole way through. In this loud voice. The whole way through. Like this was on a Friday and the guy in the front there sitting his little sermon, and this woman she was like talking the whole way through. And then I turned to someone on my left and I don't know what I said, I didn't even know her, this woman stood up from behind me, grabbed me and by my scarf, like yanked me from the back, basically kakked on me, but*

like swearing!

LD: *In the mosque.*

RD: *In the mosque. Shut up, okay? She sat me down next to her, turned around and carried on talking. I got up and I walked out.*

LD: *But who was she?*

RD: *She was like obviously this old woman, you know of the community or some such. I just got up and left. Because its like, I cant actually.*

Although not clear from the bland presentation of this piece of conversation, the participant tells this story with a great deal of passion. In the rest of the interview she describes a number of reasons and events for her identifying as a Muslim, but no longer wishing to be a part of the Muslim community in Cape Town. This particular narrative stands out from most of the rest of her talk in its singularity of purpose – it demonstrates the way in which one person, ‘this woman’ represented the final episode in her active interaction with community activities. Rukaya expresses her frustration in the situation and with what she perceives as a community at odds with her, with the phrases ‘what did it was’ and ‘I can’t actually’.

As Rukaya explains, her current position on Islam is that she is a Muslim but no longer feels a kinship with Muslim communities in Cape Town. This particular incident is used as an example of how she has come to the point of feelings of disassociation, and therefore cannot be understood in micronarrative forms because the story forms part of the overarching progressive narrative. It does display the narrative device common throughout all the narratives of being linked with others, in this case her story is closely tied with that of ‘this woman’ in the mosque. The progression through time is also clear. Rukaya used to attend mosque, although infrequently and now no longer does. Within the narrative, she employs a linear line of thought and typical plot-story distinction. She arrives at her local mosque to pray, but is disturbed by a woman talking incessantly through the service. When she comments on the talking to a stranger, the woman who had been talking assaults her and swears at her. Rukaya then leaves mosque, and does not return.

Rukaya also manages to link her previous visits to mosque with the story, and the current time of telling the narrative. She says that she had not ‘been [to mosque] in years’, although she had been previously a ‘few times’. The narrative is then placed in its context of having occurred a while prior to the interview because she relates a tale about the ‘last time’ she went.

Rukaya's repetition of the phrase 'few times' invokes a sense of the infrequency of her visits to mosque, which combined with her explanation that her last visit to mosque was 'actually just for me', gives a hint as to the extraordinary nature of the visit that was private, rare and special. The overall narrative describes an event of verbal and physical violation and violence in a private and sacred space, attributed to one individual. Rukaya's response to this intrusion is evident in the telling of the story and the repetition of the words – she 'just got up and left'. Rukaya emphasises that during the service the woman's talking was unremitting. She uses the phrase 'the whole way through' three times in a very short piece of dialogue making clear her distress at the level and length of the intrusion. This distress is echoed in the participant's use of two short sentences, both of which are used to mimic the woman in the mosque and Rukaya's internal reply to her. When relating that the woman spoke 'in this loud voice', Rukaya raises her voice on tape; and she does so again, later, when imitating her own internal reply to the woman – 'Shut up, okay?'.

Rukaya's description of the woman in the mosque who assaulted her moves from the use of 'this woman' twice, to the variation of 'this old woman'. As noted above the use of the pronoun 'this' serves two functions, to denote a distance between teller and the person spoken about; and to cite the close association between the woman in the mosque and the culture to which Rukaya allocates her. The participant links the Muslim community in that area and the woman by calling her 'this old woman...of the community or some such'. By using the adjective 'old' Rukaya discursively distances herself, a younger woman, from the woman in the mosque.

The story serves the purpose of illustrating how Rukaya reached her identification as a Muslim outside of her community, by linking the woman in the mosque with the community. The woman in the mosque perpetrated physical and verbal violence upon her, and in her conversation she positions that violence as indicative of the schism between her understanding of community, and the alienated sense of community she experiences.

6.4.2. 'This Muslim woman'

Zainu Arief related this account of her encounter with a Muslim woman psychologist in the course of a conversation around issues of puberty and sexuality. She had just explained that even though she had not yet experienced her first kiss, her mother became very strict and

placed curfews and other restrictions on her after she professed an interest in a white boy. She then rebelled.

ZA: ...*And it was a very bad rebellion I went through because I got angry. I was so pissed off, what, what crap is this? And then she took me to a psychologist. And I remember this day very well because since then I have been very wary of psychologists. I mean I have found a great one since then. She took me to this psychologist. This Muslim woman. And I thought that, now Leila listen to this, and I thought oh my God you are going to hear me. Because that's your job, you are going to explain to my mom what's going on here. Do you know what she did? That psychologist, and I think this is so completely unprofessional, I want to actually track this woman down and say, you are, she was wearing a doekie and everything. You are a good Muslim girl. Your mother has every right to, to tell you what to do and you must listen to her.*

LD: *Is that what she said to you?*

ZA: *That what she said to me. You must follow this, you must follow the religion you know. There's nothing wrong. And I got, and then I became even more angry. Because I thought no-one was hearing me no-one was listening to me and that how I basically felt and I put it all on the religion, all on the culture. Because I felt like you know, wherever I went they took it so personally that I had didn't accept the religion or I didn't feel like one of them. People took it like I was saying to them you are not good enough. And I wasn't saying that I was just different.*

Like Rukaya Desai, Zainu Arief identifies herself as Muslim, but does not feel that she belongs to any Muslim community. Unlike Rukaya who arrived at this understanding over time, Zainu felt this distance from childhood, and it has only intensified since. The narrative above illustrates one occasion in her life where she felt as though she was afforded a chance to speak and to be heard, but again was not acknowledged. Zainu sequences the events in a straight forward chain whereby she rebels against the increasing restrictions placed on her by her mother after professing a liking for a white boy; is sent to a psychologist; and experiences a betrayal by the psychologist who takes the stance that Zainu should be 'a good Muslim girl' and obey her mother regardless of Zainu's personal inclinations. It is significant that Zainu mentions the race of the boy that she admits an interest in, suggesting that the restrictions from her mother were linked to the fact that the boy was white and supposedly not Muslim.

Zainu's story highlights the shortcomings of Islamic counselling in South Africa for girls, as Shaikh (1996) and Abdullah (2003) note the shortcomings of this type of religion-based

psychology for women in particular. As Abdullah notes Islamic counselling places the family as sacrosanct and advises those seeking counselling to maintain the family structure (2003) advocated by a particular reading of Islamic discourses. In this case, Zainu's mother's wishes conform to a traditional interpretation of Islam that is supported by the psychologist, where adherence to an adult and parent's decisions are placed as paramount in a child's life. At no point does Zainu indicate that the psychologist had advised her that rebellion is a natural stage of development, rather the spotlight is placed on the psychologist's instructions that Zainu conform to the qualities of a 'good Muslim girl', who 'must follow the religion'.

Although it is clear that the visit to the psychologist occurred when Zainu was a teenager, she links the story to her present by stating that she had since found a 'great' psychologist since the previous encounter. This statement serves multiple purposes as it links the past with the present; and removes any evidence that Zainu might feel biased against all psychologists because of the incident. After rereading this piece a number of times, I was alerted by the use of this phrase in close proximity to Zainu's entreaty to me to listen to her – 'now Leila listen to this'. Prior to the interview, I had clarified the reasons for the research, and that my role was to listen in the interview process and that I would attempt to hear to the best of my ability what the participants were trying to put across. The similarity between my work as an academic in psychology and the clinical psychologist is striking from the outside. I feel that Zainu's comment about having found a psychologist, to whom she related, was aimed in part at maintaining a comfortable sense of conversation in the interview. I also have the sense that the words that I used as an introduction to the research had an effect on the shape that this participant's stories took. It is important to note that while one can be aware of the reflexive processes within a research encounter, it is very difficult to always maintain that reflexivity at the time. Parallels between the researcher and participants talk may just indicate moments of similarity and does not negate the possibility of the participant having felt as though she needed someone to listen to her as a teenager. In fact, the point is that the narrative devices employed show moments of sameness between researcher and researched.

A common theme running throughout Zainu's narrative is that of being silenced and ignored. The first mention in this piece of being heard, is her engagement with me, followed immediately by her thought 'oh my God, you are going to hear me'. Although she does not state it, it is implied that the 'you' in the phrase is the psychologist who she was sent to by her mother. The link is further evidence of the multiple levels of meaning and direction that

language and narrative can take. Later in the extract, after the session with the psychologist, Zainu notes that she felt as though 'no-one was hearing' her, 'no-one was listening' to her. This continual emphasis on the theme and the repetitive use of the phrases indicates her sense of helplessness and isolation, from her family, the community with which her family identified, and the profession that claims as its speciality listening to people. Zainu links not being heard to feelings of anger towards her mother and the psychologist, which she channels into a generalised anger at religion and community, who she feels have failed her.

The imagery that Zainu employs to describe the psychologist is interesting in that she notes 'she was wearing a *doekie* and everything'. The scarf is often symbolic of Islam, and has multiple meanings. Shaikh's (1996) work showed that the scarf is linked to honour. In this piece, Zainu juxtaposes the scarf as antithetical to the psychologist's negativity towards her, implying that for Zainu the scarf is symbolic of kindness. The bescarved psychologist, in Zainu's imagination was unkind to her and unprofessional, hence her qualification that the woman wore a scarf. The Muslim psychologist is invested with significantly more power than Zainu as an adult, a psychologist, and an outwardly devout Muslim woman. In contrast, Zainu's account of the session with the psychologist places her as a girl child without qualification who's intellectual and emotional tools are not validated but suppressed.

Both Zainu Arief's and Rukaya Desai's stories presented here show the levels to which individuals who place themselves outside of community structures and/or taken for granted cultural and religious norms, are sidelined and feel as though they have no recourse open to them. In Zainu Arief's case, she continued to question and challenge precepts that did not sit well with her in formulating her sense of being a Muslim woman. Rukaya Desai chose to distance herself from situations in which she felt marginalised and instead asserted her own understanding of her Islam. While both pieces show negative incidents where the participants were rendered as less powerful, both participants express their agency through their choice to either express outrage or distance themselves from what they view as the symbol of their maltreatment.

6.5. Common narratives

One of the purposes of this thesis is to examine women's experiences across and between specific personal events locating those events in the broader social environment. The individual narratives in section 6.4. above, reflect the experiences of two of the participants in

the study that is not echoed in the stories related by the other six participants. Although these stories are relatively unique in the context of eight interviews, the themes tie in with the literature of Muslim women's experiences examined in the preceding chapters.

This section provides a brief overview of the recurrent and shared themes found in the interviews, which are presented in Chapter 7 and Chapter 8. Issues of subjectivity featured strongly in the interviews, with two of the eight participants stating that they no longer identified themselves as Muslims, and have little to no authentic relationship with the Muslim communities of Cape Town. The remaining six participants claimed their identification as Muslim women, but to varying degrees. Two participants felt a very strong faith-based connection to Islam and equally earnest connections with their respective chosen communities. Four participants felt a separation between themselves and the Muslim communities in which they were raised.

The following two chapters expand upon these issues by showcasing the narratives that the participants used. In keeping with the general line of argument in this piece of research, the narratives illustrate the multiple ways in which Muslim women think about their subjectivities and construct their identities. The work now moves to an in depth analysis of the discursive ways in which Muslim women position themselves.

CHAPTER 7: COMMON NARRATIVES 1

PERSONAL SUBJECTIVITIES; *UMMAH*; GENDER ROLES; GENDER DISCRIMINATION; FEMINISM

7.1. Subjectivities, gender and Islam

The central aim of this thesis is to examine whether women in Cape Town at this time, who are from the outside identified as Muslim women who locate themselves within Muslim communities in Cape Town, identify themselves in similar terms. As such the opening question with which each interview began asked how the participants identify themselves. Two groups emerged – those women who do see themselves as Muslim women, and those who do not identify themselves as Muslim women. The grouping of the participants into these clusters is purely for the sake of initial analysis, and is far too blunt an allotment. The stories related by the women show the layers of meaning in positioning themselves either as Muslims or not as Muslims, with complex and subtle similarities occurring between and across 'groups'.

Fatima Sadie's response to the initial question was straightforward and to the point, echoing what she had said to me in an earlier conversation about identity.

FS: *Ok, umm [pause] well, first of all, like I said is, that first thing that I always view myself as is a, I am a Muslim female.*

Fatima's primary association is as a Muslim female, which she stresses with the repetition of the word 'first', and mentions that she had said it before and 'always view's herself in this way. For Mariam Mohamed, a convert to Islam, religious identity is also paramount.

MM: *I think being someone who has awoken to Islam at an adult stage its umm, you kind of a child and an adult at the same time. You bring the adult luggage with you the whole time. There are a whole lot of levels at which I need to grow and be nourished as a Muslim.*

Mariam immediately states her revert status, qualifying her Muslimness with the fact that she has only recently awoken to Islam, and sees herself in terms of growth and development. The imagery of her as simultaneously an adult and a child is indicative of her understanding of spirituality and identity as a journey, and a growth process. For other participants who

identify themselves as Muslims, they do so only after listing a range of other appellations central to their subjectivity.

For Jamielah Johansen, her primary identification is as a woman, then follows a list of other identifications, and as she says, somewhere along the line she identifies herself as Muslim.

JJ: *Personally, how do I identify myself? [pause]. Um, I think, um, as a woman first of all, and then as a South African woman. Because there are a whole range and series of implications that come along with being South African that I think are quite unique to the rest of the world especially given our particular time and space now. And then, you know, being a woman in terms of like how, I identify myself in a more global level and who I feel identification with [slight pause] umm, in those terms. I also identify myself as an artist. I identify myself as someone who, in terms of what I, how I think academically, which is in a very kind of like post-colonial discourse way. And then I identify myself you know in varying ways in terms of my relationships with people, you know, as a sister, as a daughter, as a friend, as a partner, as a student. And I think somewhere along the line I would identify myself as Muslim, but more specifically I'd identify myself in terms of what my spiritual beliefs are which are I think a little bit more eclectic than just belonging kind of to some kind of Islamic thing which is not at all where I would want to place myself.*

Jamielah notes that she would identify as a Muslim, but more specifically in terms of her spiritual beliefs and wouldn't want to belong to 'some kind of Islamic thing'. This participant locates her self in terms of plurality, with multiple positionings, negating the notion of the unitary construction of self. Her allusion to post-colonial discourse serves to reinforce this image.

Rukaya Desai also uses her academic knowledge to frame her response to my opening question around identity.

RD: *I [pause] have such an aversion to that question that I am tending towards being deliberately reticent. Just like trying to, no but this is, like this, I think this whole thing of identity is becoming tired. You know, so like constantly having to define, redefine and then identify and then re-identify and renegotiate one's identity, its just, its just, annoying. It really is, it has gotten to that point of like, unpacking the politics of identity crap. So I have like stopped caring. So*

like whether its better to identify oneself first as South Africa, or first as a women, or first as a coloured woman, or first as like a Muslim woman, its, for me I don't care anymore because it is just so [pause] Because I don't necessarily think that I am any one thing any more than I am any other thing.

Although Rukaya consented to a conversation around her subjectivity, with the full knowledge of what that would entail, she chose to open the interview by explaining that she thinks unfavourably of identity politics. She says that she no longer cares which is the correct sequence for how she identifies herself, because no one term encompasses her subjectivity. Rukaya's point is well taken and borne out by the literature. Identity cannot be separated out into individual parts that are hierarchical to each other (Chow, 1996). In the same way, identifying oneself as Muslim means different things to different people.

Like Jamielah and Rukaya, Natasha Hassim describes her self as Muslim only after stating other identity markers of being a woman, a mother, a friend, a healer and privileged.

LD: *But, then do you identify yourself as Muslim?*

NH: *Good grief [laugh]. Um, I do, but not blindly.*

After stating that she does in fact identify her self as a Muslim, she qualifies the assertion with the adjectival phrase 'but not blindly'. Natasha hints at a relationship with Islam that incorporates questioning and self definition. Zainu Arief also expresses an individualistic interpretation of her relationship with being a Muslim.

ZA: *You know the way the Jews see themselves as well, as not as practicing but as Jewish. That's how I kind of see myself as with Islam. I'm kind of like okay like ethnically you know and not only as a specific, it's a cultural thing now. Like this is who I think I come from kinda. But it's, but I don't practice it and I don't want to and I don't need to and I don't have any overwhelming urge in myself to bond with my family that way. To me family is above [pause] it.*

For Zainu, identification as a Muslim is reduced to an 'ethnic' or 'cultural thing' that does not incorporate her practicing the religion or her relationship with her Muslim family. Her identification with Islam echoes Foster's (1991) argument that culture and ethnicity are terms used as euphemisms for race, and Sitoto's (2003) implications that the term Muslim in South

Africa is often used identify oneself as belonging to a particular and racialised group to the exclusion of other Muslims.

Ilhaam Desai's response to the question I posed about seeing herself as a Muslim woman is framed outside of community and in terms of individuality.

IH: *Umm, I don't. I don't actually, I like [pause] just being me.*

Ilhaam clearly affirms her individuality in her second sentence. 'Just being me' indicates that identification as a Muslim woman would carry additional meaning to who she sees and likes herself as. The theme of individuality and rejection of classification as a Muslim woman runs through Shakira Jacobs' narrative, presented below. I have chosen to include this lengthy piece of dialogue in its entirety because of the importance of the subject matter both to the participant, and to me. This particular narrative is the most intimate and painful piece of dialogue in the study, and beautifully illustrates Shakira's movement through time and adversity to her present position of power. The pace of the talk is deliberate and slow, because Shakira is trying to clearly testify her experiences in order to explain how she reached her present understanding of self. Because the act of narrative is an act of representation of self, I feel that it would be remiss to précis this piece of conversation.

SJ: *Okay, umm. It is a bit difficult for me because its not too long ago that I'm actually starting to think of myself as an individual. Because I always believed to be part of somebody or something or group or whatever. So it is a bit confusing in that I enjoy the fact that I, umm, think of myself as an individual, today okay, and that I have a right to be a woman.*

LD: *Hmm.*

SJ: *Alright? But not in the old way of thinking of a woman, that she is just in the background. Okay. So that's changed for me in the last couple of years. Before I never thought that, before I used to believe that, like I would have always been before [husband]'s wife.*

LD: *Okay.*

SJ: *Ja, before I was even Shakira I was [husband]'s wife. [pause]. You know what I am saying?*

LD: *Ja.*

SJ: *And when I was a child, I was [father]'s daughter. I wasn't [mother's] daughter, I was his daughter, because he was sort of in the forefront. And he was, like*

[husband] is, known, well-known.

LD: *Hmm.*

SJ: *So I was just an attachment. So today I actually see myself differently. And it's great. [pause]. Umm, if I think of, and in that way a lot of my other ideas about who I am has started to change. And there's a scary one which is the religious thing. Okay?*

LD: *Okay.*

SJ: *Because I either, I'm gonna use, I'm gonna say it to you like this because it is the way that I will make you understand. I belonged to [father] and I belonged to [husband].*

LD: *Ja, ja.*

SJ: *And so I automatically belonged to their faith or their religion.*

LD: *Oh, okay.*

SJ: *You know what I am saying? So know I am coming out on my own. And I am wanting to find out what suits me best. I've never really been one for the ritual of the religion. Okay? It was never taught to me, but that's not anybody else's fault but myself, because I am old enough to go and learn it for myself. But, today, I still haven't really read up enough, okay, to say that I reject the religion. But I have taken the little bit that I know, and I have taken the moral teachings that I have had since I was a little girl and developed for myself what I think is a good human being and that is what I strive to be, is a good human being. Okay, to enjoy myself, but more. That's why I am not even attached to, I would, maybe I am treading on funny ground here by saying this, but I don't consider myself [pause] part of the Muslim community, as you would understand the, the Muslim community of Cape Town.*

LD: *Ja.*

SJ: *And the scary part is [pause] I also want to belong somewhere. And we've been reared to belong to a Muslim community. You know? And our whole country is starting this new thing of wanting to belong to this new South Africa, which is not for everybody because everybody is trying to fit in with this new thing now and you don't know if you must break your ties with the past. How do you? You can't sever it completely because then where you going? You don't even know what this new structure is. I think I also fit in that place at the moment.*

LD: *So what facilitated this change? What brought about you thinking instead of being [father]'s daughter and [husband]'s wife; what...*

SJ: *I think because you know, I think when I came, when I had to firstly admit and then deal with the fact that I had been molested [pause] and whatever throughout.*

LD: *You don't have to, its fine, but you don't have to talk about that. I can switch the tape off?*

SJ: *No, I am saying that's what actually brought about the difference. With all of that*

and being silent about it okay, I remained in their shadow, because when I was in their shadow I was safe. With not having to, yes, because nobody was going to look at me as a person. Do you understand what I am saying?

LD: *I do understand. Ja.*

SJ: *So when I started to deal with all of that, Shakira had to come out from behind, hiding behind [father] or [husband], and be this person on her, by herself. And that's where the change came. That's what brought about the change of Shakira coming out.*

LD: *But, okay, so would you identify yourself now as a Muslim woman? In certain circumstances?*

SJ: *[pause]. I don't think so Leila. That's why I say, I think I, you know [pause] I mean, if some people must hear what I am saying they'll think I'm you know gosh, what the hell is wrong with this woman? But I don't practice all the rituals okay? There are basics that I abide by, but those basics to me is just basic good living.*

Shakira Jacobs has only just recently begun thinking of her self as an individual, and as a woman who has the right to be a woman, and she claims that identity with a sense of enjoyment. Shakira predicates her story by stating that the question of identity is a difficult one to answer. Her narrative shows that just as identity is shaped by personal experiences and individual make up, it is also always located in social and historical contexts. Even after claiming her identity as an individual woman, Shakira qualified the statement by saying 'But not in the old way of thinking of a woman, that she is just in the background'. She places the notion of woman in context and simultaneously links past and present and indicates the fluctuating nature of ideology and community. Shakira uses her own experience to explain that whereas women used to be relegated to the background, they can now claim their rights as women. This rights-based discourse is significant in terms of her later mentioning the new South Africa, defined strongly by the access to rights for all.

Shakira notes that prior to admitting and dealing with the fact that she had been sexually abused throughout her childhood, she saw herself only in terms of being an appendage to her father and then her husband. She specifically observes that she identified herself as her father's, not her mother's daughter. A feminist reading of this statement would reveal that in patriarchal societies like South Africa in the 1960s and 1970s and the Muslim community in which she grew up, girl children with a injured sense of self, gender and sexuality, would turn to the male figure as a symbol of protection. Like her father, Shakira's husband holds prominence in the country, and she shifts her recognition of self from her father to her

husband. Shaikh's (1996) study about the levels of gender violence in Muslim communities in Cape Town goes some way to explaining how incidents of abuse are rendered invisible in part through the use of religious discourse legitimising violence. However, in this case, it might be more prudent to note that physical and sexual violence against women and children is pervasive across communities in Cape Town; and because the participant does not ever link her abuse with Islam it would be remiss to confuse the issues.

Shakira's sense of self is intricately tied up with the fact that she has survived abuse, and her willingness to acknowledge this horror and deal with it has led to a new sense of self. As an appendage of her father and later her husband, she automatically located herself within the communities and cultures within which they located themselves. By reclaiming her individuality, Shakira is searching for what best suits her. She is not attached to Islam and does not consider herself part of the Muslim community of Cape Town. In a remarkable assertion of agency, Shakira grants that she has not made an effort to educate herself about Islam sufficiently to outrightly reject it; yet she plainly claims not to identify as a Muslim woman. At a surface reading Shakira may seem ambivalent, but this piece of dialogue is presented here in isolation from the rest of the interview, where she repeats her recent feelings of distance from Islam and the Muslim community in Cape Town.

Shakira's emotional vocabulary in this extract is telling. She says that she although 'confusing', she 'enjoys' being able to 'be a woman', that it is 'great', but that there is also a 'scary' element to it. In a poignant discussion on the new South Africa, Shakira echoes her recent journey of self discovery about her past. She notes that South Africans are not sure whether to break their ties with the past because without it they would not know where they are going. Shakira links past, present and future by saying that she thinks that at the moment she is unsure of breaking her ties with the past, thereby suggesting the possibility of an unknown future.

It is also interesting to note that on two occasions, Shakira articulates that her new movement away from Islam and the community in which she grew up and has lived all her life, may not be well received. She mentions that she may be 'treading on funny ground' when she says that she does not consider herself part of the Muslim community. When stating that she would not describe herself as a Muslim woman, Shakira imitates what she thinks people

might think about her if they heard what she had been saying – ‘gosh, what the hell is wrong with this woman?’

This section has set the scene for the remainder of the narratives to be discussed. All the participant’s have been showcased in this section because the answer to the question about whether they identify themselves as Muslim, forms the pivot of this thesis. As noted before, the separation into distinctive narratives is an artificial but necessary one. The narratives above show the confluence of gender, race, religion, and personal issues – identity and the processes that inform subjectivity cannot be reduced to neat categories. The work now turns to a broader and more general discussion about how the women have come to understand themselves in their own ways. All the narratives presented below have resonances in most of the interviews, and while the themes are common, the specific stories and understandings are unique to each participant.

7.2. *Ummah*

One of the core principles in Islamic societies and ideologies is the concept of the *ummah*, which can loosely translated to mean community imbued with certain cultures and traditions (Al-Azmeh, 1993). The term encompasses the entire Muslim population of the world, as well as specific localized and national pockets of Muslim communities. Part of the allure of the term is that it is meant to bring Muslims together and create a unified identity in Islam. An understanding of the variance within, across and between all communities and cultures makes for a revised reading of this term, that can no longer be used as a blanket expression of Islamic unity. Within in the context of this thesis and the distance felt between most participants and their notion of a local or global *ummah*, the query must be made: what is it about the way that Islam is practiced and defined that makes these women feel outside of any *ummah*?

One of the participants in this study, Fatima Sadie, strongly identifies herself as a Muslim woman who belongs to and feels very comfortable within both a global and local *ummah*. Similarly, Mariam Mohamed feels a kinship with Islam and Muslims generally. For these two women, their feelings of faith and commitment to Islam foster a sense of belonging to a Muslim *ummah*.

In Shakira Jacobs' narrative around her identity above, she notes that part of the process of shifting her subjectivity in recent years is as a result of her abuse, and that she no longer feels part of the Muslim community in Cape Town because she sees herself more as an individual. Ilhaam Hiddingh talks about how negative experiences allowed her to disassociate herself from the community.

IH: *I definitely didn't want to be part of that community. And the main negative stuff that started when I came back from [European country] after being there for a year and people assumed that you couldn't understand Afrikaans anymore. They would talk about you in Afrikaans, and that was asking neighbours and all sorts of things, every time you were at an engagement or a [pause]. So, umm, no I didn't want to be part of that. I had absolutely no problem disassociating myself. I thought that was quite trivial.*

Ilhaam is emphatic in her answer. After studying abroad for a year, her return home was marred by neighbours and community members talking about her in Afrikaans, assuming that she could no longer speak or understand the language. She alludes to previous negative encounters, by describing what occurred after her return to Cape Town as the 'main negative stuff'. Ilhaam hints that her trip overseas had somehow in the eyes of the members of the community who were talking about her in Afrikaans in front of her, removed her from the community. Dawood (1993) notes that certain more affluent families were able to send their daughters abroad for education, but that this was not the norm. Ilhaam's trip occurred in the 1970s at a time when very few Muslim families in Cape Town had the connections or capital to undertake such a venture. Ilhaam locates the problem within the community, and it is quite possible that the differences in opportunity between Ilhaam and the rest of the community may have resulted in her negative experiences.

Most of the participants combine the terms neighbourhood and community, which given the repercussions of the Group Areas Act is not surprising (Hill, 1980). One of the tactics used by the apartheid regime was to separate people out into predefined groups, and legally force similar groups of people to live in specific areas. In terms of Islam at the Cape, most Muslims with the exceptions of small pockets of African Muslims who were forced to live on the outskirts of the city in informal settlements, were classified either coloured, Malay or Indian (Jeppie, 2001), and some families had representatives of all groups. As such, people were

obliged to live in certain areas and neighbourhoods, and often one's neighbours would also form one's community.

Twenty years after Ilhaam Hiddingh's experience, Rukaya Desai relates a similar story of dissimilarity of language and education that highlighted the differences between her and the rest of her neighbourhood and community. After noting that she does not feel part of any *ummah*, locally or globally, Rukaya follows with this extract.

RD: *...But its strange because when I was younger, I used to envy like my Muslim friends who came from like Muslim households, and they all speak that kind of like Slamse Afrikaans, that like you know punctuated with like Malay and Arabic words and like they all eat Slams and they all drink Slams and they all have like rakkams and like Slamse things in their house and I come home to my kingdom of kitsch and still always dealing with the conflict in the family.*

LD: *What was it that made you want to be like those Slamse friends?*

RD: *The consistency, I think. ... And it was exactly that kind of like ignorant happiness, that was just so wonderful you know. And like false teeth with the gold tooth and like the father who walks around like in his torp and pajama pants and like leather kaparangs and a khuffiyeh you know? It just looked so cohesive or it just looked so consistent. You know. And you can come with your English and your education and your existential, you can come armed and equipped, but you know if you cant all sit around and like batcha, like throw Quranic sayings and little wisdoms, then it that's it you know? ...And to makes you feel out and you can [pause] and you can get yourself into a space where you believe in your superiority by virtue of your education and your academic [inaudible], but its not quite the same because they all speak it. And, and coming from [suburb] which is a predominantly Afrikaans neighbourhood can be increasingly difficult. So I had to work 10 times harder, be 10 times funnier, 10 times bossier, 10 times with the bigger attitude, 10 times I had to work harder at trying to up end the Moslem school teacher to just get in. You know? ...it becomes exhausting. But I stopped, you know I grew out of that scene.*

Rukaya represents the community in which she lived in simplistic and stereotypical terms. Her talk is reminiscent of the cultural and psychological traits associated with the formulaic ignorant happy Malay in his *kaparangs* and *khuffiyeh* (Jeppie, 1988). She does acknowledge her prejudice later by stating that she 'must be the worst otherer in the world'. The use of the term *Slamse* is also problematic in that it is a derivative of the term used for Muslims at the Cape and is often derogatory (Jeppie, 2001). My use of the term is also inexcusable. That moment reflects just how quickly the interviewer can slip into collaboration with the narrator, and be seduced by a sense of sameness (Hurd and McIntyre, 1996). In this case, Rukaya's retelling of her wish to belong resonated with feelings that I had experienced as a child, and I became complicit in the othering and stereotyping of people.

For Rukaya, the childhood allure of belonging to a family that practiced traditional greetings and used an Islamic vocabulary, was underpinned by her assumption of cohesion and consistency within those families, and by extension that specific neighbourhood community. She juxtaposes this happy, consistent and coherent community against her own family which was in conflict. The theme of conflict is extended in her use of the imagery of battle when discussing her language and education in relation to the community – you can 'come armed and equipped' – but she always ended up feeling 'out', not feeling as though she belonged. Again Rukaya draws upon discursive positions of superiority in that she was educated privately and enjoyed a better education than her friends, and spoke English; but quickly dissolves that reflection by conceding that the power invested in those things for her was outweighed by the power of intracultural coherence and consistency.

Not being able to communicate in the same way rendered her, in her estimation, outside of her community and Muslim households in her neighbourhood. In an attempt to feel accepted, Rukaya increased her visibility, by being 'funny', 'bossy', having a 'big attitude', and up ending the Muslim school teacher. As she repeats in to show just how much effort was required, she had to be 'ten times' more than anyone else. She eventually became exhausted by all the effort she put in, with it can be assumed, limited results. She then 'grew out of that scene'.

While Rukaya and Ilhaam looked within the community to decide whether they felt as though they wished to belong, other participants looked outside of localized *ummahs*, to situate their positions about belonging. Natasha Hassim and Jamielah Johansen have very similar

experiences with *ummah* outside of South Africa. Both women point out that the way that Islam is practiced in Cape Town is without a sense of joy, which they feel is boring.

NH: *And this is the thing about Islam here is that it gets you like very tightly inscribed life. And at the same time I must say that when I met two Muslim people from Palestine and Turkey and Morocco, they not boring. And attracted to Islam and like-minded. You know that, they don't make a fuss about covering your body and all the weird things and most of them drink alcohol and all kinds of things, have fun, but they are dedicated Muslims. Because they practice like the kindness and gentleness and all the other things. So I think in Cape Town, it's very hard for me to identify with Muslims, very narrow.*

JJ: *Well I have had two experiences where I've been kind of embraced by this umm, this, this notion of a global ummah. And the one was when I went on holiday with my family to [Middle East]. And the minute that these people found out that my family were Muslim they umm, their hospitality, I mean their hospitality is quite renowned anyway, ...their desire to make you feel like you belong ... is quite overwhelming, and quite lovely in that way as well. And I had it when I went to [USA university] for a semester and I stayed in an international res[idency] with Middle Eastern students.*

LD: *Tell me more?*

JJ: *Well, their attitude to their belief is very different to the one here. There's more, there's a bigger sense of joy. And a bigger sense of celebration. People here tend to be quite puritan in their attitude...Here, if you are, there's, there's, there's no permission to dance at weddings here. There is a belief that dance is somehow akin or linked to Satan. And that dancing is provocative and sexual. Whereas, there, you know, its very much the norm at anything that's celebratory.*

For both women, the sense of fun and celebration that they experiences with Muslims from other Muslim cultures, places South African Islam into sharp relief. Jamielah describes Muslims in South Africa in terms of puritanism, and the strict prescriptive regulations around celebration and sexuality. Natasha also mentions the idea of covering up as indicative of a narrow mindset, which is also in her estimation 'weird'. Natasha, who describes herself as a

practicing Muslim with deep faith, clearly does not associate what she understands as cultural injunctions, not to drink alcohol and to 'cover up', with dedication to Islam.

For these two women, Islam in Cape Town carries with it austere and restrictive notions of religion, circumscribing the limits of enjoyment, fun and celebration; and making it difficult for these women to identify with a local *ummah*.

7.3. Gender roles

Chapter 2, Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, touched upon the way in which women in general and Muslim women in particular are construed in terms of gender roles. Hill (1977, 1980), Ridd (1981; 1993b; 1994); Dawood (1993) commented on the roles of Muslim women in Cape Town in terms of domesticity and limited access to employment outside of the home. According to these authors women's roles were located within the private sphere, primarily focused on domestic chores, including cooking, sewing and cleaning. My analysis of these pieces of research was highly critical. I argued that supporting the unitary representation of women in terms of their domestic contribution, limited the representation of these women on the whole. The women in this study also reported their experiences with gender normative roles, whereby women and girl children are relegated to the kitchen, over and above the fact that all the women in the study pursue as one of their main foci in life, business or postgraduate studies outside the home.

During our interview, Fatima Sadie explained her levels of comfort with her Islamic identity and her closeness within the *ummah*. I then asked her whether there had ever been a time when that comfort had been disturbed, and she answered that certain gender-based traditions do not sit well with her.

LD: *Has there ever been a time in sort of a community setting where you haven't felt completely comfortable?*

FS: *Yes. There often are like because I think in a community sometimes is a lot of traditions creep up. And because I am not, my mothers not traditional, we don't believe that you know that traditions are not, traditions do not come about from divine law. They like you know, like often in the community you have the women busily working in the kitchen. You know like rushing or working like crazy, and the men are like sitting. And I, that often used to goad me quite a lot because I don't see*

that as with, that is not, that is tradition, that is not part of the religion. The religion does not say that women are meant to be doing all the cooking and cleaning and men you know just sit one side.

LD: *Well, how did you resolve that?*

FS: *Well I would often get them into, rope them in. Oh those benches are so heavy, don't you want to move it for me? Ja, I would often rope them in. And fortunately I have a fairly young family on my dad's side and my mother's side as well. I mean they quite easy, you know they tend to view things a lot more, a lot less kind of narrow-minded. But sometimes its difficult because, like now I am 26 and I am unmarried. So people think you know, but that's a tradition. It's a viewpoint of theirs you know, shame you're not married.*

Fatima differentiates between her understanding of Islam, and traditions that are community-based and do not form part of the religion. She notes that women tend to do most of the work especially in the kitchen, while the men 'sit on one side' and observe. Fatima is strong in her beliefs, and her faith does not include one gender working while the other does nothing. It is interesting that Fatima ropes her male family into carrying furniture by appealing to their sense of strength which is linked to notions of masculinity, and her sense of comparative weakness which in turn is linked to traditional notions of femininity. She does not, for example, expect or ask the men to do the cooking and the cleaning.

Towards the end of the extract, Fatima explains that traditional perceptions of women make it difficult for her because she is unmarried and twenty six years old. Although she does not state it explicitly, the implication is that in traditional thought Muslim women should be married before a certain age. Fatima is careful to distinguish between tradition and religion when it comes to gender roles.

Jamiah Johansen explains that gender roles impacted on her life in obvious and daily ways where she began to realize that she was different from her boy cousins by virtue of the fact that she was a girl. The turning point in her understanding of gender roles came when she was ten years old, and was not allowed to follow her grandfather's body to be buried.

JJ: *Umm. I remember being aware of being a girl when I'd have to wash up the dishes and my boy cousins could take out the garbage or do fuck all. You*

know, and that would be like a massive indication that I am a girl and therefore I have to do certain things that they don't have to do. I have to do certain things that they, or I can't do certain things that they have a right to do.

Jamielah's first indication of girl's roles being different to boy's roles also came in the domestic sphere, when she was told to clean the dishes while her boy cousins were sometimes allowed to not participate in domestic chores. She defines the roles assigned to her as obligatory, she had to do them, and the boys did not have to. She also argues that there are certain things that boys have a right to do, but that girls and women have no right to. Immediately following on from the extract above, Jamielah continues:

JJ: *Like umm, my seven year old cousin could get on a truck and go off to go watch my grandfather be buried but my mother and I and the rest of the women in my family couldn't. You know, his wife of nearly 40 years was not allowed to go to the graveyard. That for me was quite a massive... So, I don't know how the rest of the women in my family felt on that particular day, but I know that for me there was a feeling of [pause] just no closure for the day. Because I was taught by films and I was taught by the books I was reading and the people I'd be speaking to, I mean I was only 10 when this happened, that watching the body go into the ground was a way of facilitating closure... umm there was a lot of ceremony and I mean this tradition around like saying goodbye and kissing the body goodbye, and kind of putting umm [pause] scents on the sheets and crushing, and you know petals on the sheets and that kind of the thing that the body was wrapped in and everyone was very involved in there was a point of finality of contact that was closed off from us by this very very patriarchal body coming along where all the men just went and took this body off. And then the women were left wailing at home. ...I mean obviously my, you know, my strongest feelings are towards the women of my family, particularly to my mother, my sister, her sisters and my grandmother of course because it was her bloody husband. But I think just generally to all the women who were left behind, to then make sandwiches, fry samoosas and make pies for when the men got back from praying.*

LD: *And when the men got back what happened?*

JJ: *They ate. The men ate, and the women ate after them and then the children ... but*

there was a sense of ownership that these men took over this body. And a sense of claiming it and a sense of really hemming in laager style and saying this is, he is one of us because we are men. And we are now going to take him away and we are going to do all the sacred and secret things that can be done and it's going to be private.

Jamielah's narration of this incident is profound in that at ten years old she was able to distinguish what separated and restricted her from saying goodbye to her grandfather, a man that she adored. Her allegiance as she says is with the 'women in her family' who were 'left behind'. From her perspective, the act of isolating the women and girl children from the burial of her grandfather, served to prevent her sense of closure and hindered her mourning. She does not speak for the other women, but through this narrative, the roles assigned women and men at this Muslim funeral are clearly illustrated. Ten year old Jamielah's experience is retold by 24 year old Jamielah with the understanding of the multiple cultural influences at play for the child, who believed that closure was facilitated by watching the body be buried, and was then denied that closure. For her, the traditions of saying goodbye to her grandfather at the house, and preparing his body for burial were not enough, and was not what she had expected.

The similes, imagery and emotional vocabulary that she uses to describe this event are vivid. Jamielah's sympathies lie with women in her family; she situates herself as aligned with the women, in opposition to the men, who are described as a 'very patriarchal body'. Jamielah does not differentiate between the men as she does with the women who she names as her mother, sister, grandmother, aunts and generally all the women left behind. Instead, men are described in monolithic and hegemonic terms. They move together with singularity of purpose that is 'secret', 'sacred' and 'private'. The women are relegated to the kitchen, to the domestic sphere to cry and make food, while the men embark on a journey to the graveyard and perform rituals that affirm their gender. Jamielah then utilizes a discourse of colonialism to describe the men. They took ownership of the body, they claimed her grandfather and asserted his gender over his family affiliations, and they hemmed in laager style. The use of the term laager is persuasive in that it suggests a defensive mentality on the part of the men, an us against them attitude which reinforces Jamielah's feelings of being cut off and the separate and unequal spheres to which men and women are relegated. It also insinuates although tenuously the notion of gender *jihad*.

This narrative is also interesting in that in most of the literature on Islam in South Africa, women are described in monolithic terms. Through this narrative Jamielah turns the tables and positions men as the inscrutable other, inscribing them with notions of the sacred, secret and private. This piece of talk illustrates the way in which at particular moments, and under certain conditions, Muslim women re-present dominant discourses through their own experiential understandings.

7.4. Gender discrimination

A number of participants described experiences of gender discrimination within the broader South African sphere. The two examples below show the way in which women are discriminated against because of their gender, in two public arenas – banking and the school system. While it may be argued that these pieces fall outside of the specific research question in that no mention is made of religion per se, or Islamic effects on women; the narratives reinforce the notion that all women are multiply positioned not only in terms of gender, religion, race or any other identity marker. In fact, what it is to be a Muslim woman also includes what it is to be a woman in the general sense, without the appendage of Islamic influence.

During the conversation with Ilhaam Hiddingh, she noted that although she didn't feel any sense of connection with an *ummah*, she would live in a Muslim country because in places like the United Arab Emirates the restrictions placed on women are much like restrictions in most parts of the world. I asked her how she felt about potentially living in a place where she was not considered an equal to men, and she answered that South African women are not first class citizens.

IH: *But, Leila, its written into the law that we are not first class citizens here, what is the problem?*

LD: *Into South African law?*

IH: *Oh absolutely. I've just bought my very first house, okay? All my own, all my own money, all my own debt alright? But I cant sign the papers without my husband signing it, and we are married with an ante nuptial contract out of community of property. Because that is South African law. So we are second class citizens here anyway, who the hell are they kidding? ...Yep. I needed my husband to sign...But the good news was the he was out of the country, so all I did was sign, I have power of attorney over him and over his stuff so,*

LD: *So it was easier?*

IH: *No it didn't really because it was belittling.*

Natasha Hassim explains that learners at schools are streamed according to gender for certain subjects.

NH: *And for example in school, and [daughter]'s school is an example where they were streamlining and letting girls get first preference for home economics. And [daughter] told me and I said you tell your teacher I will go to the constitutional court and the supreme court and that's the point we need to make. I mean I am not going to tell my son he cant do home economics, are you crazy? No, so you have to fight for it. And at soft levels you know? Its almost like oppression so many times, its almost unseen, you know it happens in the way in which we treat one another as people.*

These extracts illustrate that both at public schools and in the banking system, gender discrimination exists, regardless of the clauses enshrining human rights over gender oppression in the South African constitution (Zietkiewicz and Long, 1999). Natasha Hassim undertook action to change what she perceived as gender discrimination against both her daughter and her son, affirming their rights to equal education. Ilhaam Hiddingh's relationship with her husband afforded her power of attorney, but as she explains, the entire incident was belittling for her. Both these extracts show how women continue to experience gender specific discrimination even within the confines of a democracy. One of the ways in which the women in the study explained how they coped with and resisted these discriminatory incidents is through the invocation of feminism.

7.5. Feminism

Feminisms underpin the theoretical stance of this thesis. However, the notion of feminism was not included in the interview guideline as a precautionary measure to avoid pre-empting particular ways of describing and narrating life events. It was clear through the interviews that feminism is a pervasive and influential philosophy for almost all the women interviewed, but from varying and differing perspectives. Feminism as mentioned earlier in this thesis, is not the sole domain of academia or political movements (Flax, 1990); feminist ideas are sometimes initiated at community and individual levels. All the women in the study referred to feminism, if not obliquely then directly; and all referrals occurred in relation to Muslim cultural or religious practices.

ZA: ...*Why are girls different to boys? Why must I cover my bum when I go to this place and that place. Screw that. Why must I hide the fact that I have got breasts, why must I cover up and why must I be completely be covered up at certain events and stuff. Why must I watch what I say, why can the guys say what they want to say, but I must be quiet. Why is it the men are eating before the women? You know the kids kind of eat with the men. Then you notice you start noticing these few things and I was like that's not religion, that's culture. But then the religion gets put into it as well and then you go to the mosque and stuff. Its not a feminist thing, its just something that came out of me because I was just friendly with guys.*

While questioning issues of gender roles and apparent gender differences, Zainu distances herself from feminism by denying that her gender-based perceptions of regulations of dress code, social order of eating, and space to talk freely are informed by a feminist critique of Islamic culture, traditions and religion. Levett and Kottler (1998) note that during the anti-apartheid struggle South Africa, women who professed alliances with feminism were regarded with disapproval; and on a global level, feminists are generally maligned (Kitzinger and Wilkinson, 1993). Moghissi (1999) and Jeenah (2001) note that for Muslim women particularly, there is a rejection of the terminology of feminism even when their espoused ideology and actions have definite parallels with feminism, mostly because notions of colonialism and westernisation are still closely linked with issues of feminism. Zainu chooses not to claim feminism as a theoretical framework for her critique of culture and religion, while Jamielah feels that feminism provided her with the tools for gender and academic liberation.

JJ: *A number of things have contributed to me standing for this kind of awareness of how I place myself in society... My mother because she'd have these, you know sort of feminist leanings when I grew up and somehow I always just thought she was actually being quite ridiculous and why cant she just be quiet and why couldn't she just do these nice things for my dad and not get upset about it, and why couldn't she like her uncles and why did she have this attitude that would somehow rock the boat because on some level I think that we instilled, or it has been instilled in us quite severely that women have this specific and certain role and place in society, in Muslim society. And that is as a helpmeet to their husbands. And to your father, is that you're docile and sweet and kind and you have all these terribly feminine qualities that endear you to him...Umm, and I think also university, and being opened up to because you know, for me, gender issues took a back seat when I was at school. Race issues were far more important. So for me, it*

was more important to embrace black consciousness for example in its entirety and not ever, ever criticize the fact that its gender bias within its ideology is horrible and really very prejudiced. And it was only when I got to university and was exposed to different kinds of academic thinking that I actually realized that there are, there's a language and there are academic tools to actually dissect peoples behavior when it comes to gender prejudice. And that was very liberating for me.

Jamielah explains that in Muslim society women are meant to be 'docile' daughters to their fathers and 'helpmeets' to their husbands. Her mother chose not to happily fulfill these roles and her actions and attitude caused disquiet and placed Jamielah's mother in the position of disturbing the status quo. The mother's actions are described in negative terms as she didn't do the required 'nice things', she wasn't quiet, and she didn't like her uncles; evoking a sense of discord within the family that is carried by Jamielah's mother as the symbol and agitator of that dissent. Feminism is positioned negatively in this regressive micronarrative, but is reconciled as part of a methodology of liberation with academic feminism in the broader progressive narrative.

Jamielah's narrative parallels the writing of South African feminists (Hendricks and Lewis, 1994; Lewis, 1996; de la Rey, 1997, 1999; Lewis and Kottler, 1998) and Mamaphele and Boonzaaier (1988, in Boonzaier and Sharp, 1988); that issues of race within South African political debates as late as the 1990s pushed issues of gender and feminism to the periphery, so that for Jamielah it was more important to identify herself in terms of Black Consciousness than in terms of the feminism played out by her mother. At university in the late 1990s, Jamielah was exposed to a variety of academic discourses and tools including feminism, which equipped her to name gender discrimination as valid, to broaden her awareness, and to be able to utilize her agency and choose how she places herself in society.

Not surprisingly, the two participants who identified most strongly with Islam, discussed feminism in religious terms. Badran (1996) and Jeenah (2001) point out that feminism is an disconcerting term, and that Islamic feminism in particular is not always named and embraced even when Islamic feminist arguments are used. I concur with Jeenah's (2001) assessment that within the South African context, it is often difficult for women to declare themselves proponents of Islamic feminism, but that it is still possible to describe their debates in these terms. Fatima Sadie invoked many aspects of Islamic feminism, from the

argument that it is necessary to return to the original text and community of Muslims to decipher women's places, to the discussion of the inherent rights within Islam for women.

FS: ... *I mean women are being oppressed throughout the world, but the fact is that Muslim women shouldn't be oppressed because we have specific rules saying why women shouldn't be oppressed... For women especially, because I think we, we were in a largely patriarchal society. Men are, men tend to control things. Men are just, they physically stronger than us and so they tend to be, they tend to, and from what is in reality men have the ruling powers over lots of things. And if we look at the, if we look at the structure of Islam, the Imams, they are males, okay they lead the prayers and that give lectures tend to be men. And, um, not saying that women can't do it, but our madressah teachers tend to be men. Um, and so often they can, um, say things from a very male perspective. And um, that's why its important for yourself to be able to know and you can actually, and then you can interpret things for yourself. And so that you know, if, if, if anything gets said or even from a practical perspective, if there are things that you need to do, then you need to know what your rights are. Like for instance a woman, women getting divorced. So many women don't even know what their rights are as Muslim women. And they have so many rights and they not aware of it and so often they get abused because of that. And so you know into that, sometimes I think it's a lot your own responsibility because you need to know, so that you don't, because then you can't say oh, I misread [unclear]. Because you, you threaten yourself if you don't know.*

Fatima Sadie clearly uses Islamic feminist arguments by acknowledging that Islamic principles are often mediated through a patriarchal perspective, but that true Islam is predicated on rights for Muslim women. In addition, she notes that the responsibility lies with women to find out about their rights and thereby avoid the potential for abuse, and by giving the example of divorce suggests the debate around Muslim Personal Law. This logic is in opposition to Moosa's (2002) theory that even if MPL is restructured to accommodate a woman-friendly perspective, abuse against women would not necessarily diminish; and Shaikh's (1996) discussion around the need to shift discourses of violence and place responsibility on the perpetrators not the victims to effect real social change. Fatima acknowledges the pervasiveness of patriarchy in Islam as practiced today in Cape Town, but contends that this is social construction, and not religious injunction or the inability of women that prevents them from leading the prayers or teaching *madressah*.

In an amusing piece of dialogue, Mariam Mohamed explains why she feels that feminism can be incorporated into one's understanding of Islam.

MM: *We used to meet each other at youth rallies and [laugh] she was a fat mouthed journalist you know, way out there, feminist happening. And suddenly she was Iman and Muslim and fully in hijab and I was like wow sister, what happened to you? ...I was fascinated ...Because I saw parts of myself in her, and I wanted to understand that she hadn't betrayed any aspect of self simply because oh I want to marry that man therefore I will go that way, which I couldn't believe. What did she do with all her journalistic questioning fever? What did she do with her feminist bones that must have been rattling, what, how? [laugh].*

Mariam answers her own questions by explaining that Iman showed her a documentary about Muslim women worldwide.

MM: *But she showed me a video for once, little windows, for the first time honestly in the video, women in Islam, but it just showed a diversity of Muslim women who were interviewed. Some in polygamous marriages but mostly their diversity from Norway to America to India to Brazil...They really were talking about their experiences and the challenges they face and the prejudices, stereotypes, and some talking about their activism on that level. ... I remember it because it was like an early turning point when I suddenly thought hell I have got to think of myself as open minded but I actually never even bothered to check it out in a library that there could be more information than what I see on TV...Umm, and also to, to recognise, shoo, if I am honest with myself I have deep prejudice against this and obviously its linked to a deep fear that there's an us and them-ing that is so in place that I have never questioned, I have just been really unconscious about it. How could I not think that that's my sister because she wears her you know certain garb, or speaks a certain language or comes from a certain you know country. That was really a kind of knock on the head, very humbling.*

This documentary served an important purpose in Mariam's spiritual and ideological path in that she recognised that her understandings of what it meant to be a feminist. She had unconsciously negated the experiences of many women around the world, most specifically Muslim women. Her perceptions shifted from experiencing Islam as antithetical to feminism, to recognising her own prejudice when it came to Muslim women and perceptions of Islam and women.

This chapter has showcased various pieces of dialogue illustrating common narrative themes of identity, *ummah*, gender roles, gender discrimination and feminism, with an emphasis on both the overarching ideas and the distinctive arguments presented by the participants. The following chapter continues in this vein, but focuses more on common aspects of the participants' socialisation and lives.

University of Cape Town

CHAPTER 8: COMMON NARRATIVES 2

EDUCATION; DRESS CODE; SEXUALITY; WEDDINGS

Chapter 7 addressed the common narratives for all or most of the participants with regards to gender, subjectivities, culture, *ummah*, gender discrimination, gender roles and feminisms. The following chapter explores the way in which the participants relate narratives about the socialised aspects of their lives, their experiences at school and in *madressah*; issues around dress code and the restrictions on sexuality; as well as incidents at weddings, which featured in all the interviews.

8.1. Education

8.1.1. *Madressah*

The South African education system for the most part prior to 1994 was heavily invested with Christian ethics. Almost all public schools and most private schools gave religious instruction for Christianity only. A handful of secular private schools and other private religious schools were dotted throughout the country. From the accounts of all the participants bar Mariam Mohamed, who recently converted to Islam, children attended *madressah* or Muslim school in the afternoons once school was dismissed. As such, the women were meant to be versed in both Christianity and Islam, but all except Fatima Sadie reported that they felt as though they learnt little to nothing at *madressah*. Narratives around *madressah* are understandably linked with narratives of the family, as most of the women attended *madressah* as children at the behest of their parents.

ZA: ...My mom started getting conscious of it back in [Cape Town] and started sending us to *madressah*. But we hated it and we bunked and we went and we never learnt anything and we learnt everything phonetically and you know we didn't know what the hell we were saying, we were just saying it you know what I mean? And then I think it was more kind of thing about how she saw herself in the eyes of other people. And I think what so many single moms do, is because you know you start measuring yourself up against an ideal and you think you are going to fail if you don't and I think she sent us to all these things because she was afraid that people would talk.

LD: Did you go to *madressah* when you were little?

IH: A few. We didn't go for long. Once or twice to several. [laugh]. Well, we couldn't learn anything, because if they didn't speak Arabic, they spoke Afrikaans, and we weren't interested in either. And we weren't ever interested in the religion. That was

never part of it, we just went because we were meant to go. Our parents made us go because it was expected.

NH: *I went to madressah every day after school with my brothers and sisters and I recited my Qur'an but nobody ever taught me what anything meant.*

Zainu Arief claims that her *madressah* experience had much to do with her mother's feelings of being judged for being a divorced, single mother. All three extracts illustrate that the women did not feel as though they attended *madressah* to learn, it was more about a cultural injunction, something that was expected. There is a distinct lack of meaning and a flatness to the commentaries above that indicates that for most of the women in the study, *madressah* was more of a chore than something entered into with excitement. It is telling that all the women who profess to have alternative understandings of their spirituality, or feel disconnected to religion, had off-putting experiences of early learning in Islam.

For Fatima Sadie, *madressah* symbolised a happy space where she was able to engage with her Islam.

FS: *Well I did go to madressah as well. I went to madressah in, from what was grade, standard one? And umm, I actually enjoyed madressah, [laugh] I was probably one of the few who did enjoy madressah because I know that lots of kids used to hate it. I [pause] a lot of kids used to like pretend to go and never went actually. I actually enjoyed it. Because it was about learning about my faith, and I think you know it's just as important what you get taught, what's taught to you as a young child... I just always wanted to know more about the faith because I wanted to really understand it. Madressah was very interesting for me. And I actually did really well at madressah, because I just enjoyed it so much, it made so much sense to me.*

8.1.2. School

Like all the participants, Fatima's early schooling was spent at a Christian public school, where she enjoyed singing hymns and joined the choir.

FS: *It was just different that we used to sing Christmas hymns, I mean Christian hymns, but that I mean, I didn't, I became one of the lead singers. [laugh] because I didn't know the difference.*

Shakira Jacobs also sang in the choir as a child, and for her it was with a sense of release.

SJ: *I sang hymns in the choir. And I must admit, when I was, when I was at school, well I mean I, didn't think much of myself because at that time I'd already been molested. And that was the only time really that I was free and happy was when I was singing in the church choir.*

Both women loved singing hymns in the choir, but because of their very different upbringings and circumstances, have differing reasons and meanings attached to the act of singing. Fatima Sadie was as happy at *madressah* as she was singing in Christmas hymns at her first school, although she invests more meaning and emotion into her *madressah* experience. Shakira Jacobs, like Ilhaam Hiddingh, attended *madressah* sporadically. Shakira clearly contrasts her experiences of being molested as a child and her feelings of low self esteem, with her positive experiences of singing hymns in the school choir, explaining that she felt 'free' and 'happy' only when she singing. The church space and the act of singing provided Shakira with a safe space to express herself, a feeling that was not shared with other spaces of her childhood which were overshadowed by the spectre of child abuse.

Jamielah Johansen's experiences of marginilisation at an Anglican school were similar for all the participants who attended Christian high schools. She explains that in the midst of a Christian apartheid environment, she felt the need to assert her Muslimness, in terms of race and religion.

JJ: *They [parents] also sent me to a Christian school when I was about 10 which was one of these really awful colonial white private school setups which turned me into a second class citizen based on my race and religion... When I went to [school], it was a very, very big issue for me to identify myself as Muslim because I was in this extremely, very homogenous space where there was this singularity of umm purpose and a singularity of faith and culture, and everything fell under this Anglican banner. And it was quite important for me to assert the fact that I was Muslim.*

Zainu Arief relates a similar experience of being forced to attend church despite her inclination not to. She notes that these experiences crystallized her feelings of being different from the Christian girls at school, and made her realize that she was Muslim. Her language is

emotive and persuasive, narrative devices used to indicate the level of meaning attached to these feelings.

LD: *What was it like, [school], did you go to church?*

ZA: *Yes, and that's what I hated, another thing. Oh, ja, because they also tried to force religion again once upon me, do you know what I mean? Once again, all of a sudden in our life, we obviously knew where we came from. But the Muslim girls, we'd be sitting there like you know those Christmas like carol things? We'd have to sit there for three hours in the church that is so uncomfortable, with a religion that you know nothing about. You not interested in it. You know? And you forced to do this crap and you sign when you go into [school] that this is what you will do.*

Zainu gives the impression of being trapped in a situation that she could not negotiate out of by repeating this notion of being forced as it was compulsory for students to sign a document declaring that they would attend church, which in turn led to Christianity being forced upon her. She signifies her discomfort with the services, by describing the Christmas service as long and boring, and the church as uncomfortable. At the same time, both Zainu and Jamielah note that the sense of otherness that they experienced at school highlighted the perception of being Muslim girls. This feature of identity became more salient for them depending on the situation within which they found themselves. At church and at school they either chose or were forced through circumstance to adopt the position of forefronting their inherited religious subjectivities.

8.2. Dress code

In the literature on academic representations of Muslim women in South Africa and worldwide presented in Chapter 3, dress code and embodied identity are noteworthy because of the persistent use of these notions when depicting Muslim women. Embodied identity and dress symbolise social codes, law, norms and ideas that have been incarnated. Dwyer (1999) argues that dress code is an overdetermined signifier of identity for Muslim women in particular places and at specific times. Because of the over emphasis on dress and veiling in almost all literature on Muslim women both locally and globally, I initially chose to omit any questions or direction to the topic. However, the participants all spoke about their feelings around what were restrictive dress codes for most, and symbols of faith for others. For many women in the study, veiling and modest dressing have multiple layers of meaning, and can

simultaneously be symbolic of something that they do not subscribe to, but wish in a particular circumstance to use for their own and others benefit.

As documented elsewhere (Davids, 2003) the meanings attached to dress code are fluid, subject to change and circumstance. In the interviews, for the most part, women spoke about dress code and veiling in terms of rejection and resigned assimilation. For Fatima Sadie, it has been her choice to wear what she describes as respectable clothing and scarves since she was sixteen. For Mariam Mohamed, her veiling and style of dress attests to her identity as a revert, but is syncretic in that she already dressed in this fashion prior to her reversion to Islam. The rest of the women do not generally wear scarves, and tend to dress as they like; but all of them profess to wearing the scarf to convey a message of respect for Islam and Muslim rituals on specific occasions.

Shakira Jacobs' narrative around veiling is intimately connected to notions of redemption and change. I asked her what wearing a scarf means to her.

SJ: Honestly, it's a las. [laugh]. Honestly it's a las. I found that it actually looks very nice hanging over my one shoulder. That's how I tend to wear it these days. And for me at the moment it's become a, an accessory to what I'm wearing. There was a time for about two years when I actually wore completely, my hair was completely closed. And that was about, almost 15 years ago. And that was just after my father died. And [pause] and I went through this whole scary bit about ha, oh my God, I can also die, and then if I go foot in the grave, you know, they will chop me into little pieces because you know. I have been a very naughty Muslim girl you know? So I just hoped and prayed that doing so I would be redeeming myself and umm [pause] I suppose I just had to go through that as well and then discover that no it's not. I feel totally choked because it's not the person I want to be; or the person who I am that I am just not setting free. So now I feel freer than I have ever done in my whole life... Umm [pause] I don't think I was even aware of what people thought. But I just wanted to be closed up in my own thing, do you know what I mean [pause] and I think I also did it because I wanted to belong to where he had gone. Because in my mind he was now really; it was, he was buried as a Muslim and he had gone to God. That's how I understood it. And so I wore the scarf for that.

This extract illustrates beautifully how the meanings attached to a piece of cloth can change for the person wearing it. Shakira transformed the symbol of grief and redemption into a fashion accessory, mirroring her earlier explanation of changing her perceptions of her own

self and freeing herself from hiding from her abuse. Just as being an appendage to her father and then her husband had given her a sense of safety, her attempt at redemption is intimately linked to her earlier narrative of wanting to be invisible. Again, she mentions wanting to belong to a place of protection, to be where her father was, with God. Shakira's narrative moves from a space of needing security and to be closed up to one of freedom, where the scarf is no longer a device to choke and close her up, but an accessory to enhance her appearance. As Shakira points out, this is how she is wearing the scarf these days, and 'at the moment'. By stressing the temporal aspect of the symbolism of the scarf to her, Shakira re-enforces the notion that symbolism is always contextual and subject to multiple meanings and variations.

Natasha Hassim's relationship with veiling is also complex and multifaceted, and notes the cultural dimensions to veiling. When asked whether she wore a scarf Natasha responded that she did.

NH: *Ja. [Only when my hair is dirty. [laugh]] When I was very young I wore a scarf because I thought that I had to pray to be good. But [husband]'s culture, [husband] is my husband, they don't wear scarves. Like his mother and aunt they were the cleanest and most pious women I have ever met in my entire life and they never wore scarves. In fact in their culture, the hair is always plaited and taken back. Put henna on and everything. But its open, the scarf goes backward over your neck. You know, and so there's something that that would tell you, you know? That its not about shame and all the other things that Malay culture teaches.*

LD: *Did you grow up in...*

NH: *I grew up in the Malay culture, and my mother always wore a scarf, always always had a scarf on her head. And I did for a while wear it. But I don't like, I don't like a scarf. I think its, you know I don't like it. The funny thing though is that even when I do meditation, I want to cover my head. Its very funny that when I approach the sacred, I want to cover my hair, but I don't know what, I haven't even thought about it enough.*

In a similar vein to Shakira's narrative above, and Zainu's narrative about the bescarved Muslim psychologist in Chapter 6, Natasha invokes the idea of scarves as symbols of goodness. She reduces the scarf to three symbols – as a covering for sacred moments, even those outside of her Islamic prayers; as a mark of shame and/or piety and goodness; and as a cultural marker. Natasha equates notions of shame and Malay culture. In her estimation,

Malay women tend to cover their heads because of issues with shame, whereas Indian women who she describes as pious do not cover their heads, and therefore do not bring into play issues of shame. Yet as she notes, when 'approach[ing] the sacred' she always covers her head.

Issues of oppression and discrimination feature prominently in Fatima Sadie's narratives of dress. This participant spent a substantial amount of time discussing her embodied experiences. As the only woman in the study who actively and consistently dons unmistakably Islamic headgear, her experiences could be indicative of the ways in which veiled Muslim women are treated here in Cape Town and abroad. Regardless of whether her narratives are generalisable or not, the validity lies in the fact that she related these experiences in the interview situation. In discussing her experiences while working overseas, Fatima told of the way in which she was treated in Britain.

FS: *Ja, very different actually. There were some very interesting differences. Because in Cape Town I can, if I should wear a scarf, I could go around very freely wearing a scarf. I wouldn't, I wouldn't be treated differently really. Umm, people wouldn't be funny towards me because there's some, there's a quite a big proportion of Muslim people and practicing Muslim people in the sense that they wear scarves and they cover themselves. Umm, when you go to a place like England, Islam is very, is viewed in a very kind of fearful sense. They see Muslims as terrorists or fundamentalists or. And so if you go around wearing a scarf people look at you very differently, and they treat you very, very differently. Umm, if you, you've always been used to a community where people treat you as an equal, or they treat you as just another person, umm, it's very hard to adjust to that. And, umm, like I know lots of times I wouldn't wear a scarf, just so that I could actually be treated like another person, rather than as a, as an oppressed female. [laugh]. Often at work I would have these... people would tell me that they really hate Islam because it oppresses women. So I said, excuse me I am a Muslim woman, do I look oppressed to you? And, umm they wouldn't know how to answer the question.*

The pressure exerted on Fatima to not wear a scarf as she would then be treated as an ordinary person must have been immense because she capitulates. This is in marked contrast to a later narrative that shows her tenacity in the face of discrimination, and the inventive ways in which she overcomes obstacles to her faith. She notes that Islam and by implication

Muslims are treated differently in Britain, as terrorists or fundamentalists, which she found very difficult to adjust to. This interview took place in August 2001, and this extract illustrates the extent of the prejudice aimed towards Muslim women in scarves even before the spotlight was placed on women in Afghanistan and the terror attacks in the United States. However, Fatima manages to exert her own opinion by claiming her own identity and defending her faith and her own positioning. By retorting the claim that Islam oppresses women, she asserts her own subjectivity, dispelling the unitary construction of Muslim women in scarves as subjugated beings.

Fatima's personal choice to wear a scarf echoes the freedom that she draws from her Islam and the strength of character that she demonstrates in the following narrative. While discussing her personal meanings around the scarf, I asked her whether she had experienced any negative incidents similar to the one above, but in Cape Town.

FS: *Yes. It was also related to the scarf. I was at university and I was on a clinical rotation. I had a scarf on my head. And one of the lecturers, she was at, she was previously from Britain, and she shouted at me because I was wearing a scarf. She said like I am not allowed to have anything over my shoulders even though the scarf was just around my neck. It wasn't over my shoulders. And I looked at her, because she had hair, her hair was hanging over her shoulders and I thought what difference does it make. But she was actually, she treated me, she used to treat me in a very nasty way if I didn't take my scarf off. And, but I would show her that I refused to take it off because I didn't see why I had to. And then, at the same time that that ruling had been changed, there was a rule before that you know hospital staff weren't allowed to wear things over their shoulders. But there was consideration for religious reasons. That was the one. And then even at work. When I, I was a student and I was working at um, [Department Store 1] and [Department Store 2]. And so when I was wearing a scarf they didn't like it. And ja, I actually lost my job at [Department Store 1] because of that.*

LD: *And did you appeal? Did you do anything?*

FS: *I think I was too young to actually, I think I was about 16 or something. I was just really upset but at the same time I really needed the job, so I got the job at [Department Store 2].*

LD: *And they were fine?*

FS: *Um, as long as I tied my scarf up in a turban!*

LD: *What? How does that work?*

FS: *Yes, for some reason it makes a big difference! [laugh]. Somehow according to*

them its not as bad! I thought, I thought it was ridiculous. But, but then also its like I said about um, people are just kind of intolerant I suppose. And um, I really needed to work and I was still covering my hair and I didn't mind so much.

In two critical and public areas of her life, her education and work space, Fatima experienced discrimination because of her scarf. She uses innovative means to keep her job and adhere to her religious choices, by wearing the scarf as a turban. What was important to Fatima was that she managed to keep her head covered and fulfil her sacred obligation. Mariam Mohamed's version of veiling is also innovative in that it marries cultures, and she also stresses that the importance of veiling is personal and private, and whether other people recognise her turban as Islamic *hijab* is not of consequence to her.

MM: *My understanding of it is modest clothing and the idea of covering my head is actually something I was doing prior to recognising a link with Islam... With wearing a scarf, the way that I wear it as a turban, is something that may be very common in other cultural contexts where Islam is practiced, but in South Africa I don't see it a lot. And so people sometimes assume I, it is an Irie sister where, or its an African you know Xhosa turban, wrap or whatever. For me its not important, for me its my hijab.*

Ilhaam Hiddingh stresses the usefulness of *hijab* and scarves in practical terms. She notes the advantages of wearing 'long, loose' and 'flowing robes' and scarves in hot, dry and dusty countries, and reduces the discourse around veiling to that of choice and practicality as opposed to religious injunction.

IH: *[pause]. But, umm, I remember once when I was traveling in [South Asia] and I wore a scarf then because I was going to visit family, it made so much sense, its dry and dusty. Its actually, it has very little to do with religious kind of things when you live in those kinds of environments. It's actually really nice to wear long, loose flowing robes and cover yourself up. Sorry, it might not be black in the heat of summer, that wouldn't be first choice, but, seriously. [pause] So when it comes to being covered up, the ones that choose to do it for religious reasons, that's their choice. There's others and in that geographical areas where it's actually advantageous to put a scarf on.*

Dress code has been shown to be about personal preference, tolerance, choice, and respect. It has also been discussed in terms of the differences of symbolism attached to it. Of the eight women in the study, seven were at pains to point out that even if they do not follow Islamic tenets, they dress modestly. Jamielah noted that while she does not wear scarves, and she

consumes alcohol, she doesn't *'like playing into my sexuality in terms of the way that I dress'*. Notions of sexuality and dress code are enmeshed in some of the other participants' talk, and are elaborated on in the following section.

8.3. Sexuality

Four of the eight participants spoke about issues of sexuality and the restrictions placed on their expressions of sexuality through cultural and religious directives. The discussions were often held in conjunction with other issues, so that fragments of conversation alluded to the conjunction of sexuality for women and dress code. Jamielah noted above that she chooses to dress in a manner that does not overtly signify sexuality, and earlier when discussing her experiences with Muslims from the Middle East notes that the attitude to dancing in Cape Town Muslim communities prescribes dancing as a provocative and sexual act which is frowned upon.

Zainu Arief parallels her burgeoning sexuality during puberty with increasing restrictions. She links her childhood freedom to the fact that as a child she was sexually innocent and therefore not viewed as someone who requires curtailment.

ZA: And when I actually was, when I actually hit puberty and the religion started affecting my life in terms of now I had to dress a certain way, and become a certain way and stuff. Because you know childhood is that innocence, you still have that freedom. You know, but now once sexuality enters the picture, I started having big problems with it.

Fatima Mernissi (1985) strongly argues that in Muslim communities in Egypt, the regulation of women's sexuality is a tool utilised to regulate the place of women in society. Zainu speaks of her physical development as signalling an alteration in the way she lived her life. Her freedom is limited through the way she now has to dress and the changes imposed on her actions and the way in which she is told to express herself.

Shakira Jacobs discusses how gender segregation is a mechanism for controlling and denying women's sexuality, by citing the example of a conversation she had had with the principal of a Muslim school.

SJ: *And then he said to me like they would pray at school and so the boys file in, no the girls file in at the back and the boys are in the front. So I said to him but, I know the answer, but I said to him but why, why are the girls at the back you know? So he said to me no, because you know, the men can be turned on by the women. So I said to him have you looked at today's women? The men want to run away because the women are so wild. So I mean what makes you believe that the women aren't turned on by those backsides when they look at it?*

LD: *Well, exactly. [laugh].*

SJ: *He says to me, ne? I said yeah. So why cant, I mean women do get turned on!*

Gender segregation during prayers is a hotly contested issue. The movement to include women in mosques garners mixed reactions, and a commonly used argument to support gender segregation is the notion that women should be behind men in order not to entice or distract men from their prayers. Shakira nicely counters this logic by explaining to the principal that by using that argument, he leaves space open for women to be enticed and or distracted from their prayers by the men who are in front of them. She also includes a modernising discourse, by claiming that 'the women of today' have sexual yearnings much the same as men.

While discussing her attitude towards dress code and *hijab*, which she describes as '*mental colonisation*', Rukaya notes that women are told to moderate and subdue their sexuality to cover for the unwarranted sexual gaze from particular men.

RD: *You know like this whole thing of women and their sexuality, and how we have to downplay our sexuality and this whole thing of like dropping your gaze. For me its always ja, I drop my gaze so I can't stand the Imam like checking out my ass. You know, or the fact that he is talking to my tits.*

Rukakya points to sexual harassment from within in the *ulama*, from an *Imam*; and then goes on to discuss how she once made use of the mosque to search for attractive men.

RD: *...At mosque I would wear a scarf and a long thing, but I would wear very little underneath. [laugh].*

LD: *Where do you sit?*

RD: *With the women.*

LD: *At the back?*

RD: *No there's a curtain, but I don't know why but I was sitting close to the curtain*

and so we were like a level up and then the men sit one level down, but there's a curtain separating, so you can't see them because there's a curtain. But now there's a ten centimeter gap where the curtain ends and the floor begins, and I don't know why, but I just completely started tuning out to what the Imam was saying. But I decided you know I want to check if there are any hot men in the crowd. And I completely lost track of where I was and what I was meant to be doing and I went from like sitting on my knees to like sitting on my bum. And then I was leaning on my arm, and then before I knew it I was lying on my stomach with my head on my arm peeping under the curtains trying to make like eye contact with someone. And then again I was like slapped from behind and like brought back to reality. It was quite funny and I just laughed.

In this narrative, Rukaya manages to subvert the sexual discourse around Muslim women in sacred spaces, that they cannot and do not ever act on sexual urges. There is an air of a clandestine operation, as she tunes out from the Imam's disembodied voice; sneakily moves from one position to another in order to breach the curtain as a divide and look into the male section, which is unsanctioned behaviour. This behaviour is then regulated by someone in the women's section who slaps her from behind, bringing her back to the fact that women are not allowed to look through the gap for whatever reason, and will be punished for doing so.

Mernissi (1985) argued that Muslim women's actions in Egypt are circumscribed by socially prescriptive and limiting notions of sexuality. On some level, the narratives of the women in this study echo this theory of limitation through restrictive gendered sexualisation. In combination with Wicomb's (1998) discussion of the internalisation of shame for women, the following piece of dialogue can be analysed.

Ideas about virginity and shame are tightly inscribed with notions of ideal femininity and the right of access to prayer space. Zainu Arief claims that the stigma that her family attaches to her sex life inhibits her from being able to pray and commune with God.

ZA: Six partners I have had, six partners and my God, my aunt comes down and tells me she was a virgin and stuff like that, and they say well at least you have never shamed your family and I think oh ja [laughs]. Well I have slept with half the country! Do you know what I mean? You suddenly realise like how like you know how modern you are and suddenly it catches up with you and I, I don't want to feel like ashamed of myself because sometimes there are those moments when I think oh... Because

sometimes I do feel a need, I must say. Just want to get down on the muslah and pray, but then I think what right do I have?

Zainu feels that her right to pray is revoked because she is not a virgin and has had six partners. Her general behaviour is criticised, and in her family's estimation her saving grace is that she has not shamed them, by which they mean she has not slept with anyone. Zainu expresses a need not to feel ashamed and at the same time a wish to be able to make *salaat*. Prescriptive notions of sexuality as shameful prohibit Zainu from pursuing her wish to pray.

8.4. Weddings

The policing of women's sexuality extends beyond just looking in Rukaya's case, to sex before marriage not being sanctioned in Zainu's case. Of the women who participated in this study, only one woman lived with her partner of eight years outside of wedlock; three were married; one woman was widowed and currently sexually active; and of the three that still lived with their parents, only one confessed to not having been sexually involved with anyone. Of the women who had been married, three of them explained that their weddings were as a result of family pressure to lend an air of sanctity and respectability to their partnerships.

Natasha Hassim did not want to get married, but felt obliged to so that her father-in-law would be able to attend mosque as he was restricted from doing so while she and his son lived together.

LD: *How did you get married?*

NH: *It was a traditional Indian Muslim wedding. And I only got married, this is the other reason, I knew this was the man I wanted to spend my life with from like three minutes into meeting him, and I only got married because his father couldn't go in the mosque if we weren't married and living together. So I did it, okay it's the same thing. I loved his father and they were so good to me. And so I thought, but it's not such a big deal to do. But I have that commitment problem which is why I could happily live with this man forever, but as long as you don't say marriage. And I did the traditional Islamic wedding thing because they needed it.*

LD: *Were you married in the mosque?*

NH: *Well he went to the mosque. You must remember that I stayed at home and I was [laugh] doing things and I while I was getting married to him. Because I never saw it, they just told I was married and he said that I had been [pause], it was done.*

Natasha emphasises that the wedding occurred for her husband's family, and not out of personal preference. As she points out, they needed it. She also explains that she was not present for the ceremony, and was just informed of the fact that she was now married and her partner's wife. Natasha's lack of participation corresponds with Shakira's experience of her wedding day.

LD: *Tell me about your wedding day?*

SJ: *Well, that's not part of the women's [pause] I mean you are not there. You are not present which I also think is pretty weird. Because I mean he could have made a big balls up! [laugh]. And I just accept him you know? But umm, I think there were just too many people for me. And so I just went through the motions, because I didn't feel part of anything. While he was doing this very sacred and holy thing, I mean I could very easily have been taking a pee [pause]. But I mean at that time I should have been sitting down. Quietly. You know.*

Shakira's narrative is peppered with phrases indicating her sense of disconnection with the actual ceremony. The wedding ceremony is 'not part of the woman's experience', she was not there, and was resigned to just accepting her fiancée as her husband. Shakira did not feel 'part of' the event, she 'just went through the motions'. As she explains, she could have been engaged in any other activity at the actual moment of union. She contrasts her separate and banal experiences of those minutes, with her husband's experiences of doing a 'sacred and holy thing'. Her regret is evident when she says that she feels as though she should have been sitting quietly during that special time. As with Jamielah Johansen's earlier account, Shakira inscribes men as carriers of the sacred and holy.

Shakira Jacobs also tells of how she chose not to wear a *medora* to her wedding, a garment invested with all sorts of symbolism, in a narrative that nicely shows the convergence of discourses of personal choice; sexuality; culture and belonging.

SJ: *Umm, I mean things like, I don't know where, which one this falls in, but I mean wearing a medora when you get married.*

LD: *Did you wear one?*

SJ: *I refused because I had my Juliet Cap. So I refused the medora. Only to discover after my honeymoon, coming back, my mother-in-law saying ooh, you've got to wrap the medora and send it back to my father-in-law's sister, eldest sister and she is most ticked. Because you wear a medora as a sign of your virginity.*

LD: *And you didn't know this?*

SJ: *And I refused to wear one! I didn't know but I point blank said no, no, no, no I am not wearing that thing. So how did these people interpret that?*

LD: *What was the basis of your objection?*

SJ: *I had my outfit and that kind of thing didn't [pause]. I think it was umm, whenever I had been to weddings when I was a little girl and these women had had these big medoras all pinned and what you have it, it was always these, umm, [pause]. This is going to sound derogatory. So umm, Malay weddings ok? And I didn't fit in there. I wasn't part of that community.*

Shakira comments that she doesn't know where this narrative fits in to the study, as it transverses many differing aspects. She chose not to wear a *medora*, a symbol of virginity to her in-laws because her outfit was complete and because the *medora* to her symbolised a culture in which she felt that she did not fit. It is apt that the analysis ends on this note with this particular narrative as once again attention is drawn to the fact that lived experiences cannot neatly correspond with imposed categorisations. For example, the *medora* while an object of dress is simultaneously linked to issues of dress code, symbolic of prescriptive sexual norms, a cultural conduit, and a site of personal resistance by Shakira.

This chapter has shown the ways in which the women in the study understand and narratively shape the socialised aspects of their life histories. As with the previous seven chapters, the focus and through line of this chapter has been to showcase the multiplicity of ways in which Muslim women discursively represent themselves through their experiences with education; dress code; sexuality; and weddings. In addition, the commonalities and differences between the women have been presented in order to demonstrate the variety of experiences expressed in the study. The following and final chapter draws together the analysis presented in Chapter 6 through 8 by summarising it, and then elaborates on and makes concluding comments about the study as a whole.

CHAPTER 9: DISCUSSION

Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5 have provided an overview of the theoretical background and theoretical framework, and the methodological framework for the study; while Chapter 6, 7, and 8 have presented the analysis of the interviews that form the backbone of this thesis. This chapter elaborates upon the final three chapters, summarising the narratives and discussing the links and gaps between the information gleaned from the narratives and the extant literature on Muslim women in South Africa and covers possible alternative readings of the interviews. Insight into the limitations of the study, and the challenges and opportunities of researching women and Islam in South Africa, and concluding remarks are also included.

9.1. Narrative analysis summary

As noted in Chapter 6, analysis requires specific choices on the part of the researcher regarding the representation of the interviews. The information provided by the participants in the discussions held during the interview process is upheld to be of as much importance as the published academic texts on the subject. As such, no attempt was made to fit the narratives to existing theories and literature. Rather, a concerted effort was made to let the participants speak for themselves. However, patterns of convergence with and divergence from the literature did appear and are discussed in the following section.

The individual narratives presented in the preceding chapters in italics reflect the recurrent themes and key events that cut across and between interviewees. Because narrative speaks the language of culture (Reissman, 1993); is the product of dialogue; and simultaneously shapes, represents and discursively constitutes the self, the analysis focussed on three main levels:

- social, historical and cultural processes;
- the power relations between the researcher and participant;
- the representation by the participants of their subjectivities.

Running through all three levels are notions of gender and gendered experiences, and feminism as the primary referential framework for the study. The participants' narratives showed that while gender is of importance to the ways in which they shape their reality, it is one of a range of identities from which these women draw upon. Feminism featured strongly in the analysed talk of the participants as a theoretical tool with which to understand gendered processes and power relations. The gendered organisation of socialised institutions such as

families, marriage, education systems and economic barriers, appeared in the narratives of all participants through an examination of personal experiences of normalised gender roles and gender discrimination, and revisited in Chapter 8 in narratives around education and weddings. Closely linked to issues on womanhood and Islam in South Africa were narratives about dress code and restrictions on sexuality.

In Chapter 6, the issue of individual narratives was addressed. Both Rukaya Desai's incident in the mosque and Zainu Arief's experience with the Muslim psychologist differed from other narratives in the study in that these two pieces focussed on the negative effects of individual interaction that were in turn reflected onto the broader community. Both participants eventually deflected the locus of responsibility from the women that they encountered onto whichever Muslim community they were at that point associated with. By doing this, the participants mirrored the notion of Muslim women as carriers of culture and tradition espoused and refuted by so many authors (Ali, 1992; Dwyer, 1999; Kandiyoti, 1991a, 1991b; Moghissi, 1999; Mohanty, 1988; Narayan, 1997; Rozario, 1996; Werbner, 1997). Both pieces of talk could have been analysed in an alternative ways. Rukaya's incident in the mosque could also be analysed in terms of the spaces afforded women and the self expression allowed women within sacred centres. Zainu's session with the psychologist also fits in with the section on dress code and although mentioned, more emphasis could have been made of the symbolism of the psychologists' scarf. However, in reading the interviews in totality, it is clear that these two incidents clearly demarcate which women are invested with cultural power and therefore are carriers of that culture within the participants experiences. The relative lack of power that both Rukaya and Zainu feel is then channelled into the choice to gradually distance themselves from communities and culture with which they feel disassociated.

Chapter 7 and Chapter 8 explored the common narratives across and between interviews. Of the eight women interviewed, two participants felt a very strong connection with their Islam and the communities to which they choose to belong; two had chosen to distance themselves entirely from being Muslim; and the remainder claimed Islam to varying degrees for differing reasons. While talking about their subjectivities in terms of gender and Islam, a very clear pattern emerged that the participants did not divide their identifications into neat categories. In keeping with recent debates around subjectivity and the confluence of identity markers (Chow, 1996; Cross, 1996; de la Rey, 1997; Kitzinger, 1993), it was apparent that the

participants did not separate out race, gender, class, religious identification, sexuality, and age. It was, however, also clear that gender did inform many experiences related in the interviews, as did apartheid-based notions of race, culture, and ethnicity (Foster, 1991; Ebrahim-Valley, 2001a, 2001b; Jeppie, 2001).

There were divergent views as well as patterns of commonality on self-identification. Only one participant defined herself solely in terms of her place on her path to becoming fully Muslim, while all other interviewees claimed their gender. Another participant noted that her primary association is with her gendered situatedness within Islam – that she sees herself as a Muslim female. Three of the participants asserted that they situate themselves multiply, with one of the three noting that the division of her self-identification into parts is a limiting exercise that she rejects. Another participant noted that for her, she is Muslim only in the sense of ethnicity and culture, not in terms of religion. Ilhaam Hiddingh veered away from a community-based identification and invoked an individualist stance in describing her subjectivity, as did Shakira Jacobs in her account of the way in which childhood sexual abuse has influenced her perception of self. The differential and sometimes contingent relevance of varying identifications of race, class, gender, and religion was pivotal to understanding how these women came to their present notions of self and their relationships with the world.

Al-Azmeh's (1993) argument that Muslim cultures and traditions are fluid and based on temporal and geographic location is borne out in the women's narratives about their sense of belonging to a local or global *ummah*. Rehana Ebrahim-Valley's (2001b) paper on the diversity in the imagined *ummah* is expanded from relating only to South African Indian communities, to being a useful analytical tool in the examination of gendered experiences of *ummah*. The two participants in the study who strongly identify with Islam, in turn feel a connectedness to the notion of *ummah*, while all the other participants note their growing feelings of distance from local Muslim communities. These participants disclosed that they felt outside of the communities to which they were meant to belong by virtue of having been born Muslim. This sense of separation was predicated on negative experiences of being othered as well as doing the othering because of class issues and different types of education. Participants pointed to general perceptions of the restrictive nature of the way in which Islam is practiced in Cape Town at this time giving examples of their positive and joyful experiences with Muslims from outside of South Africa. Further exploration of this sense of being othered was reflected in the narratives around gender roles and gender discrimination

whereby participants noted that these issues are not endemic to Muslim communities but are pervasive throughout South African society.

Gender, while only one of a number of categories to which the participants aligned themselves, proved to be a particularly important category for reflecting on lived experiences. All bar one of the women who had only recently converted to Islam, noted that often in extended family and community situations, women are relegated to the domestic sphere to cook and clean while the men socialise with one another. While most of the participants did not assign blame for this uneven distribution of labour to the religion, one woman emphatically pointed out that this division is tradition-based and not rooted in Islam. All seven respondents made clear the different ways in which they subvert this paradigm, from either subtle coercion of the men to assist, through to outright castigation of these gender roles.

In a narrative that illustrates intergenerational reactions to gender roles, Jamielah Johansen notes that as a girl she had two competing conceptions of how women should behave – a feminist perspective from her mother, and a socially-based perspective of the docile, sweet and feminine. She then describes her grandfather's funeral as a crucial moment in her life that helped shape her conceptions of gender. This participant reverses the notion of women as carriers of culture by describing the men in terms of the secret, sacred and private; while at the same time describing the gendered division of roles for men and women. While arguing against the use of binary definitions to describe the experiences of women, I must make note of the use of these categories by a few of the participants themselves. The discourses in this narrative are complex and multifaceted, and although a binary distinction between men and women, traditional and feminist, is alluded to there is simultaneously a subversion of these categories. This echoes through most of the narratives. Definite distinctions are made between modern and traditional, but are at the same time blurred to show the intricacies of lived experiences. For example, while commenting on what could be construed as a traditional restrictive Islamic country, Ilhaam Hiddingh notes that South Africa which is celebrated for its progressive and liberatory gender policy is in actuality positioning women as second class citizens by virtue of the fact that women married out of community of property require their husband's signature when buying property. Most of the participants noted that while in general they feel at ease with the gender policy in the country there are definite instances of gender discrimination that they encounter. From a gender equity

perspective, Natasha Hassim's account of the prioritisation of girl children for home economics in the schooling system, disadvantages both her son and daughter. Interestingly, almost all the participants at some time or another invoked a rights-based discourse in their narratives when discussing gender roles and gender discrimination. This is indicative of the strong and persistent influence of the South African human rights framework, and could have provided an alternative lens through which to analyse the narratives.

As noted through the preceding chapters, a feminist framework underscores this thesis, and although omitted from the interview schedule, all the interviewees mentioned feminism and paralleled the literature on the differing strands and development of feminism in South Africa. The participants echoed Kitzinger and Wilkinson's (1993) and Narayan's (1997) notions that ascribing to feminism in certain contexts is an disconcerting affair; as well as South African writers who note that during the anti-apartheid movement race was prioritised over gender (Ramphela and Boonzaaier, 1988; Hendricks and Lewis, 1994; Lewis, 1996; de la Rey, 1997, 1999; Lewis and Kottler, 1998). One participant clarified her stance on feminism and Islam by noting that Islam provides the basis for gender equality and that social patriarchy is what prevents women from assuming their rightful positions as Muslim leaders. Another interviewee noted that she had previously been prejudiced towards Muslim women by assuming that Islam was antithetical to feminism, but had resolved that conflictual model. Again the multiplicity of Muslim women's experiences and personal ideologies is demonstrated through these narratives. Although common themes appear among the participants' narratives, the details and shape of those thoughts differ. In this subsection on feminism and the previous subsections, a number of views are expressed, each located in particular understandings of what it is to be a woman in South Africa at this time, not just a Muslim woman.

The term 'Muslim woman' has been used as a blanket expression that evokes imagery of docile, oppressed, domesticated women bound by notions of tradition and strict interpretations of Islam (Ali, 1992). The narrative analysis in this study reveals just how common certain experiences are, but how each woman chooses to interpret these events in their own personal way. The following four themes: education; dress code; sexuality; and weddings came up repeatedly in all the interviews. Most of the participants experienced the same types of socialisation and issues around restriction, and there is a large degree of

similarity in the ways in which they structure and relate narratives of resistance to these organisations of society, yet there is much variation between their accounts of dress code.

Mariam Mohamed did not attend *madressah* as a child, but noted in her interview that from what she understood of the process, many children felt as though this extra activity after school hours was a chore. This sentiment was echoed in six of the participants' narratives, all of whom related stories of boredom and the inadequacy of the education at *madressah*. The women noted that they did not feel engaged with the subject matter as they were not there out of choice, and often the lessons were in Afrikaans and Arabic, languages they did not understand. One participant expressed her delight at going to *madressah* because she felt a connection with her faith. Most women explained that there was a social injunction to attend *madressah*, that it was the expected thing to do and that families felt an amount of pressure to send their children to Islamic lessons. Zainu Arief mentions that her mother sent the children in the family to *madressah* because as a single mother she felt that her social position was precarious and that people would judge her harshly if her children did not attend *madressah*.

Education in South Africa prior to 1994 had a distinctive Christian National slant, and so it is not surprising that all the participants noted the influence of Christianity in their early education. Most of the participants described their enjoyment of singing hymns in the school choirs as young girls, and did not equate the singing of hymns with any form of religious co-option. Shakira Jacobs acknowledged that the school choir provided her with a safe space for her to be happy, a counterpoint to her feelings of apprehension and sadness. These benign experiences of Christian education shifted with age and developing notions of difference. Four of the participants attended government high schools during the 1970s that had a strong policy to reject apartheid education. The other four participants all attended private schools in the late 1980s and early 1990s, three of whom attended Christian private schools and one attended Islamic private schools. The women who attended the Christian private schools related their stories in narrative format and are therefore included in the analysis. All three told of feeling othered at these institutions because they were not white and/or Christian. Although these three were grappling with identifying themselves as Muslim at home, at school there was a forced and strong sense of Islamic identity in opposition to the hegemonic Christian environment.

The narratives on education did not have a gendered slant, but clearly identified issues around race, and the ways in which religious identity shifts according to age, place, circumstance and history. The narratives on dress code, sexuality, and weddings were highly gendered. As noted before, dress code is an over determined signifier for Muslim women (Dwyer, 1999); and the meanings attached to dress code are subjective and fluid. The participants in this study addressed the topic in terms of choice; and as symbolic of religious identity; and/or redemption, piety, culture, and shame. Overwhelmingly, the women mentioned the situational aspect of dress code, that wearing a scarf means different things at different times to different people. All participants noted that wearing a scarf or dressing modestly is about personal choice, as well as about issues of cultural and religious respect. One participant explained that although she does not identify herself as Muslim and does not wear a scarf in her everyday life, would definitely don a scarf at a religious event out of cultural respect.

Notions of dress code and sexuality were quite enmeshed, but while the women stressed the importance of choice in veiling, choice was absent from narratives around sex and sexuality. Sexuality was formulated in highly restrictive terms, with freedom equated with pre-pubescence and childhood innocence. As Fatima Mernissi (1985) explains, the regulation of women's sexuality allows for the regulation of women in all spheres of society. Narratives of regulation pointed out how pubescent girls and women are expected to cover up to hide their sexuality, yet at the same time are positioned as asexual in mosques and at prayer meetings. Gender segregation at mosques is often predicated on the notion that men get aroused when looking at women, thus sidelining the possibility of women being aroused by men. A number of participants told of how they countered these claims, either in conversation, or by actually inadvertently expressing their sexuality at the mosque. One interviewee confessed that issues of shame and virginity are so closely enmeshed that because she is no longer a virgin, she feels that she cannot make *salaat*. It must be noted that throughout the interview process and during the analysis of narratives, heterosexuality was assumed. An alternative and perhaps more thorough exploration of this section would not preclude the possibility of other forms of sexuality. By assuming that the participants were all straight, this thesis has conformed to one of the most pervasive and limiting ways of situating Muslim women, by ignoring the diversity of sexual expression available to them as people.

Issues of sexuality were revisited in the narratives on marriage ceremonies and weddings. Although only three of the participants were married at the time (one was widowed; two were

single; and two in long-term committed relationships), all the participants discussed weddings as key sites of gender relations and specifically argued against women not being present at the time of the marriage contract. The two narratives on weddings presented in the study have definite similarities in that both women were absent from the wedding ceremony; both women felt dissociated from their wedding day; and there were questions around virginity at both weddings. Natasha Hassim did not want to be married, but capitulated to a wedding in order to remove the stigma from her father-in-law who could not attend mosque as she and his son were living together. Shakira Jacobs defied her parents-in-law by refusing to wear a traditional symbol of virginity, the *medora*, at her wedding.

The narratives show the complex and diverse representation of experiences and subjectivity for Muslim women that belies the often cited stereotypical tensions between private and public; tradition and modernity; Islam and west. This study draws attention to the need for a revisiting of theorising around Muslim women that veers away from binary distinctions and normative accounts, and instead takes a position of multiplicity.

9.2. Limitations to the study

As noted in the section above there are alternative ways of rereading the interviews. A different framework may have produced another set of analysis, which could have proven contradictory to the analysis presented in this thesis.

The use of narrative analysis in this study has highlighted the progression of women's lives in terms of their subjectivities, that the formulation of their identities has shifted over time. Narrative analysis has however proven to be a limiting factor in the inclusion of specific events and parts of life history. Within the first round of interviews, three women explained the importance of their activism at high school to the development of their current understandings of self. Because these tellings did not conform to narrative structure, I felt compelled to exclude those parts of the interviews. Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 note that representation necessarily requires choices that may not be well-liked but must be made to fit with the methodological framework. The exclusion of second round interviews that focused on the events of 9/11 was made for the same reasons. The interviews were not narratives, but rather a series of interlinked political discourses. Both of these excluded yet relevant pieces of the interviews touched upon issues of politics and activism.

Representational decisions and word count also limited the amount and depth of analysis that could be performed. The analysis presented in the preceding chapters form only part of the overall story. I am also aware that criticism may be directed towards the small sample size. In terms of qualitative methods and narrative analysis, the sample of eight women is more than adequate given the richness of text and issues that the interviewees provided.

The multidisciplinary nature of this research may also be viewed as an inadequacy in that too many subjects are traversed in one tome. Two central arguments to this piece clarify that the representation of Muslim women in South African academia is to a large extent predicated on historical depictions which need to be challenged; and that unitary conceptions of lived experience are stifling and reductionist. This thesis has been an attempt to link all arguments throughout the piece, from the inclusion of literature through to the way in which the interviews are analysed.

9.3. Researching Islam and gender in South Africa

As Farid Esack states in his 1999 book On Being A Muslim, South African Islam is one of the most dynamic in the world. There are at present, a number of academics and activists studying the issues around women and Islam in the country; but these issues need to be foregrounded across all communities in the country. In particular I would argue that while certain issues may be pertinent in a Muslim setting (for example, women not being allowed at cemeteries to bury loved ones); most issues like the gendered division of labour cut across communities and should not be discussed as a Muslim problem. Gaps in the literature do exist. As argued in Chapter 2, there is a need to analyse historical texts from a feminist perspective and to affirm the contributions of women to the development of Islam in South Africa in a detailed and meticulous fashion. Chapter 3 alerted the lack of rigorous research on the current situation of Muslim women in South Africa, and the necessity to formulate indigenous and gender sensitive accounts of what it is to be Muslim and a woman in South Africa.

I have been very fortunate in conducting this research in that I have been afforded the opportunity to explore these issues. The perception of Islam as generating closed communities that are unwilling to enter into intracultural critique has not been my experience. This is not to say that pockets of conservatism do not exist, but to note that in my dealings with the participants, *Imams* and *Sheikhs*, academics and the general public, there has been a

sense of openness and eagerness to broach the subject. Perhaps there is a shift in the understanding of what it is to be Muslim at this time – that this term is not exclusive and reserved for men who have inherited Islam from their forefathers. Rather, the syncretic nature of religion and culture is taking centre stage; and with that the understanding that the articulation of religious identity is a fluid and personal affair predicated on choice and circumstance.

9.4. Concluding remarks

De la Rey (1999) explains that if one adopts a position that meaning and interpretation are dynamic processes, the writing of a conclusion closes down that fluidity and contradicts one's position. Instead, opting for the open-ended 'concluding remarks' recognises the fluctuating nature of narrative and supports the overall epistemology of the thesis.

This study has attempted to showcase the complexities within the experiences and subjectivities of Muslim women in Cape Town by analysing the life history narratives of a sample of women. The unitary construction of Muslim women as caught between the binary oppositional stances of tradition and modernity; Islam and the west; has been shown to be a reductionist account of the plurality of experiences. Instead, the diversity across and between this group of eight women's narratives has been revealed. Gender is theorised as a salient and powerful barrier within certain situations, but that gender roles and gender discrimination for Muslim women are not limited to Muslim communities but are pervasive across South African societies. In addition, gender is but one of a range of identifications that inform subjectivity. Muslim women are multiply and differently positioned according to particular times, places and circumstances.

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APPENDIX 1: GLOSSARY

<i>batcha</i>	recitation
<i>burkha</i>	a scarf-like covering
<i>doekie</i>	scarf
<i>hadith</i>	statement attributed to the Prophet Muhammad
<i>hajj</i>	pilgrimage to Mecca
<i>hijab</i>	full covering for women
<i>Imam</i>	leader
<i>ji had</i>	struggle in Islam
<i>kak</i>	shit
<i>kapparangs</i>	wooden clogs
<i>khuffiyeh</i>	fez
<i>khutbah</i>	sermon
<i>las</i>	irritating
<i>madressah</i>	an Islamic school
<i>medora</i>	elaborately adorned headgear
<i>Moslem</i>	Muslim
<i>muezzin</i>	call to prayer
<i>muslah</i>	prayer mat
<i>rakkams</i>	religious inscriptions, usually framed
<i>Ramadaan</i>	Month of fasting
<i>salaat</i>	prayers performed five times daily
<i>shahaada</i>	declaration of faith
<i>Shariah</i>	Islamic juridical path
<i>Sheikh</i>	teacher and/or religious leader
<i>Slams/Slamse</i>	abbreviated and somewhat derogatory term for Malay
<i>torp</i>	robe or overcloth for men
<i>ulama</i>	religious leaders, learned people
<i>ummah</i>	universal Muslim community
<i>voetsek</i>	go away

APPENDIX 2: CODING

...	Pieces of narrative excluded
!	Raised voice at end of sentence
Um	Quick um
Umm	Longer umm
[pause]	Pause of three seconds or longer
[slight pause]	Quick pause
[laugh]	Participant laughs
[identifying information]	Names of people and places removed, but general information included
[ing]	Part of word inserted for clarity

APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. How do you identify yourself? What are the key terms you use to make sense of your identity?
2. How does your family identify itself?
3. Growing up, what was your understanding of your religious identity?/ Do you remember when you became aware of being Muslim?
4. How has that awareness changed/developed over the years – childhood/ teenage/ adulthood?
5. Do you feel as though you belong to a global or local ummah?
6. Has there been, for you a relationship between religion and race?
7. Tell me about any obstacles/challenges, or any positive experiences relating to your understanding of being a Muslim women.
8. Is there anything you would like to include?

APPENDIX 4: CORE NARRATIVE SUMMARIES

1. Jamielah Johansen, 23 year old Master's student

Jamielah Johansen describes herself as having been born into a middle class family in central Cape Town. She notes that her family was 'an anomaly in the Muslim community in that her parents were friends with people from different racial, cultural and religious backgrounds. At ten years old Jamielah was sent to a private Christian school, and in the same year her grandfather who had played a pivotal role in her life, passed away. It was at this point that she started noticing and understanding racism and gender discrimination; the differences between Islam and Christianity; and the differences between Muslim and western cultural paradigms. At her grandfather's funeral she experienced the gender biases in Islamic cultural practices as she and all the other women in the family were not allowed to follow the procession and witness the burial. Throughout high school Jamielah had difficulty understanding her mother's feminist attitude and was pre-occupied with issues of race and racism. At university she acquired the language and academic tools to confront gender prejudice which she described as very liberating. Two experiences overseas – a family holiday in the Middle East, and a semester at a university in the United States – provided a counterpoint to the cultural traditions in South Africa and exposed her to a vibrant and celebratory means of practising Islam. She now describes herself as a South African woman, in terms of her relationships with others, her academic leanings, her spiritual beliefs and somewhere along the line as a Muslim.

2. Fatima Sadie, 25, Medical practitioner

Fatima Sadie was born into a devout Muslim family. As a child she found comfort in her Islam and was taught from a young age by both her parents that 'Allah is all around you...He is closer to you than your jugular vein'. This sense of faith and closeness to Allah has not altered throughout her life. She attended Islamic schools for most of her childhood education, and noted her joy of attending *madressah* in the afternoons after school. At ten years old she began debating and participating in conversations around her religion, and first realised the importance of education in terms of religious awareness for women. Just after puberty she independently elected to wear a scarf as testament to her faith. Fatima describes an ease and comfort in the Muslim community in Cape Town, which was first challenged when she was sixteen and started working part-time after on the weekends after she was fired from a large retail store for wearing her scarf to work. She experienced this type of pressure again in the

workplace, and later when she attended university and was ordered to remove her scarf. After graduating and receiving her clinical accreditation, Fatima toured Europe and worked for some time in Britain. She notes that this period strengthened her beliefs and faith. Fatima describes herself as a Muslim women who subscribes to the Qur'an as the basis of her theology.

3. Shakira Jacobs, 44, Business woman

Shakira Jacobs was born into a prominent Muslim family in Cape Town. She explains that she was sexually abused as a child and she could not imagine herself as an individual. She therefore identified herself as an attachment to the dominant person in her life who at that time was her father and because he was a figurehead in the Muslim community, Shakira identified herself as Muslim. During her childhood she attended a Christian primary school and the only time she felt free and happy was when she was singing in the church choir. In high school during the 1976 uprisings and because of the strong focus on race, she realised at a Muslim wedding for the first time that her mother was white. She was married a few years later under Muslim law, and felt disassociated with the marriage contract as she had not been part of the ceremony. Shakira also clashed with her in-laws who insisted she wear a *medora*, a traditional bridal head covering that she felt was foreign to her own culture. When Shakira was thirty years old, her father passed away. She subsequently wore a scarf for two years as she believed that this symbol of faith would bring her closer to her father. More recently, Shakira has allowed herself to admit that she was sexually abused as a child and to speak openly about it. Parallel to this exploration of her childhood and the effects on her adulthood, she has come to see herself as an individual who has the right to be a woman. She does not consider herself as part of the Muslim community and no longer identifies herself as Muslim.

4. Zainu Arief, 27, Artist

Zainu Arief spent the first few years of her childhood in a small country town, in which her family were very modern and free and the only Indian Muslim family. Her parents divorced and her mother and sisters moved to Cape Town just before Zainu started her education at a private Christian girls school. She explains that being a single mom, her mother felt community pressure and sent her girls to *madressah* for the first time and gradually became more religious. This intensified when Zainu's aunt married when Zainu was twelve years old. Zainu began to feel restricted and started questioning cultural attitudes and beliefs from puberty when she was told to cover up and be quiet. At sixteen Zainu was sent to a

psychologist who told her to be a good Muslim girl and to obey her mother. She notes that this event spurred her rebelliousness and her unhealthy relationship with Islam. Religious dogma was also forced upon her at school, where Muslim girls were required to attend church services but Jewish girls were exempt. She notes that these types of experiences catapulted her into finding her own way in the world, outside of the traditional cultures and prescribed religions, and that she is in a constant search to fit in. When travelling and working in Britain, Zainu felt free of religion and culture and was just proud to be South African. Zainu defines herself as Muslim because she belongs in a Muslim family, but not as a practising Muslim.

5. Rukaya Desai, 24, Postgraduate student

Rukaya Desai's father's family is Muslim and her mother converted to Islam on marriage. She lives with her family who are religious in a suburb on the Cape Flats. During her childhood she attended a private Catholic girls school, and attended *madressah* after school. She felt different to the children at *madressah* and longed to belong to that community. This feeling gradually rescinded during high school when she was expelled from various *madressahs* for insubordinate behaviour. Rukaya no longer feels that it is important to identify herself in terms of identity politics. She does consider herself a Muslim women, but prefers to think of herself as a good person.

6. Ilhaam Hiddingh, 40, Business woman

Ilhaam Hiddingh was born into a family in central Cape Town who could identify themselves as Muslim only in terms of the fact that they didn't eat pork. She and her sister were the first two children in the extended family to attend a Christian primary school, and as a child she loved playing Mary in the nativity plays and always won Religious Instruction class prizes. She felt that her family were on the outskirts of the community and being the youngest, she was on the outskirts of the family. She therefore felt completely disassociated with the Muslim community and the neighbourhood in which she grew up, a feeling that persists today. At eighteen years old she took the opportunity to study abroad, and when she returned she felt that she was treated with a degree of hostility from the broader community. After a few years at university she moved out of her parents home, an unprecedented event at the time, to live with friends in a seaside town. She married a white atheist man and while pregnant with their first child a number of people made contact with her to turn her back on the devil. Ilhaam does not ascribe to the epithet Muslim, and feels strongly that people should be free to choose how they wish to identify themselves.

7. Natasha Hassim, 40, PhD candidate and educator

Natasha Hassim describes the home she grew up in Cape Town as Muslim and traditional but Godless, with an absent father, domineering mother and protective brothers. She attended *madressah* with her brothers and sister after primary school everyday. At 14 she became an activist, and at 16 during the 1976 uprising, she became an atheist because she could not understand how God could allow such suffering. She studied and qualified and married a deeply spiritual man, but she felt disassociated from her wedding because she was not an integral part of the process. Natasha and her husband were politically active in [province] United Democratic Front, where she took a secondary role to him but witnessed the power of mothers in [city]. At 28 years old she returned to university to continue studying and met a deeply religious woman and started relating to Islam in a spiritual way. Natasha identifies with the struggle that women face generally, but not specifically with Muslim women or the Muslim community in Cape Town. For her, Islam is one part of a bigger spirituality.

8. Mariam Mohamed, 30, Artist and poet

Mariam converted to Islam in her twenties, having been born in a Christian family in [province]. Both her brothers had converted to Islam before her while she was dabbling with other faiths, and searching for an authentic relationship with religion. She explains that she had had limited exposure to Islam and a narrow perspective on women in Islam which was compounded by her brothers' proselytising efforts towards her. Mariam's acceptance of Islam as her way of life was predicated by two powerful dreams, and the parallel experience of a woman friend of hers who had had a similar political and spiritual journey to her and had embraced Islam. She feels connected to Muslim women in Cape Town and the world because of the support that they give her. Mariam believes that part of her Islam is to be a conduit for peaceful understanding and use the public platform for commentary around issues pertinent to Islam.

