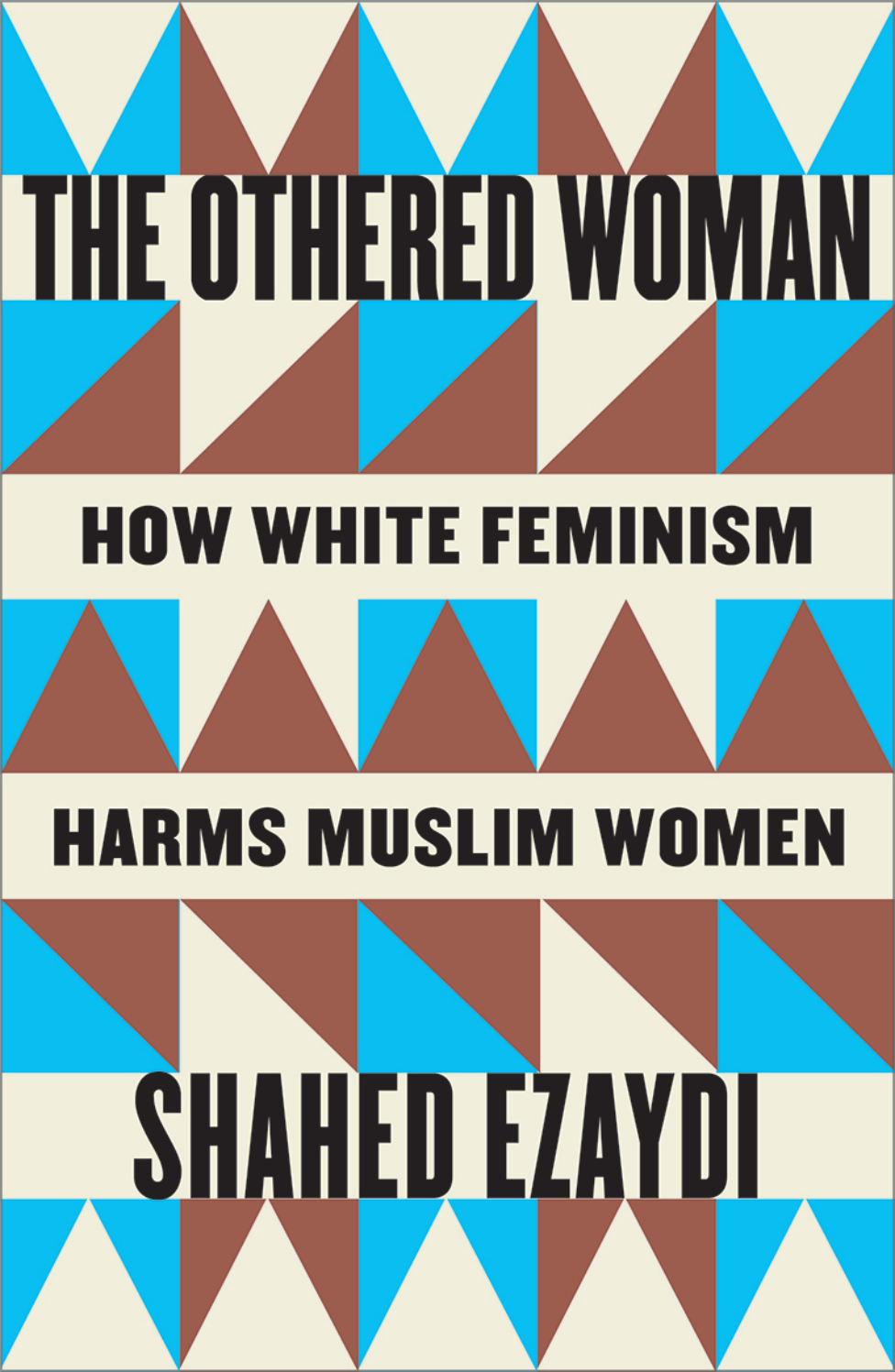




# **THE OTHERED WOMAN**

**HOW WHITE FEMINISM**

**HARMS MUSLIM WOMEN**

**SHAHED EZAYDI**

## The Othered Woman

‘Shahed Ezaydi has long been a vocal critic of white feminism and is a fierce advocate of inclusivity and women’s rights. Her debut book is an in-depth analysis of the toxic influence of white feminism and its impact on Muslim women globally.’

—Friday Magazine

‘Shahed Ezaydi’s work deftly traces how both the state and white feminist practices consistently vilify and dismiss Muslim women through a kaleidoscope of Islamophobia and racism. *The Othered Woman* is also an important corrective, underscoring the Muslim activists and thinkers challenging these harmful narratives.’

—Koa Beck, the author of *White Feminism*

‘An urgent, vital contribution to the feminist conversation – one that tears through the comfortable myth of universal sisterhood.’

—Alya Mooro, author of *The Greater Freedom*

‘A radical, eye-opening analysis of the marginalisation that Muslim women face that leaves no stone unturned. Powerful and truth telling.’

—JJ Bola, author of *Mask Off: Masculinity Redefined*

‘A powerful, clear-eyed reckoning with the exclusions at the heart of white feminism. Shahed Ezaydi illuminates what so many need to see. *The Othered Woman* is the read we need in book clubs up and down the country – there’s so much to learn here and even more to talk about.’

—Freya Bromley, author of *The Tidal Year*

‘A brilliant read. Meticulously researched and robustly articulated, this is a timely analysis of white feminism’s performative solidarity and the damage it causes Muslim women.’

—Samia Rahman, author of *Muslim Women and Misogyny*

‘Shahed incisively lays out the deep entanglement between white feminism and Islamophobia. This is a necessary read that lays bare how Muslim women have been persistently sidelined by the very movements claiming to fight for our liberation.’

—Nafisa Bakkar, co-founder and CEO of Amaliah

‘Resisting [the] hate narrative, Shahed Ezaydi centres Muslim women’s voices and celebrates inspirational Muslim women of the past and the present. This is essential reading in today’s polarised world where states and social media allow hate to flourish, providing wider society with “permission to hate” Muslim women as “Other”.’

—Irene Zempi, Associate Professor  
in Criminology at Nottingham Trent University

‘Like swallowing the red pill of Feminism. Truly enlightening. Shahed writes with the familiarity of a “tell it like it is” truth-telling friend and packs a page-turning punch. A reminder and a prescription for all feminists (and everyone) to take their intersectional medicine.’

—Zahra Barri, author of *Daughters of the Nile*

# The Othered Woman

How White Feminism Harms  
Muslim Women

Shahed Ezaydi

PLUTO  PRESS

With special thanks to Peaks of Colour for their generous support as a patron of this book

First published 2026 by Pluto Press  
New Wing, Somerset House, Strand, London WC2R 1LA  
and Pluto Press, Inc.  
1930 Village Center Circle, 3-834, Las Vegas, NV 89134

[www.plutobooks.com](http://www.plutobooks.com)

Copyright © Shahed Ezaydi 2026

The right of Shahed Ezaydi to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

While every effort has been made to trace the owners of copyright material reproduced herein, the publisher would like to apologise for any omissions and will be pleased to incorporate missing acknowledgements in any further editions.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 0 7453 5234 3 Paperback  
ISBN 978 0 7453 5236 7 PDF  
ISBN 978 0 7453 5235 0 EPUB

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental standards of the country of origin.

Text design by Six Red Marbles UK, Thetford, Norfolk

Simultaneously printed in the United Kingdom and United States of America

EU GPSR Authorised Representative  
LOGOS EUROPE, 9 rue Nicolas Poussin, 17000, LA ROCHELLE,  
France  
Email: [Contact@logoseurope.eu](mailto:Contact@logoseurope.eu)

# Contents

|                                                                   |     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| <i>Introduction</i>                                               | I   |
| 1. White feminism and its definitions                             | 9   |
| 2. The perception of single-issue oppression                      | 21  |
| 3. Liberation politics and the veil                               | 37  |
| 4. The ‘unique’ misogyny of Muslim men                            | 69  |
| 5. The relationship between women, feminism and the far right     | 105 |
| 6. Gendered Islamophobia, carceral feminism and UK state violence | 127 |
| 7. Islamophobia in the European context                           | 151 |
| 8. White feminism and its role in global conflicts                | 173 |
| 9. Muslim women: Loud and proud                                   | 199 |
| <i>Conclusion</i>                                                 | 219 |
| <i>Appendix</i>                                                   | 223 |
| <i>Interview with Haaniyah Angus</i>                              | 223 |
| <i>Interview with Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan</i>                      | 227 |

## CONTENTS

|                                         |      |
|-----------------------------------------|------|
| <i>Interview with Nafisa Bakkar</i>     | 23 I |
| <i>Interview with the Three Hijabis</i> | 23 5 |
| <i>Acknowledgements</i>                 | 239  |
| <i>Notes</i>                            | 24 I |

For my mother

*Content warning: Mentions of sexual abuse,  
rape and violence.*

# Introduction

‘It’s just how some people react to people like us’, my mother told me when I was around eight years old, in response to me asking her why a strange man on the bus home from school was shouting at her.

My mum wears a hijab, so she’s visibly a Muslim woman, and she has been subjected to her fair share of verbal abuse since my parents moved to the UK in the early 1990s. How do you explain this to an eight-year-old who doesn’t understand why a stranger has suddenly decided to hurl abuse at you on a bus? I don’t remember too much about the incident, but I do remember feeling sad, ashamed and embarrassed that this man was shouting at us to leave England and ‘go back to where you belong’, when we were simply sitting at the back of the bus in Sheffield trying to get home from my weekend Arabic classes. Go back to where? To Libya, a country I’ve never known? To Scotland, where I was born? Even as a kid, I could tell from my mother’s tired and deflated eyes that this was something she’d experienced before and would likely face again in the country my parents chose to call home. This stranger probably didn’t think twice about his comments and

continued on with his day, but it's a situation that's stayed with me for decades. And, sadly, this wouldn't be the last time I came across Islamophobia. Dealing with Islamophobia, while also trying to navigate the two cultures I was growing up with, left me feeling pretty lost. My friends definitely didn't get me and I was too nervous to talk to my parents about my confusion as I didn't want them to think I was rejecting our way of life. But constantly being told things about your religion, especially when it came to women's rights, meant I started to absorb some of it and believed this Islamophobia.

Would my dad force me to wear the hijab when I was older? Would I end up being pushed into a marriage I didn't want? Is Islam an oppressive force for women? These were all questions I was both asking of myself and that I'd had friends ask of me throughout my years at school. The feelings of unease didn't go away, they simply changed. If anything, hiding my faith or feeling ashamed of it made me feel worse. But I did hide huge parts of myself, especially growing up during a time when feminism was only becoming more mainstream. Well, a specific type of feminism anyway. I buried the feelings of unease down deep for many years and only revisited them in my early to mid-twenties.

Many of us who live in the West have inadvertently absorbed white feminist ideas. This is a type of feminism that believes: that Muslim women can *only* experience oppression at the hands of Islam (ignoring other structural harms); that this oppression can be boiled down to the wearing of the veil; and that Muslim men enact an exceptionalised form of misogyny and gendered violence. We may approach topics or issues concerning Muslim women with the best intentions but

end up reinforcing damaging and harmful stereotypes instead. It's a conversation that crops up again and again, but it feels like it just goes round in circles. People express their concerns or opinions regarding an issue involving Muslim women, but in a way that is based in racism and Islamophobia. And invoking a white saviour lens is not going to help Muslim women in the slightest.

It takes a lot of unlearning to get to the point where you can stop and think about how you're approaching such topics; I know it did for me. It's only now, looking back on my school days, that I can see just how widespread Islamophobic views and attitudes were, even amongst people I had called good friends, and how much I had internalised this Islamophobia.<sup>1</sup> Peers told me that Islam was 'backward' and a 'woman-hating' religion. They asked how I could possibly call myself a feminist if I also practised my faith. In fact, the vast majority of Islamophobic comments I faced were comments based in 'feminist' ideals. In my mind, feminism and my faith became two distinctly separate entities, existing on opposite sides of my sense of self. I felt as though my lived experiences of being both a Muslim and a young woman were fighting each other, as if they were competing in some sort of game of identity wars. Something didn't feel right about it all and so I decided to do my own homework. I was always taught, by my family and my religion, to look for the truth. So, I wanted to seek out more knowledge and information about Islam to see if what people were saying was true, but I didn't really know where to turn. My sociology classes at school had primarily been focused on white feminists and my religious studies lessons taught a watered-down and often

incorrect version of Islam. I eventually found books and articles that set the record straight, but having an accessible book such as this one whilst growing up would have been such a useful and invaluable tool, one that I hope can be of use to many others.

Many people are quick to comment on the rights of Muslim women (especially those living in or from the Global South), which tend to be rooted in racist and Islamophobic stereotypes, without ever actually speaking to Muslim women about their wants and needs. Our rights are always discussed, dissected and held to the ideals of white Western womanhood. But when was the last time we were asked how *we* felt? What is it that *we* want? The prevailing paradigm in the West is a feminism that places Muslim women into a box of silence, submissiveness and oppression, and if we do not fit into that box then we are not ‘real’ feminists. To white feminists, we are simply a symbol that can be called upon whenever needed to further their own agenda.

For example, the rights of Afghan women are incredibly important and should be discussed, but many of the opinions and news stories that focus on Afghanistan have been analysed through a specific lens. There has been a large emphasis on surface-level issues, such as women’s clothing, rather than on the structural issues, such as Western imperialism and colonialism, that have had a devastating impact on Afghans, including Afghan women. There is no better example of this white feminist rhetoric than an image that was circulated on social media of three Afghan women dressed in miniskirts in the 1970s. It was used to make comparisons to women’s lives before the Taliban and women’s lives now, with this image

being shared alongside contemporary images of women dressed in burqas. But this image comparison is just a Western framing of what it means to be a liberal or progressive society. A woman wearing less clothing, or ‘Western’ clothing, does not automatically equate to liberation or freedom, and a woman choosing (because it may be a choice for *some* Afghan women) to wear the veil doesn’t equate to being oppressed. All this image does is feed into the white Western notion of womanhood and how that is indicative of a liberal society. It is a womanhood that has been exported and imposed on all women, but if they do not adhere to it, they are not the ‘right’ type of woman.

Then, on the other hand, you have the experience of Palestinian women during an ongoing genocide which has been met by a wall of silence from a huge swathe of feminism in the West. You may even be wondering what a genocide has to do with women and feminism? But when many women have resorted to taking period-delaying pills or using tent scraps as a substitute for period products due to the unhygienic circumstances they’re now living in, it is a feminist issue. To menstruate in such dire and harrowing conditions is something that’s completely unimaginable to most Western women. But instead of sparking mass outrage, this horrific and heart-breaking situation has been met by little to no comment or reaction from many public figures in feminist spaces who claim to stand for the rights of women.

These two examples are at the heart of the issue of gendered Islamophobia, by which I mean the specific forms of Islamophobic stereotypes and discrimination that Muslim women face. Unsurprisingly, there are not many books that

delve into the specific relationship between white feminism and gendered Islamophobia. More and more books are being published analysing the nature and consequences of white feminism, but Muslim women only ever seem to be mentioned briefly, tucked away in one or two chapters. Whilst books on white feminism are indeed a welcome thing and very much needed to understand women's liberation movements, the relationship between white feminism and Muslim women is in urgent need of a thorough interrogation. Why are we thought of as silenced and oppressed? Why are we seen as in constant need of help? Until we fully understand the impact that white feminism has on Muslim women, we will never be able to gauge just how much widespread harm it causes.

I want this book to serve as a foundation and a tool to both gain a better insight into the insidious nature of white feminism and to learn more about the lives and experiences of Muslim women across the world. From chapter two to five, this book aims to unpack some commonly held myths and beliefs that have either been created or reinforced by white feminism. Then, chapters six, seven and eight of *The Othered Woman* will then move on to how the myths surrounding Muslim women – and maintained by white feminism – translate into very real harms at state level in the UK and globally. And because I want to end this book on a more joyful note, the last chapter features brilliant Muslim women of the past as well as interviews with women who inspire me today and a hopeful vision for the future.

Many of the stories we hear or see about Muslim women are told from a biased, ignorant or downright hateful perspective,

especially if you look at how some newspapers and magazines talk about us. It's a rare thing to hear or read about the lives and experiences of Muslim women, without negative stereotypes, offensive language or a saviour perspective. Muslim women can and should be able to write our own voices, perspectives and stories. We are more than just stereotypes. We are layered, complicated and beautiful people – just like any other group of women – and our voices deserve to be heard and listened to.



# I

## White feminism and its definitions

*‘It assumes that white women experience  
misogyny in the same way all women  
experience misogyny’*

Even though a lot has been written about white feminism over the past few years, it still seems to be a misunderstood term, particularly by white women. I know I’ve had difficult conversations with people that elicit reactions of defensiveness or accusations of racism when talking about white feminism and its harms. There have been defences of ‘Well, I didn’t know’ when I’ve pointed out that a comment is Islamophobic, or ‘My partner is of Muslim heritage’, or, my favourite, ‘I have a Muslim friend’. But why is it viewed with such difficulty? And what exactly is white feminism?

White or liberal feminism refers to a type of feminism that focuses exclusively on white middle-class women and prioritises issues that primarily affect them. It’s also often referred to as ‘girlboss’ feminism, as the focus tends to be on equality and empowerment gained through capitalist means, for example calling for an increase in the number of female CEOs and the growing ‘hustle culture’ trend. It’s a feminism that prioritises

achieving equality for white women, insisting that their equality will open doors for all other women.

White feminism is also closely related to white fragility and the structure of innocence, where a person may feel a sense of discomfort or defensiveness when confronted with issues around racism. In her book *Innocent Subjects*, feminist scholar Terese Jonsson writes that ‘white feminists, generally committed to progressive politics and ending (gender) oppression, have a particularly deep investment in being “good” white people’, and that their feminism is rooted in the connection between whiteness and innocence. And this white feminist innocence is ‘prioritised in order to maintain and legitimise the continued centring of white women within feminist movements’.<sup>1</sup> When viewing the world through the prism of white feminism, many women may not even be actively aware that the feminism they’ve subscribed to is exclusionary to so many others. Writer and academic Rachel Elizabeth Cargle describes white feminism as a ‘type of behaviour that rests under the guise of feminism only as long as it is comfortable, only as long as it is personally rewarding, only as long as it keeps “on brand”’.<sup>2</sup> It’s a feminism that does not consider the intersectionality of women, ignoring how misogyny intertwines with racism, Islamophobia, and ableism, for example. It assumes that white women experience misogyny in the same way *all* women experience misogyny – which is simply not the case.

We also need to define what is meant when we talk about Islamophobia, specifically gendered Islamophobia. I do not completely agree with using the term ‘Islamophobia’, as I believe it places too much emphasis on individual fear, but it is a term that is widely used and understood. There have been

many debates around the meaning of the term ‘Islamophobia’, including an ongoing conversation around whether it is a form of racism or not, but an ‘official’ definition now exists in the UK, which the All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims put together in 2018. It defines Islamophobia as ‘rooted in racism and [...] a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness’.<sup>3</sup> It’s a definition that has been widely adopted by many across civil and political society, but for this book I do not think it goes far enough, particularly to explain gendered Islamophobia. And so, the definition I want to use for this book is one that Lola Olufemi uses in her book *Feminism Interrupted*. She writes that Islamophobia is the ‘social and political assumption that Muslims are predisposed to violence’, which is well suited here as many of the tropes about Muslim women, pushed by white feminism, are rooted in the belief that Islam is inherently violent.<sup>4</sup>

However, to truly understand how and why white feminism is harmful, it is necessary to break it down to its origins and how exactly it excludes whole communities of women. There are countless examples of white feminism in action – including in the days of the suffragette movement and fighting for (white) women to vote. ‘Many suffragettes of the previous era were abolitionists but, as white feminism would increasingly demonstrate, there is a marked difference between thinking Black Americans should be free and believing they should have equal opportunities to white people’, writes Koa Beck in her book, *White Feminism*.<sup>5</sup> A notion that is as reflective of the British suffragette movement as it is of the American one.

An instance of an apparently feminist movement which

displays some of the issues in white feminism from more recent years is a campaign raising £13,000 to put writer Jane Austen on British banknotes without, as the author Leah Cowan puts it, ‘attempting to improve women’s access to banknotes irrespective of whose face was decorating them’.<sup>6</sup> The resurgence of the #MeToo movement is another notable example. This was a campaign that hit the headlines in 2017 after allegations surrounding Harvey Weinstein began to emerge, but the prominent voices were famous, privileged white actors.<sup>7</sup> In fact, #MeToo wasn’t a new movement at all. It had actually been started all the way back in 2006 by a Black woman named Tarana Burke – who was only mentioned in the conversation once the #MeToo movement really took off.

Similar issues are to be found in pop culture too. In a 2022 *Dazed* article, the writer Halima Jibril wrote about ‘mainstream feminism’, exploring some of its history, particularly related to the influence of the Spice Girls:

Rather than focusing on discrimination, homophobia, and classism [...] the Spice Girls were telling people that ‘Margaret Thatcher was the first Spice Girl, the pioneer of their ideology’ – a real quote by Geri Halliwell, who recently took a selfie with (and basically endorsed) Liz Truss, our prime minister by day and Swiftie by night. Though much of the mainstream media wants us to believe that the Spice Girls redefined feminism, they arguably, through their performative assertions of girl power, made centre-right politics more palatable.<sup>8</sup>

Look at the collective outrage of women during the 2024 Oscars, when Margot Robbie and Greta Gerwig didn’t secure

individual nominations for their work on *Barbie*. Their lack of awards caused the internet to explode (or it felt like that, anyway) into a discussion of how the film was a victim of the patriarchy and the lack of nominations for its two leading women was unfeminist and unfair on these two very rich white women. The prevailing sentiment proudly proclaimed that it wasn't just Robbie and Gerwig who had been 'snubbed', but *all* women. Granted, Gerwig may have deserved a nod for creating and directing one of the highest grossing films of the year – a film that was nominated for best picture – but to frame this as a feminist issue and make it about equality is a classic example of white feminism in action. In a bizarre turn of events, Hillary Clinton even got involved in the discourse, sharing on social media: 'Greta & Margot, While it can sting to win the box office but not take home the gold, your millions of fans love you. You're both so much more than Kenough'.<sup>9</sup> Whilst women around the world were facing tangible and material harm on a daily basis, white feminists were busy sharing their frustration and anger about an average film not getting an award.

Taylor Swift is an artist whose public stance exemplifies some of the issues which we also find feeding in to white feminism. I want to start by saying that I enjoy and admire Swift's songs and lyrics, but she's certainly become a problematic favourite. For most of her early career, Swift rarely commented on anything even a little political, which at the time made sense, as she was a young teenage girl, and most people wouldn't expect formulated political thoughts from a fifteen-year-old in the spotlight. However, as she got older, Swift became very careful as to what she spoke up about and, most

importantly, what she kept hidden from the public eye. The singer has spoken up about misogyny, the patriarchy and sexism in her industry and even wrote about it in her song ‘The Man’. These are all valid concerns, but I have only seen Swift engage with the issues in relation to herself and her work. She dipped her toe into the world of politics in 2018 when she endorsed Democratic candidates in her home state of Tennessee and, more recently, when she endorsed Kamala Harris in the 2024 US election. She has also spoken out in support of Black Lives Matter and expressed her intentions to become more inclusive in her documentary, *Miss Americana*. But I haven’t seen this translate into much action. Swift is still the embodiment of ‘girlboss’ feminism, and when she credited much of her feminist learning to her friend and writer Lena Dunham, the picture became that much clearer. Dunham has also exemplified a problematic type of feminism, having been outspoken about women’s rights, but in ways which seem to apply particularly to white women. In fact, she has faced criticism of her hit series, *Girls*, for its lack of racial diversity.

A specific example of a problematic approach to Muslim women which one can also see in white feminism is a 2021 BBC *Woman’s Hour* interview with the then newly elected general secretary of the Muslim Council of Britain, Zara Mohammed.<sup>10</sup> The presenter, Emma Barnett, steered the conversation to questions about female imams and the exclusion of some Muslim women from society, rather than Mohammed’s historic appointment as the first ever woman elected to the post, and persisted with her line of questioning even after Mohammed stated she didn’t know the answers to her questions. ‘How many female imams are there, in the UK at the

moment?’ asks Barnett. Mohammed responds, ‘I wouldn’t have a clue on these numbers because my role is making sure that we include our affiliates, particularly women, in the work that we are doing in making sure that our structures as well as the work we do are truly representative’. Barnett then interrupts Mohammed with, ‘It’s fine if you don’t know, but do we have female imams in this country?’ When Mohammed attempts to clarify Barnett’s question, the host outlines that the UK has female chaplains and female rabbis, and so, ‘What is the picture for women leading prayer in Britain in Muslim communities?’ Mohammed reiterates that her Muslim Council of Britain role isn’t to ‘adjudicate or examine’ on that part of spirituality, to which Barnett interrupts her again, and after another minute or so says, ‘It’s striking that you can’t answer that question’. The *Woman’s Hour* interview was widely criticised by high-profile figures (Muslim and non-Muslim) and resulted in an open letter being signed by over one hundred politicians, writers and other prominent figures, stating that Barnett ‘appeared intent on reinforcing damaging and prejudicial tropes’ about Islam. It went on to say that the interview ‘mirrored the style and tone of an accountability interview with a politician, rather than authentically recognising and engaging in what this represented for British Muslim women’.<sup>11</sup>

Many Muslim women will have seen their own experiences reflected in the way Barnett approached her questions to Mohammed. I know it made me reflect on some of those difficult conversations I’ve had in certain feminist spaces. I have seen many attempts by white women to reassert a typical negative stereotype about Islam: that it’s a ‘backwards’ religion that just doesn’t care about women. It’s a stereotype

as old as time. Islam is viewed as this violent and misogynistic religion, where women are treated badly and are living oppressed lives. And, because of this, Muslim women can't possibly be linked to feminism, let alone be leading feminists in their fields. Barnett's interview reminded me of this, as she seemed to ask questions based on a preconceived judgement of Islam. To me, it wasn't journalism, but an attempt to catch out a Muslim woman to reinforce those kinds of preconceived beliefs. You could see it in the fact that when Mohammed tried to clarify the question on female imams with, 'Are you referring to chaplains? Are you referring to women that lead the prayer? What are you actually referring to?', Barnett replied, 'Well you tell me'. The lack of basic research was evident and indicated to me that there was never an intention to learn or understand.

A major part of the structure and strategy of white feminism is based on its roots in white supremacy. I spoke to Koa Beck for an article in *Mashable* and she explained to me how white supremacy is one of the main elements of white feminism, with both overlapping in viewing the experiences of white cis women as the primary concern of feminism. 'White feminism acts to homogenise feminism: to assert mainstream dominant feminism as *the feminism*, which is not true; this is an act of white supremacy', says Beck. She goes on to say that 'this dynamic often means that where the needs of women of colour, disabled women, or Muslim women conflict with that of white supremacy, their needs will be dismissed or subjugated'.<sup>12</sup>

White feminism is also closely intertwined with the white saviour complex. This will be explored in more detail later

on, but it's a common trope held by white people with the mindset that people of colour, or any group considered 'non-white', are submissive and helpless. And this white saviour complex is still alive and kicking today, particularly when it comes to white feminism's reliance on outsourcing labour. In her book, Beck outlines how what was traditionally viewed as 'women's work' in the 1950s – mostly household labour and childcare – has 'shifted to brown and Black women's work'.<sup>13</sup> The women who carry out a lot of this work (such as cleaners, cooks and nannies) are, most often, working-class women of colour and/or immigrant women. And it's the middle-class white women who rely heavily on this work so they can achieve their balanced lives. It's this care work that allows these women to have successful professional careers as well as a family and children and, ultimately, lead their feminism-approved lives. But at what cost? Well, the lives of brown and Black women.

There's no better example of these kind of problematic attitudes than when feminists took to social media to defend the fact that they had had cleaners during the COVID-19 pandemic. Caitlin Moran penned an article about it in *The Times*. Much of the article is simply Moran defending the fact she has a cleaner and saying what a good employer she is, with little to no class or race analysis. 'I tell you one thing we [middle-class feminists] are fixing, though – by paying someone wholly willing to do the cleaning, it allows both of us to have a job, and for our cleaner to have a job. Now two women are in paid employment', Moran wrote.<sup>14</sup> She is essentially patting herself on the back for having a cleaner, but also speaking for them.

This isn't the only time that Moran has shown flaws within her feminism, either. Back in 2012, the writer shared her interview with actor and screenwriter Lena Dunham on X (formerly known as Twitter), to which someone replied: 'Did you address the complete and utter lack of people of colour in *Girls* in your interview? I sure hope so!' Moran replied with, 'Nope. I literally couldn't give a shit about it'.<sup>15</sup> In her book, *How to Be a Woman*, she also others Muslim women who wear burqas. She writes:

It was the 'Are the boys doing it?' basis on which I finally decided I was against women wearing burkas. Yes, the idea is that it protects your modesty, and ensures that people regard you as a human being, rather than just a sexual object. Fair enough. But who are you being protected from? Men. And who – so long as you play by the rules, and wear the correct clothes – is protecting you from the men? Men. And who is it that is regarding you as just a sexual object, instead of another human being, in the first place? Men. Well. This all seems like quite a man-based problem, really. I would definitely put this under the heading '100 per cent stuff that the men need to sort out'. I don't know why we're suddenly having to put things on our heads to make it better.<sup>16</sup>

Here are many of the problems we'll discuss in a snapshot – congratulating yourself for 'giving' a woman paid employment and framing it as progressive, while seeming to dismiss intersectionality and reinforce harmful stereotypes.

An important thing to note about the term 'white feminism' is that it doesn't refer to a particular group of people but,

rather, acknowledges a particular system and ideology. Beck says that her work and writing has been dubbed ‘racist’ by some critics, but is clear that white feminism can be ‘practised and asserted by anyone regardless of their racial identity [. . .] I intentionally chose the term “white feminism” for my argument because this is an approach to gender equality that ultimately asks you to aspire to whiteness and not equal rights’.<sup>17</sup> And I’m choosing to do the same with this book as the term ‘white feminism’ is not only commonly used and understood in popular culture, but it represents a system and ideology that has whiteness right at the heart of it. For Muslim women, it’s this type of feminism that has fed (and keeps feeding) so many of the negative stereotypes and myths that affect our lives constantly, including the belief that Muslim women’s oppression is rooted only in our faith.



## 2

# The perception of single-issue oppression

*‘Muslim women tend to be treated with  
a one-size-fits-all approach’*

White feminism has never been good at understanding or even acknowledging the intersectional and diverse experiences amongst women. It focuses on and prioritises achieving equality for white middle-class women, as their experiences, challenges and oppressions are viewed as universal. As mentioned earlier, it’s a feminism that assumes that white women experience misogyny in the same way *all* women experience misogyny. It’s the idea that Muslim women *only* experience one form of harm and that’s religious oppression. There’s a narrow and singular focus on Islam being the oppressive force, and this is what completely blinds white feminism to other harms Muslim women face, such as racism and class oppression.

While white women do experience misogyny and oppression, they still benefit from the structures of white supremacy and wield more power than any other group of women. In *Hood Feminism*, Mikki Kendall explains how white feminists

embolden a ‘feminism that could ignore police brutality killing women of colour, that could ignore the steady disenfranchisement and abuse in local and national politics of some women based on race and religion, wasn’t about equality or equity for all women; it was about benefiting white women at the expense of all others’.<sup>1</sup> Women of colour are harmed by white feminism in several ways. Tone policing, white women centring themselves in conversations, ‘white-splaining’, white people getting defensive around topics related to race – women of colour have to navigate these types of situations on a regular basis. As mentioned earlier, a woman getting defensive about racism and Islamophobia by telling me she has a Muslim friend is something that will always stay with me, mostly out of sheer wonder and surprise at the audacity of the excuse. White feminism doesn’t meet women where they are but blames women of colour, incarcerated women and poor women for not achieving ‘feminist wins’, such as a work–life balance or owning property, and doesn’t consider the structures that marginalise these groups in the first place – preventing them from achieving similar successes to white women. ‘It’s a feminism that tells us that the issues that are important to us – which may include areas such as economic realities, childcare access, affordable housing, and immigration policies – are not “feminist enough” because the white feminist ideology doesn’t centre them’, as Koa Beck tells me.<sup>2</sup>

The term ‘intersectionality’ was coined by law professor and academic Kimberlé Crenshaw in the 1980s to describe the way people’s social identities overlap. In a 2020 *Time* article, Crenshaw said that intersectionality had been distorted

over the years, but it's 'a lens for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other'. She added that we 'tend to talk about race inequality as separate from inequality based on gender, class, sexuality or immigrant status. What's often missing is how some people are subject to all of these, and the experience is not just the sum of its parts'.<sup>3</sup> And it's this intersectional lens that is missing from how white feminism views and contextualises the world. Even when there's an attempt to incorporate intersectionality into white feminism, it usually ends up being depoliticised and moved into the context of neoliberalism, rather than as a tangible tool for understanding and fighting for social justice. For example, intersectionality has come to be understood as representation. Through a white feminist lens, intersectional feminism is now commonly understood as making sure Black and brown faces are visible in your work or organisations, but the thought process tends to stop there. The actual structures in place that marginalise and oppress women of colour remain the same, it's just the face of the work looks different. It's superficial and, often, just as damaging.

If you took a quick look at recent UK Conservative governments, you would have seen a number of Black and brown faces which, on the face of it, might make you think that this political party had nailed diversity and representation in politics. Take the former home secretary Priti Patel as an example: she was the first woman of colour in the job. She was hailed a 'girlboss' and a 'feminist' in many women's magazines for managing to attain her position of power. However, if you peeled back the layers of Patel's work in government (namely

her ‘hostile environment’ policies around immigration), you’d quickly see that the beliefs she holds and policies she enforces are not serving her community, but simply harming them further. Listening to Patel defend the cruel and restrictive Nationality and Borders Bill behind the veil of women’s rights was not only angering but offensive. It’s not a bill that protects women, it’s doing the exact opposite. But Patel knew that placing this bill within the context of women’s rights would spark sympathy from certain sections of the public. This is the crux of what representation politics is, which sits at the heart of some white feminist circles, especially the more liberal ones. It’s this idea that bringing different people in from different ‘diverse’ backgrounds is enough to achieve equality and bring about change in our society. This isn’t to say that representation isn’t important – it can be a powerful tool – but it’s something that’s been co-opted by those in power to reinforce existing structures of oppression behind a mask of superficial progress.

The beginnings and development of intersectionality and its relationship to feminist movements has been explored in much more depth and focus elsewhere in literature, but, for this chapter, I want to focus on white feminism’s specific tunnel vision when it comes to Muslim women.

White feminism operates on the assumption that, for Muslim women, the single and only oppressive force in their lives is their faith, whether they’ve stated this oppression or not. Because of the core belief that Islam is fundamentally violent and ‘anti-feminist’, this feminism develops tunnel vision and cannot focus on any other factors. To white feminists, all the problems that Muslim women may have must be

traced back to Islam. But not all Muslim women are the same. We're not a homogenous group. There are *many* different experiences and attitudes amongst *many* different communities. A Black Muslim woman will have different experiences to a lighter-skinned brown Muslim. A working-class Muslim woman will have different experiences to a middle-class Muslim woman. A queer Muslim will have different experiences to a heterosexual Muslim. A hijab-wearing Muslim woman will have different experiences to a non-hijab-wearing Muslim woman.

I felt a lot of confusion around my identity whilst growing up, which continued into my early twenties. I grew up in the leafy, middle-class suburbs of Sheffield where we were one of few Muslim families in the area, and this brought with it a hyper-awareness of my family and our identity as brown Arab Muslims. I've already mentioned the gendered Islamophobia I experienced as a teenage girl; facing these challenges meant that any barriers or difficulties I experienced were, in my mind, directly linked to my faith. Many years later, I know this mostly isn't true. When I'm sexually harassed on a train or followed home in a car, that isn't my faith oppressing me, that's misogyny. When I push back on a former male colleague making lewd and crass 'jokes' about women, only for him to fire insults at me, that isn't my faith oppressing me, that's misogyny. I may face some forms of racism, but I'm a light-skinned brown woman, so I don't have the lived experiences of a darker-skinned Black Muslim woman. All of these complexities within identity are lost on white feminism, which views sexism as the single most important form of oppression in our society, and which flattens the experiences

of other women, including – perhaps especially – Muslim women. And because the idea around single-issue oppression has become quite a commonly held belief, Muslim women tend to be treated with a one-size-fits-all approach – which has a range of consequences.

### **Muslim women, race and Blackness**

Due to the view that all Muslim women experience the world in the same way and that the source of their oppression is Islam, the racism and colourism that Black Muslim women experience both within and outside of their communities is ignored and allowed to happen again and again. Like all oppressions, Islamophobia is intersectional too; race, for example, has a significant impact on the way Black Muslim women experience gendered Islamophobia. But these nuances are either cast aside or flattened down by white feminists, and the pervasive and deep-rooted colourism in some Muslim communities is rarely afforded the time and space for discussion.

In 2019, The Black Muslim Forum carried out a survey of one hundred Black Muslims in the UK on their experiences of discrimination. They found that 63.4 per cent of Black Muslims felt they did not belong in the UK Muslim community, 53.9 per cent felt they did not belong to their local mosque and 84 per cent felt they did not belong in Islamic societies at their university. Overall, four main themes regularly came up: marriage, culture, anti-Blackness and mosques/madrassahs.<sup>4</sup> When it came to the search for marriage prospects,

respondents talked about the preference for fair skin, finer hair and European features as a common reality within several Black and non-Black cultures. These white European beauty standards have also led to the issue of skin bleaching, with skin lightening products marketed heavily in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Another significant aspect of the Black Muslim Forum's research was how anti-Blackness wasn't seen as a problem in Muslim communities, with racist language allowed to go unchecked.

Haaniyah Angus, a culture writer and founding editor of *labaatan*, shared with me her experience of being a young Black Muslim woman living between the UK and Saudi Arabia as a teenager. The interview can be found in the appendix. 'I struggled with being a teenager because it was already such a weird time moving back and forth. When I came back to Saudi Arabia, it was difficult because yes, I was Muslim. But I was also Black. And I faced a lot of racism and sexual harassment because of this'. She also says that in the UK, there's an intersection between Islamophobia, classism and racism that has 'bred this harsh and cold version of Islam that exists in the West. It's just not what Islam is supposed to be'. In their research, academics Sheymaa Ali Nurein and Humera Iqbal looked into the experiences of young Black Muslim women in the UK and how these experiences are shaped by their intersecting identities. The quote below from one of the research participants, twenty-three-year-old Aisha, sums up the different ways Black Muslim women experience oppressions: 'As a Black person, you are oppressed, you have racism [...] and then as a Muslim you have Islamophobia against you, you have

people with certain agendas against you. As a woman there is patriarchy, people who hate you, misogyny'.<sup>5</sup>

Not only this, but Black Muslim women have to navigate the racism within their own faith communities too – especially in religious settings such as mosques, Islamic schools and university societies. Nurein and Iqbal's research showed that several women said they felt singled out and actively avoided spaces which tended to be dominated by South Asian Muslims. And when they did point out the anti-Blackness in their communities, they were accused of dividing the ummah (Muslim identity or community) or their experiences were dismissed with the 'defence' that Islam prohibits discrimination and racism – which is true, but that doesn't mean that Muslims don't discriminate or harm others. In a 2006 research paper, University of Exeter scholars Sarah Rich and Salah Troudi explored the experiences of five Muslim students at a UK university. In their paper, they argued that multiple variables, including culture and religion, become associated with race to create 'new racisms' which marginalise certain groups.<sup>6</sup> And this argument goes a long way towards explaining how Black Muslims feel that they aren't accepted by either the wider Muslim community or the wider Black community.

The intersectionality of Black Muslim women is often overlooked within Black history too. For example, the African-American activist Malcolm X is a well-known figure in history, but not many people know of the contributions his sister, Ella Collins, made to his life and the wider Nation of Islam movement. Collins converted to Islam before he did, ended up funding his pilgrimage to Mecca and ultimately shaping his worldview, especially during his youth. Then

there was Nana Asma'u, a scholar, poet, author and teacher born in modern-day northern Nigeria in the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> She was a key scholar in the Muslim world, wrote poems in three languages and was an advocate for women's education throughout her life, establishing the *yan-taru* (the associates or disciples) – an organisation of female teachers travelling to rural areas to improve Hausa women's education. Another woman in history who is often forgotten is Hajar, a Black Egyptian woman who was a key figure in Islamic history and forms a pivotal role in the Islamic pilgrimage millions of Muslims make to Mecca each year. It was Hajar – the wife of the prophet Ibrahim and mother of Ismael – who ran between Mount Safa and Mount Marwa seven times in order to find water for her son until a water spring erupted near where she had left Ismael in the desert. She is remembered for her faith, perseverance and devotion, with her experiences serving as a reminder for Muslims to have patience and trust in Allah. And while her journey is a key part of Hajj, Hajar's identity as a Black Muslim woman is regularly erased.

The tragic case of twelve-year-old Shukri Yahya-Abdi is another, more recent, example of how Black Muslim women and girls can be overlooked, neglected and treated differently by those both within and outside of their communities. In the summer of 2019 in Bury, Shukri went missing after school. After going to the school to try and find her daughter, Shukri's mother, Zamzam Ture, reported her missing to the local police. Soon after, a call was made to emergency services about a young girl who appeared to have drowned in the River Irwell. Less than four hours later, Shukri's body was found. At a press conference in August 2019, the family's lawyer Attiq Malik

said that ‘within hours’ of Shukri’s death, Greater Manchester Police had released a press statement that ruled out the possibility of suspicious circumstances surrounding the case.<sup>8</sup>

Since Shukri’s death, campaigners and the family’s legal team have fought for her death to be properly investigated. The Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) opened an investigation after receiving a complaint that alleged officers ‘failed to conduct an effective investigation and prematurely concluded that the death of Shukri Abdi was not suspicious’.<sup>9</sup> The police denied these allegations but, after protests across the country, the family won the right to an inquiry. The 2020 inquest established that on 27 June 2019, Shukri was with four other children before she died. These children, along with a fifth child who witnessed the events, gave evidence via video link to the inquest about their recollections of the incident. What began to unfold is a narrative of bullying (according to Shukri’s family, though no evidence of bullying was found by the school or the inquiry). The coroner also confirmed that she had gone into the river while holding hands with one of the children and moved into deeper water after Shukri was told she would be taught to swim.<sup>10</sup> In December 2020, the inquest concluded that Shukri’s death was accidental. As the journalist Nimo Omer wrote for *gal-dem* at the time:

The death of Shukri Yahya Abdi was a deadly cocktail of social issues. To try and flatten this story and blame one person or institution would fundamentally miss the point. For now, the onus keeps falling on grassroots groups and local communities to speak up for people who don’t have a voice of their own and the fight is only getting more gruelling.<sup>11</sup>

Being Black, female, Muslim and a refugee means that Shukri would already have had to face and navigate multiple layers of structural disadvantage in society, and it seems that these barriers remain present when trying to understand the circumstances that led to her death.

### **Muslim women, class and poverty**

The issue of class oppression is also vital in understanding Muslim women's experiences of the world. The UK's cost of living crisis has affected so many of us, but there are certain communities who have had to deal with the sharper end of the economic crisis. Muslims are falling into poverty at a rate ten times higher than the national average, with 50 per cent of Muslims falling below the poverty line. On top of this, Muslims are over-policed and represent 15 per cent of the prison population (but make up just 6.3 per cent of the UK population).

According to the National Zakat Foundation (NZF), which collects and distributes funds to millions of Muslims across the UK, current figures suggest that women – and in particular women from racialised backgrounds – are being hit the hardest by the cost of living crisis. In 2022, the NZF reported a 90 per cent year-on-year increase in applications to their hardship relief fund.<sup>12</sup> This isn't too surprising when you look at government figures and see that 46 per cent of Muslims live in the bottom 10 per cent of the most deprived Local Authority Districts in England.<sup>13</sup> More recent data from the Muslim Census adds to this bleak picture. They

surveyed 1,568 Muslims aged eighteen to over sixty-five living in the UK to explore their experiences of the cost of living crisis and how the year 2021–2022 impacted various parts of their lives, from their mental well-being to their savings and ability to afford household bills and expenses. The Muslim Census survey found that:

- 54 per cent of Muslims noted some level of difficulty when paying at least one of their household bills since August 2021, whilst 13 per cent experienced difficulty every single month in the same period.
- 65 per cent of Muslims have had to take out some form of debt to accommodate their everyday costs and bills since August 2021.
- 19 per cent of British Muslims have relied on food banks in 2022, with the majority of those (65 per cent) using food banks within the last three months.
- Where 45 per cent of Muslim men experienced a reduction in their savings, Muslim women fared substantially worse, with 57 per cent indicating that their savings had been cut in the last year.<sup>14</sup>

From racial and religious discrimination to domestic abuse, violence and more, Muslim women are particularly at risk, and statutory and government provision is simply not enough to support them. It's one of the reasons why the Muslim women-led media organisation Amaliah worked with the NZF to launch its Muslim Women Zakat Fund in March 2024. The partnership aims to help those facing hardship across housing, employment, healthcare, education and

more. As written by Audre Lorde and quoted in the first sentence at the launch of the fund by Amaliah's CEO, Nafisa Bakkar: 'The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. But as Muslims, we have been given a whole set of divine tools by Allah to build alternative realities that uphold community, justice and care'.<sup>15</sup>

I sat down with Bakkar to talk more about the Muslim Women Zakat Fund and how Amaliah's work with NZF naturally evolved into a fund that would support fellow Muslim sisters living in the UK. The interview can be found in the appendix. 'The cost of living has hit our communities hard, and that's when you consider we were already facing a lot of socio-economic issues. And then when you think about how gender intersects with class and poverty, the picture becomes bleak', Bakkar said. It's this intersection between gender and class that tends to be completely overlooked by white feminism, ignoring the fact that poverty affects the lives and experiences of so many Muslim women – both here in the UK and globally. She explains that we tend to forget that charity and zakat are needed here at home too: 'This partnership is really about how we view our social welfare within our communities and that solidarity, especially with Muslim women'.

When you consider the economic experiences faced by many Muslim women and then combine them with border violence, it becomes even more challenging for Muslims – especially as many migrants who come to the UK are not permitted to work or have access to proper state welfare support. The 'no recourse to public funds' limitation on some visas means that many migrants who come to the UK to seek refuge and asylum must live on the very basics. The Home

Office's 'hostile environment' policies have thrown migrants of colour into poverty and destitution because of their inability to access housing, employment and healthcare, and, as the immigration process has grown more bureaucratic and more expensive, many migrants have been left in a state of limbo. Due to the UK's foreign interventions in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Libya, many migrants who escape war, conflict and violence in these countries and come to the UK are of a Muslim background. But it isn't their religion that's causing them to experience oppression: it is economic hardships, class struggles and state and border violence.

By only centring faith in the oppression of Muslim women, white feminism is allowing for our continued oppression and discrimination by other forces – such as economic factors, misogyny and racism – because it can't see past the single-issue oppression it has imposed on us. Muslim women's experiences of racism and class don't fit into the narrative and stereotype of the 'weak' and 'submissive' Muslim woman that white feminism constantly imposes on us. If Islam is not the perceived oppressive force, the experiences of Muslim women end up neglected and ignored. It also means that white feminism would need to look *a lot* closer to home to find the structures of oppression, something which will most likely be very uncomfortable. It's that discomfort which festers into fragility and defensiveness in white feminists, and which then turns into excuses like 'I have a Muslim friend'.

It's only when oppression is viewed as directly related to Islam and faith that white feminists end up taking notice and may begin to consider platforming the experiences of Muslim women. This is what allows for systemic violence – like

domestic abuse, border violence and racist attacks – to continue happening to Muslim women without consequences. To understand the complex and nuanced experiences of Muslim women, you cannot only focus on our faith. It flattens our lived experiences into something they're not. White feminism needs to take a much deeper look at the wider structural factors in society that cause Muslim women harm, looking past the single-issue oppression lens and at the bigger picture. Because if it doesn't, it is only reinforcing those very oppressive structures and moving attention away from where it's really needed: racism, poverty and the cost of living crisis affecting Muslim women's lives.



### 3

## Liberation politics and the veil

*‘Muslim women are both invisible  
and hyper-visible’*

The way Muslim women dress has always been a source of debate and judgement, and their clothing has become increasingly politicised over the years. A veiled Muslim woman is seen as oppressed and silenced. That’s before she’s even uttered a word. The hijab and the niqab bring with them a multitude of racist and Islamophobic stereotypes. She is submissive. She is uneducated. She does not speak English. These are stereotypes that we have seen all too often in how the media represents Muslim women, both in fiction and non-fiction formats.

In *Reel Bad Arabs*, author Jack Shaheen researched media representations of Arabs and revealed three main characteristics or stereotypes of Arab women. Two of these stereotypes are also fitting when it comes to looking at the representation of Muslim women in general. The first stereotype Shaheen identified was that of the ‘oppressed wife’. She is completely covered, silent, obeys her husband and does not leave the

home unless with her husband. The second stereotype is the ‘oversexualised harem maiden’, which does not always refer to religion or faith but can still sometimes be used to stereotype some Muslim women. And the third and last stereotype is that of the ‘female terrorist’. She is the opposite of the ‘oppressed wife’ in that she has a voice and free will, but this is used for religious fanaticism, violence and ‘terrorism’ against the West.<sup>1</sup>

*Homeland*, an award-winning TV show, has been widely criticised as being ridden with Islamophobic tropes, particularly in terms of how Muslim women are depicted. In *Homeland*, we see regular depictions of Muslim women as the ‘oppressed wife’ or ‘female terrorist’. Claire Danes, who plays a CIA agent named Carrie, acknowledged the criticisms of Islamophobia and said in a 2020 *Guardian* interview:

I get it. I think it’s tricky and kind of inherently problematic, right? There are a lot of brown people in our story who are doing really bad things, and there aren’t enough opportunities to create a more balanced portrait of that demographic. That was always going to be a point of vulnerability for us, but I also think that our heroes are really problematic and really flawed. We’re wrestling with some pretty challenging questions and ideas and those two sides of various arguments were personified by our characters.<sup>2</sup>

In the first season, which aired in October 2011, there is a scene where Carrie is speaking to an imam. He tells his fully covered and silent wife to wait upstairs while he speaks to Carrie. Without a word, she leaves the scene, and only returns

later to let Carrie out of their home, where again she does not speak a word. This is entirely typical of how many people view Muslim women, which these stereotypes only serve to reinforce even further.

If Muslim women are not oppressed and silent, then they are violent and complicit in ‘terrorism’, which is exactly what viewers saw in the hit BBC TV show *The Bodyguard*. Nearly a decade after *Homeland* first aired on TV, *The Bodyguard* hit our screens in August 2018 and it seemed very little had changed when it comes to Muslim representation. From the outset, we see a hijab-wearing woman, Nadia, hiding in the toilet of a train about to set off a bomb, fulfilling the ‘female terrorist’ stereotype. The use of the hijab is key here, as it instantly tells the audience all they need to know about what’s about to happen, i.e. a ‘terrorist’ plot, due to how intrinsically connected Islam and ‘terrorism’ now are in people’s minds. After the protagonist, David Budd, attempts to talk Nadia out of setting off the bomb, it quickly becomes clear that she is actually a victim who needs saving, and the stereotype evolves into that of the ‘oppressed wife’. The audience then finds out in the final episode of the show that Nadia is in fact the ‘terrorist’ mastermind behind the whole operation – a move back to the ‘female terrorist’ stereotype. This is not an empowering or radical twist. It is simply switching between two stereotypes.

The common thread in the Islamophobic tropes used to represent Muslim women is that the woman is almost always wearing visibly Islamic clothing, whether that is a hijab or the full covering of the niqab. She is instantly identifiable as different, the alien Other. But it is a double-edged sword, as the

hijab is not only used to signify Otherness, but also, through its removal, is a method to signal assimilation into the rules of Western society and move closer to whiteness. The removal of the hijab has been used as a plotline in many media depictions of Muslim women, but a prominent example is Netflix's drama series *Elite*. The TV show includes a Muslim student, Nadia, who grapples with feeling like an outsider at her private school, both as a hijab-wearing girl and as a scholarship student. She is portrayed as quiet and timid, until her school demands she remove her hijab. Even though Nadia chooses to remove her hijab, the moment she stops wearing it is distinguished as a moment of liberation and 'freedom' in *Elite*. She begins to rebel against her 'oppressive' parents and religion and, without her hijab, quickly captures the romantic attention of a boy, as she is now seen as more Westernised and closer to whiteness and, so, more worthy of attention.

The image and story of *Elite*'s Nadia and all these other stereotypes I have explored are pushed to the forefront by white feminists. Theirs is a feminism that is more focused on chanting 'free the nipple' and 'pussy power' at women's marches or advocating unshaven armpits, whilst simultaneously viewing any form of covering as oppressive. A veiled Muslim woman doesn't fit into what white feminism views as a 'liberated' or 'modern' woman. The wearing of the hijab or niqab is not seen by them as an active choice made by a Muslim woman, but as a choice made for her through being forced to cover up, either by religion or by the men in her life. She is always the victim.

The actor Anya Taylor-Joy attended the world premiere of *Dune 2* in February 2024 dressed in a white pleated silk dress

styled with a translucent white hooded veil, all designed by Dior haute couture. Her outfit was reminiscent of a Muslim burqa and hijab and Taylor-Joy was criticised for dressing similar to a Muslim woman on the red carpet. And the criticisms were not wrong. For Taylor-Joy, this was a statement fashion look – one that got people talking and attracted the attention of columns in magazines. However, as a non-Muslim woman, she can wear an outfit that looks like traditional Islamic clothing for an evening and then go back to her reality. It appears that when a woman like Taylor-Joy wears a veil it's a cool and stylish fashion choice, but when a Muslim woman wears it, it's viewed as oppression. It's another way for white women to appropriate another woman's culture or religion for aesthetic or beauty purposes whilst ensuring that marginalised women remain structurally oppressed.

In fact, some feminists seem to see Muslim women as being in direct opposition to their values, with a lot of their thinking around the inherent patriarchal nature of Islam being based on how Muslim women present themselves. The campaign group Femen is a good example. The group, which describes itself as 'an international women's movement of brave topless female activists' and a 'special force of feminism', uses nudity to play on the objectification of women's bodies to capture media attention and includes the fight against 'political Islam' as one of its objectives. In a 2013 interview with *The Guardian*, Femen leader Inna Shevchenko said:

I will never have a discussion about Muslim feminism because it doesn't exist. It cannot exist. It's oxymoronic. It's Islam,

clearly, saying women must be covered for their dignity [...] Once any monotheistic religion is starting, feminism is finished. You can forget about women's rights or human rights in general.<sup>3</sup>

In the same year, the group created a 'topless jihad day' as a gesture of solidarity for a Tunisian woman, Amina Tyler, who was threatened with death by Iman Almi Adel, then leader of Tunisia's Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, for exposing her breasts online. Femen called for allies to 'come to the embassy of the Republic of Tunisia and protest topless, with "My Body Against Islamism!" written on your body'.<sup>4</sup> During some of these demonstrations, women wore fake beards, hijabs, burned tawhid flags and pretended to pray – ridiculing Muslims in the process. In September 2015, two Femen activists stormed the stage of a French Muslim conference, ripping off the abayas they'd worn as disguises and exposing their naked torsos painted with slogans that included 'I am my own prophet' and 'no one makes me submit'.<sup>5</sup> The conference itself had already been subjected to a 6,000-strong petition due to the participation of a few of the male speakers and their misogynistic views on the role of women in Islam.

In theory, these women were attempting to take a stand against sexism and misogyny, but there's more to these types of campaigns than first meets the eye. Why do Femen relate their own sexual liberation to the emancipation of Muslim women? Why do these activists assume that Muslim women do not have a voice of their own to fight for their own rights? Nobody is disputing that misogyny exists in Muslim communities, but

protests such as this reinforce the binary view that you're either a Muslim who believes women are inherently less than men or a feminist who hates Islam. Groups like Femen and conservative Muslims who embody misogyny are both sides of the same coin: they both reinforce the idea of Islam being a sexist and violent religion. They assume that Muslim communities are monolithic rather than diverse like any other group of people. And one thing these protests do, above all else: they completely erase Muslim women from the picture. A quick search of images from Femen's protests show a sea of white women, but very rarely is there a Muslim woman in sight. Femen doesn't seem to be extending a hand of solidarity to Muslim women, but rather reinforcing the idea that we do not have a place in their 'feminism'.

In response to Femen's topless jihad day, 'Muslimah Pride Day' was launched by Sofia Ahmed, which involved an open letter to the feminist group and photos posted on social media in which Muslim women were seen holding placards with slogans such as: 'Nudity does not liberate me – and I do not need saving' and 'shame on you, Femen, hijab is my right'. Organiser Sofia Ahmed wrote on Facebook at the time: 'Muslimah (female Muslim) pride is about connecting with your Muslim identity and reclaiming our collective voice. Let's show the world that we oppose Femen and their use of Muslim women to reinforce Western imperialism'.<sup>6</sup>

The concept of empowerment through women's bodies (naked protests, bra burning, hairy armpits, etc.) has been around since the late 1960s and politicised a woman's body in the pursuit of women's liberation. In what's been dubbed 'the sexual revolution', important headway was made in normalising

sexuality, attitudes towards it and personal relationships in general. But, as valid as these movements were in advancing feminist thinking, they served to only advance a particular kind of feminism: that of white womanhood. The sexual revolution primarily occurred in the West and didn't account for the experiences of other women, including Muslim women.

As feminism has progressed over the years and entered mainstream thinking in many countries, it has meant that many women are now able to wear what they choose. But, in the context of feminism, this choice is now commonly understood as equating to women wearing less. This is a white Western notion of womanhood. With the days of British women having to cover up from the neck to the ankles in the 1890s long gone, women wearing less is viewed as a celebration of the hard-earned liberation won by the generations of old. But this form of womanhood has been exported and imposed on all women *all* around the world. *All* women are expected to adhere to this version of white womanhood and feminism, with women who are perceived as rejecting it being branded 'anti-feminists' or even 'woman haters'. And, because white feminists have created and internalised this view, they equate Muslim women covering up with anti-feminism.

This idea that Muslim women are inherently anti-feminist has meant they have been completely excluded from mainstream feminist spaces. And yet Muslim women are also spoken for by white women. They are excluded, but their perceived experiences are not. Muslim women are both invisible – their voices completely ignored – and hyper-visible – they have become a symbol of oppression. They are simultaneously scrutinised and ignored, never more so than by white feminists.

Muslim women are told what their problems are, what their lived experiences are like and, subsequently, decisions are made for them to ‘better’ their lives. All without them ever even saying a word. And most of the ‘oppressive’ experiences that have been ascribed to Muslim women are hinged on their veiling and covering up. The concept of women choosing to wear the veil is completely disregarded by white feminism, as their perceived liberation is entirely dependent on the removal of the veil. And so, that choice becomes irrelevant.

This is not to say that some women aren’t oppressed through the veil. There are instances where Muslim women are punished for the clothes they wear or for the lack of hijab or niqab. In July 2009, thirteen Sudanese women, including journalist Lubna al-Hussein, were arrested in Khartoum, Sudan, for wearing trousers in public.<sup>7</sup> They were charged and convicted of breaching Article 152 of the Sudanese criminal law, which prohibits dressing indecently in public. Most of the women were issued with fines, but Lubna al-Hussein refused to plead guilty or to pay a fine, not wanting to give the verdict any kind of legitimacy. Instead, she chose to remain in prison. She was later freed due to international pressure on the Sudanese government. This has been known to happen elsewhere too. In Saudi Arabia, women’s clothing and appearance is governed by a strict interpretation of Islamic law and enforced by the Saudi Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, better known as the religious police. Women who are viewed as exposing too much skin or wearing too much makeup are harassed and intimidated by the religious police. In November 2016, Malak al-Shehri was arrested for tweeting a picture of herself wearing a bright-coloured dress

in Riyadh and, more importantly, without a hijab or abaya (a body-length loose robe).<sup>8</sup> She was charged and detained with cyber-crimes and encouraged others to also take a stand against the kingdom's dress codes. She was released from jail after five days, and the photo was deleted.

However, the key thing to note about these examples is that they are not the universal experience for Muslim women. Not all Muslim women are forced, either by the state or their families, into covering up. And not all Muslim women are punished or condemned when they do not cover up. The danger with many of these types of cases is that they are lifted and isolated outside of their contexts and used to 'prove' that Islam is a backwards, barbaric religion, that Muslim women are oppressed and that the hijab is the pinnacle of this oppression. And some of the principal perpetrators of this are white feminists. They take cases like al-Hussein's and al-Shehri's and they turn them into symbols, irrefutable evidence that Muslim women need saving. And who is it who will be saving them? White feminists, of course.

The disregard of Muslim women's choice is indicative of a wider mindset that embodies white feminism, and that is the mindset of the white saviour.

### **What's the relationship between the white saviour complex and the veil?**

The white saviour mentality has deep roots in colonialism and neo-colonialism. It is exactly how white colonisers framed their violent invasions of people's lands, by claiming

that these were barbaric and unintelligent peoples who didn't know any better and needed to be taught how to live a more 'civilised' life. Civilised like the West. And so, through war and violence, the coloniser's culture and lifestyle were imposed upon a huge proportion of the Global South. The white saviour mentality was used to justify the slave trade, as well as the colonisation by countless Western nations of vast areas of Africa, Asia and South America for many centuries.

Of course, white people today may be highly critical of what their countries did in the past during the height of colonial rule, but the white saviour mindset still very much exists. It has simply been repackaged into a more 'acceptable' neo-colonial way of thinking. It still pushes the false and one-dimensional narrative that people of colour are in need of help and that their countries are barren lands seething with poverty and misery. White saviours are propping up the continued dehumanisation and infantilisation of billions of people in the Global South, as well as the colonial violence of their ancestors.

It is just another way for the West to establish and uphold white supremacy and maintain this long-held power imbalance on the world stage. And it is a mentality that is still regularly invoked today, whether through governments becoming involved in foreign conflicts or the rise of voluntourism. Voluntourism is the merging of volunteering and tourism, where people will travel to other countries (typically as part of a charity or organisation) to help communities in that country. Even though, on the face of it, this sounds like people trying to do some good, it is simply an extension of the colonial view of 'non-white' countries. These are people who have likely never interacted with the communities they

are trying to help, so the help they are giving may be completely misguided or, worse, forcefully imposed.

It is white organisations going into African countries to volunteer and help poor communities, but without ever actually engaging with those communities. These are communities who are told how to improve their lives by people they've never met or spoken to. This is exactly what the UK charity Comic Relief was accused of in 2019 when an image of Stacey Dooley holding a Black child hit the front pages. Dooley had posted the photo on Instagram with the caption 'OB. SESSSSSSSSSED' and a broken heart emoji. It was quickly criticised by many, including Labour MP David Lammy, for its white saviourism. In a BBC interview, Lammy said that 'Comic Relief is a 20-year-old formula that asks comedians to perform and sends celebrities – most often white – out to Africa, and that image evokes for lots of ethnic minorities in Britain, a colonial image of a white beautiful heroine holding a black child, with no agency, no parents in sight'.<sup>9</sup> Speaking about the Comic Relief row at Hay Festival in 2019, the documentary-maker said she would do the same again and that 'Ultimately, the only people I care about are the people on the ground. I was texting them yesterday. They're very happy with how we behaved. We had consent from the family to use the picture. On my part I feel OK with what we did'.<sup>10</sup> Dooley's case is not a unique one at all, as Comic Relief has been sending white celebrities to African countries for years. But what Dooley's photo managed to do is encapsulate the problem with the white saviour approach to helping people. It is self-serving 'help' that is imposed on communities or groups, with the expectation of gratitude, without those

communities ever asking for the help. And there is no better example of this in action than in how white feminists view and treat Muslim women.

White feminism has a white saviour mentality embedded at its very core and the continued effort to 'liberate' Muslim women is based on Othering them. Liberation politics will not work if white feminists do not first drive home this image of the Muslim woman as the uncivilised Other. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said writes about the use of Othering by the West.<sup>11</sup> He explains how the concept of Orientalism was created through the power and domination of one culture, the Occident (the West), over another, the Orient (the East). The West viewed itself as enlightened, forward-thinking and educated, whereas the East was viewed as the mirror opposite: backwards, primitive and barbaric. As well as the use of colonial stereotypes and imaginative geographies, this dominance by the West involved the dehumanisation and 'alienification' of the East. The constant use of dehumanising stereotypes and language successfully created this image of the Other and instilled it in a Western audience – an image that supported further colonisation and imperialism, the ramifications of which are still in full force today.

The Othering of the Orient has developed into the Othering of Islam and its cultures, with the symbol of the Other most commonly being the Muslim hijabi woman. In her book *Feminism Interrupted*, Lola Olufemi writes, in reference to Muslim women, that 'the civility of whiteness is contrasted with the barbarism of the Other'.<sup>12</sup> Islam in general is seen by the West as being in direct opposition to civility. It is an idea that stretches back centuries but is also very much prevalent today,

albeit in different ways. Islam has always been viewed as a violent and savage religion, but today that violence is framed through the lens of religious ‘extremism’ and ‘terrorism’. The linking of Islam and ‘terrorism’ is deeply ingrained in the Western psyche, the ramifications of which have hugely contributed to the continued Othering of Islam and Muslims. Another common perception of Muslim countries is that they are undemocratic and, therefore, must be uncivilised and ‘not like us’, as if the Western construction of democracy is the only way to live and function as a society. We only have to look at the US election of Donald Trump to see that Western democracies don’t always behave like a democracy.

There is no greater and more impactful image of the Other than that of a veiled Muslim woman. It is an image that has been regularly used in the West, especially in the European context, to drive home the message that Muslims are inherently different and alien to life in the West. An image of a veiled Muslim woman is perceived to be in direct opposition to everything that the West supposedly stands for – from equality to freedom of expression. A key example of this played out in Algeria in the late 1950s. While fighting to maintain their colonial rule, the French made veils a significant target in their propaganda. A French propaganda poster was produced that showed two faces: one veiled and one unveiled. The image was accompanied by the slogan, ‘Are you not pretty? Then unveil yourself!’ It was an attempt by the French to show that Muslim women had chosen ‘freedom’ which, ironically, did not mean freedom from colonial rule but instead freedom from the oppressive forces of Islam. Alongside this poster, the French also staged mass ‘unveiling’ ceremonies, where Algerian women

would have their veils removed to stand in solidarity with their 'French sisters'. This was extremely tactical propaganda; France knew that it could not win this war and maintain its rule without Algerian and Muslim women.

Another example of the rhetoric of white feminists being used to further violent colonial rule is the case of the British rule of Egypt, from the late nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth, and Lord Cromer, the British consul general in Egypt from 1883 to 1907. Cromer was as typical as colonisers come and was constantly critical of Islam and the 'mind of the Oriental'. But the aspect of Islam he took most issue with was the treatment of women, becoming a self-appointed liberator of Muslim women. He saw Islam as the source of degradation of women, with its veiling and segregation, and said that 'Egyptians should be persuaded or forced to become civilised by disposing of the veil'.<sup>13</sup> However, the irony is that Cromer's mission to 'save' Muslim women did not reflect attitudes on home soil at all. Back in England, Cromer was a founding member of the Men's League, an organisation that opposed the suffragette movement and their fight for equal rights for women. He was actively opposed to women's rights and their goal for equality, which makes his comments around Muslim women that much more transparent in their self-serving motives.

In *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance*, Fadwa El Guindi writes that colonialism incorporated this language of feminism and used the issue of women's position in Islamic societies as the focus of its attack.<sup>14</sup> Men like Cromer, who were inherently anti-feminist, used the rhetoric of white feminism to attack Egyptian men for upholding a system and religion that

discriminated against women. It was an attack that appeared to be one of morality but, underneath the surface, it was an insidious tactic to stoke divisions and exert dominance. 'This posture of subversion and appropriation of the colonised culture can be interpreted as the colonising power's attempt to legitimise its own domination and justify its occupation policies', writes El Guindi in her book. Leila Ahmed, in *Women and Gender in Islam*, also explains how white feminism was used to uphold these systems of power and justify violence. She writes that 'whether in the hands of patriarchal men or feminists, the ideas of Western feminism essentially functioned to morally justify the attack on native societies and to support the notion of comprehensive superiority of Europe'.<sup>15</sup>

And when you delve into how colonial rule affected Muslim women in Egypt, it becomes abundantly clear that Cromer, and British colonial rule in general, was not a 'saviour' of Muslim women at all. If anything, the rights of Muslim women deteriorated under colonial rule. European involvement in Egypt's (and other nations') economy had a disproportionate impact on working-class women, as the industries they were most likely to be working in, mainly textile production, collapsed due to the exporting of raw goods and materials. Many women lost their employment, income and, effectively, a large part of their independence. The British also drastically reduced the education and training opportunities for Muslim women, with Cromer placing restrictions on schools and raising school fees, which effectively locked out Muslim girls. Cromer also restricted the training of women in medical fields to just midwifery, arguing that, in the civilised world, medicine was a field for men. British colonial rule meant the imposition of British

law and the removal of Islamic law, which meant Muslim women lost many of the rights that Islam had always given them. Under British law at the time, married women were denied any legal or property rights outside of their husbands'. However, in Islam, women are given many of these rights, including financial independence from their husbands. But under colonial rule, all these rights disappeared.

After decades of colonial rule by the British, however, Muslim women began to reclaim their power and identities through the act of veiling. Egypt in the 1970s saw the modern secular clothing that had been popularised by the British replaced with Islamic clothing. But this was not just about a change in appearance. As El Guindi writes, Muslim women's movement back to traditional Islamic clothing, including the veil, was 'encoded in an affirmation of an Islamic identity and morality and a rejection of Western materialism, consumerism, commercialism, and values'.<sup>16</sup> Arguably, it was also a rejection of Western feminism, which came to be seen as the tool of the coloniser. Ahmed writes that Muslim women saw white feminism as an 'instrument of colonial domination' and an 'ally of colonial interests'.<sup>17</sup> As well as rejecting the colonial narrative of women, in which the veil epitomised Islamic inferiority, Muslim women were also rejecting the images and perceptions that white feminism had imposed upon them.

'Winning over' Muslim women, like the French and British attempted to do in Algeria and Egypt, is not just confined to history. A modern example is the case of Rahaf Mohammed, a Saudi Arabian woman whose name hit the headlines in January 2019.<sup>18</sup> Mohammed flew to Thailand and locked herself in a hotel room, pleading on social media for help to

avoid deportation back to Saudi Arabia. She feared that her deportation and a return to her family could lead to her being killed, claiming that she had been physically and psychologically abused by them. In one instance, Mohammed says that her family locked her up for six months for cutting her hair short, because it is forbidden for a woman to dress like a man. There have been several prominent cases like Mohammed's, including the case of Dubai's Princess Latifa.<sup>19</sup> Why do these cases attract so much international attention and outrage? This is not to suggest that what happened to these women is not abhorrent or deserving of attention, but more a question of why the West chose to pay attention to *these* cases especially.

The answer is in the combination of a white saviour complex and the perceived Other of Islam, in particular, the Muslim woman. Rahaf Mohammed and Princess Latifa are both Muslim women (or formerly Muslim) who argued that violence had been inflicted on them by their families. But it is the religiosity of this violence that attracts the attention of the Western world, because it fits with the barbaric and violent narrative they have constructed around Islam, as well as their perceived single-issue oppression. And so the need to help or 'save' these women intensifies because it can also serve a purpose. It means the Western world can highlight these types of cases and say, 'Look at how they treat the women in their society!', whilst reinforcing Islamophobic, racist and colonial stereotypes.

Muslim women escaping their families, and sometimes their religion, are also seen as 'acceptable' victims to white feminists and the Western world, as they are viewed as

rejecting Islam, and so assimilating to whiteness. And this is especially the case if it is a Muslim woman who chooses to not cover up or wear the hijab. This is exactly what happened in Mohammed's case. After being granted asylum in Canada, she renounced Islam. This rejection of Islam and the Other, coupled with the fact that she does not wear the hijab, meant that the West saw her as closer to whiteness, and so 'one of us'. Nothing encapsulated this more than the images of Mohammed being met at Toronto's airport by then Canadian foreign minister Chrystia Freeland – a white woman. Rahaf Mohammed stepping off the plane and into the arms of a white woman perfectly signified both the white saviour mentality of the Canadian government and Mohammed's successful assimilation into the accepted notion of 'modern' womanhood. She was no longer the Other.

### **What are the consequences of white feminism's stereotypical view of the veil?**

The gendered Islamophobia at the heart of white feminism is inherently violent. The negative connotations and symbolism around the hijab that white feminists have created and upheld has meant that Muslim women's appearance has become increasingly politicised in the West. This is especially true in the European context, which will be investigated in more detail in Chapter 7. This politicisation of a religious choice that Muslim women have made has real consequences for them, which is highlighted in a recent EU ruling that allows employers to ban women from wearing the hijab in the

workplace.<sup>20</sup> It is state-sanctioned gendered Islamophobia that once again discriminates against Muslim women simply for expressing their faith.

In the UK, the hijab may not be criminalised or controlled under law like in many of its European counterparts, but that has not stopped those in government from publicly ridiculing Muslim women who wear the burqa. In 2018, Boris Johnson, the UK's former prime minister, famously described Muslim women wearing the niqab as 'letterboxes' and 'ninjas' in his column for the *Daily Telegraph*.<sup>21</sup> Just words? Well, these words were followed by a 375 per cent increase in hate crimes targeting Muslims the week after the article was published, with a large proportion of victims being Muslim women. In fact, 42 per cent of offline Islamophobic incidents 'directly referenced Boris Johnson and/or the language used in his column'.<sup>22</sup> White feminism has justified and normalised the gendered Islamophobia that Muslim women are constantly subjected to and our leaders are taking full advantage. Violence targeted at Muslim women is seen as an unfortunate consequence of their perceived unwillingness to assimilate into Western society. It's a form of violence that is so normalised that public figures like Boris Johnson feel entirely comfortable writing comments that are deeply offensive to Islam in a national publication. A 2021 inquiry into Islamophobia within the Conservative Party found that Johnson's comments 'give the impression to many that the party and its leadership are insensitive to Muslim communities'.<sup>23</sup> Johnson knows full well that he will face little to no consequence for his actions.

In fact, whenever a 'terrorist' incident occurs which has Islamic 'extremism' at its heart, Muslim communities face an

increased threat of Islamophobic harassment and violence. In the week after the 2013 murder of Lee Rigby in south-east London, almost 200 Islamophobic incidents were reported to the Tell MAMA hotline.<sup>24</sup> The organisation also recorded 141 hate crime incidents after the 2017 Manchester Arena bombing, as well as an increase after the London Bridge attacks a few weeks later. The mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, released figures at the time that showed a fivefold increase in Islamophobic attacks since the London Bridge attacks and a 40 per cent increase in racist incidents too.<sup>25</sup> But even when it isn't 'terrorism', certain global conflicts can also have an effect on the lives of Muslims. Since the Israeli state launched its genocidal offensive against Palestinians in Gaza in October 2023, Islamophobic hate crimes in the UK are on the rise once again. Solidarity with the Palestinian people is not exclusive to Muslims but, because of how this violence has been framed for decades – as a Muslims versus Jews 'conflict' – any criticism or backlash tends to be targeted towards Muslims. According to ITV News, since 7 October 2023, there has been a tenfold increase in anti-Muslim incidents targeted at schools and universities and a 600 per cent rise in incidents including verbal and physical abuse, as well as vandalism of mosques.<sup>26</sup> In one of its reports, Tell MAMA found that Muslim women were more likely to 'bear the brunt' of Islamophobic attacks, particularly if they were wearing Islamic clothing – more than a third of victims were visibly Muslim women.<sup>27</sup> Some Muslim women are even resorting to changing their appearance, wearing caps or beanie hats instead of hijabs, to prevent being targeted and attacked.

In recent years, I've personally become more worried and

anxious about Islamophobia and how it affects me, but mostly my family and friends. I've sadly grown used to comments thrown at me telling me I'm a 'terrorist' on the bus home from a night out, to 'go home' in my social media comments and 'stop speaking Arabic' when talking to my mother whilst shopping in town. Because it isn't just the veil that's been politicised, but language too. Even though I'm making more of an effort not to reduce or minimise myself or my mother tongue in public settings, I have found myself speaking Arabic less and less. All because of that one incident. I answered the phone to my mum for one of our regular catch-ups and I sometimes slip into Arabic when speaking to her. We were chatting about my outfit for an upcoming wedding when a man – who was clearly sitting nearby listening to me on the phone – came over and told me that if I chose to live in the UK, I should be speaking English. 'We don't want any of your funny language in this country', he said to me. I quickly hung up on my mum and walked off in shock and tears.

One of the worst parts of this incident – and so many like it – is that I can't help but imagine what would happen if it escalated into something more violent. It's always the immediate thought I have whenever I get verbally abused: well, at least I wasn't physically hurt or harmed. It's not that these comments don't have an effect on me, but they no longer shock me. When my family and I chat about going on holiday, we have to think about which countries we might consider relatively 'safe' for us as Muslims so that we're not harassed *too* much. The person I worry about the most by far, however, is my mum. She is a hijab-wearing Muslim woman, which means she's automatically identified as Muslim in public settings. To people

who are set on inciting hatred and violence against Muslims, she is an extremely visible target. Muslim women have been verbally abused, spat at, had their homes damaged, hijabs ripped off and been physically assaulted – some on a near-daily basis. The stories I've heard from loved ones is enough to make your blood boil with rage, especially when very few non-Muslims in these situations do anything to help.

Ruby Hamad writes about how white women and their feminism uphold the structures of white supremacy,<sup>28</sup> and that has never been truer than in the context of Islamophobia. The Othering of Muslim women into a generalised image of oppression, submissiveness and silence is violence. Adopting a white saviour mindset when it comes to the lives of Muslim women and imposing a Western form of feminism on them is violence. And using the hijab, and Muslim women, as a political pawn to further ulterior motives, especially by the state, is violence. The veil being seen as a symbol of oppression has been rejected by many Muslim women, but this rejection needs to spread wider into non-Muslim feminist circles too. Because, as long as the veil is thought of as oppressive and anti-feminist, then Muslim women will continue to be Othered and isolated from large parts of society. The oppressive force is not the veil, but the exclusionary and limited form of white Western feminism that views and treats Muslim women as second-class women.

## The sexualisation of Muslim women and the veil

The hijab has not only been politicised to use Muslim women as pawns in political and social contexts, but it has also been sexualised, with white feminism reinforcing the idea of liberation being tied up with the removal of the veil. Muslim women are seen as lacking sexual agency, and so a significant part of our ‘liberation’ lies with us showcasing our sexuality and, ultimately, becoming sexually available to men. A ‘good’ Muslim woman is seen as someone who doesn’t wear a hijab, dresses in typically Western clothing and is sex positive. In other words, we are only accepted if we assimilate to white feminism’s idea of womanhood – it’s only then that it can even begin to consider us as ‘free’.

However, feminism hasn’t always centred on sex positivity. A part of second-wave feminism, the sexual revolution of the 1970s – a movement that challenged traditional societal behaviours related to sexuality and relationships – changed the way many Western societies thought and approached sex. The Women’s Liberation Movement (WLM) of the 1970s and 1980s fought for women’s right to sexual autonomy, fuelled by the question: who gets to determine the ways in which women are sexual? But the WLM were also advocating for other changes, including free contraception and abortion, twenty-four-hour nurseries, ending violence against women and pushing for equal education and equal pay for equal work.<sup>29</sup> Yet it was the sexual revolution that made the headlines most of the time.

After years of protests and campaigns, a cultural change began to occur. Not only did the Equal Pay Act 1970 become law but premarital sex became the norm, contraception

became more widely available (particularly with the introduction of the birth control pill) and the US ruling of *Roe v Wade* legalised the right to abortion. These changes became central components of feminism over the years and the sex positive feminism we know today owes everything to the sexual revolution.

The mid-2010s saw the rise of the naked selfie as a form of feminist protest. A 2016 *Vogue Australia* article claimed that ‘naked selfies are the new feminism’ and included five famous women who showed that ‘being a feminist doesn’t have anything to do with one’s physical appearance’.<sup>30</sup> These women included Emily Ratajkowski, Bella Thorne and Kim Kardashian, with Ratajkowski saying in a *WWD* interview, ‘My response to people saying I post oversexualized images is that it’s my choice and there’s an ownership and empowerment through them’.<sup>31</sup> However, even when feminism isn’t focused on sex positivity, it can still be exclusionary for anyone other than white middle-class women. For example, the No More Page 3 campaign wanted to remove topless images of models from the *Sun* newspaper. But this campaign gave little to no thought to the models involved in the imagery and the income they would lose, as well as failing to understand or even acknowledge the sexist nature and legacy of the rest of the *Sun*’s pages.

This isn’t to say that sex positivity is a bad thing. It’s brought huge amounts of progress with it. It gave women the right to choose what to do with their bodies and not be shamed or punished for these choices. Most women can now choose whether to get married or have children, we can wear whatever we want and date whomever we want. A problem

arises, however, when sex positivity is seen as the *only* way to be a liberated woman, without any consideration of context. The centring of sex positivity in feminism excludes swathes of other women, erasing their narratives and understandings of sex – including Muslim women. Speaking to *Vice* in 2015, filmmaker Jade Jackman, who produced *Exploiting It*, a film that explores the effects of Islamophobia on Muslim women, said: ‘People almost fetishize the hijab. One thing that came up in filming is how Muslim women often get asked inappropriate questions about their sex lives, because the perception is that they don’t have sex’.<sup>32</sup> The writer Haaniyah Angus tells me of her own experience with wearing the hijab and experiencing sexual harassment:

I used to wear the hijab when I was a teenager and a young adult and stopped wearing it at twenty-two. One thing I’ve noticed since taking it off is that I’ve been harassed less. It’s not that the sexual harassment doesn’t exist, it’s that it’s changed. When I wore the hijab, it was a lot of white men harassing me in public. It’s clear to me that being a hijab-wearing woman comes with its own type of sexual harassment that’s based in a lot of fetishisation and orientalism.

It’s as if Muslim women exist so outside of the ‘norms’ of sex and relationships that people feel at liberty to question and prod into some of the most personal aspects of a person’s life – yet another way Muslim women are Othered. When sex is used as a tool for liberation and sexual pleasure is framed as central to feminism, it denies the experiences of a Muslim woman, as well as other faiths such as Catholic Christians

and Hindus, who may choose to pursue abstinence from sex until marriage. Because she has chosen abstinence, why does this now mean she is without sexual agency or backwards thinking, in the eyes of white feminists? And it isn't just the experiences of Muslim women which are at risk of being erased. What about sex workers? Or those who are asexual? Sexual pleasure is important, but it shouldn't play a starring role in the fight for women's liberation.

One of the main stereotypes surrounding Muslim women is that we are without sexual control or agency and are simply passive and submissive women. But at the same time, Muslim women are also hyper sexualised (particularly hijab-wearing women) and these various racist imaginings trap women into prescribed sexual contexts and male gazes. In Alya Mooro's brilliant *The Greater Freedom*, she talks about the idea of the 'invisible jury' – referring to the opinions and judgments of others on everything from how we dress, how we behave, to how we live our lives and much more.<sup>33</sup> Muslim and Middle Eastern women have to navigate feeling conflicted between two concepts of sexuality while living in the West.

I've seen and heard loved ones being shouted at by men on the streets with comments like 'take it off' or 'show us what's underneath', in reference to their hijabs or Islamic clothing. I still remember when I was a teenager at school, I was nicknamed the 'forbidden fruit' by some of the boys because I never had a boyfriend. It wasn't said in a malicious or mean way, but it still made me feel weird and Othered. None of my friends got this nickname, even the ones who also never dated, so why did I? Later on in life, I've been described as 'exotic' on several occasions; another scenario where the other person

thinks they're giving you a compliment, but it once again only makes me feel like an outsider. Why was I, compared to my white female friends, seen as exotic? Because of patriarchal imagination and the perceived 'mystery' surrounding our sexual availability, Muslim women and girls end up being bullied and humiliated through this specific racial lens. And it's something which has some of its roots in white feminism, as sexual liberation is such a big focus. But sexual liberation is a very narrow form and definition of freedom that doesn't allow for much nuance, particularly when it comes to how sexual agency intersects with race and faith.

Going back to Shaheen's research in *Reel Bad Arabs*, one of the stereotypes he identified is that of the 'oversexualised harem maiden'. Shaheen doesn't explicitly reference Muslim women, but it's a stereotype that can be applied here as, historically, imaginings of Muslim women have often featured sexual overtones. Whether it's images of the Middle Eastern belly-dancer, South Asian women based on the *Kama Sutra* or women from African descent depicted as hypersexual, all these tropes serve to paint racialised women as 'exotic', mysterious and, ultimately, subject to the white male gaze. Even going as far back as the early nineteenth century, artists from Europe and North America were clearly confused as to how to represent Muslim women in their art and would often represent them through fantasy: mysterious-looking harems, black-kohled eyes hidden beneath veils and smoke and mirrors.<sup>34</sup> But these artists weren't painting what they were seeing, but what they *imagined* Muslim women to be – and, most importantly, they were imagined through the eyes of men. Modern art and photography still embody a similar

approach, centring male imaginings of Muslim women rather than accurately representing us. As Rehan writes in her *Amaaliah* article, these portrayals of Muslim women are ‘rooted in nothing other than the Western imagination of a hidden and unfathomable world; they are mirrors to those surveying men, and not windows into the lives and beings of their subjects’.<sup>35</sup> These Orientalist and hypersexualised imaginings of Muslim women are not confined to media or art either. Artificial intelligence (AI) also has these tropes embedded within it. For example, Lensa, a mobile app that generates a person’s avatars based on a photo they upload, has come under criticism this year for hypersexualising Muslim women’s avatars. According to *Muslim Girl*, several Muslim women reported that the avatars the app generated from their photos were hijab-less and immodest, even when the photos they uploaded included them in their hijabs.<sup>36</sup>

These tropes, however, are not just offensive images in magazines and books or on TV screens. They are yet another colonial tool of power which aims to reinforce the oppressive structures that the world as we know it has been built on. The fascination and obsession with uncovering and revealing the body of a Muslim woman has led to our bodies being fetishised and objectified by the male gaze – particularly in the world of pornography. For the past decade, one of the top-ranked performers on Pornhub has been a hijab-wearing woman. Mia Khalifa is a Lebanese former adult actor who shot to fame for starring in porn films whilst wearing a hijab. In fact, a 2015 *Vice* investigation found that demand for hijab porn is high: ‘If you type the word into the search bar of Pornhub or xvideos, you’ll see thumbnail after thumbnail of

porn featuring the headscarf'. It found that most of the scenes in hijab porn play on the notion of the 'Middle Eastern woman as the innocent yet obedient sexual object' and that the hijab is used to signify the woman as a 'sexually repressed "Arab" ready and willing to bow down to her Western master'.<sup>37</sup> Khalifa, who is not Muslim, has defended the video where she appears with a hijab, calling it 'satire'. Speaking to *Hero Magazine* in 2020, she said:

There was no dominance dynamic, the women were the powerful ones in the video. I stand by my statement of the fact that it is satire [. . .] I don't want to sound like I'm defending it, I'm just defending the fact that it is not meant to put down Muslim women [. . .] The meaning for the people who made it was definitely exploitation, but it wasn't demeaning or degrading to Muslim women in general.<sup>38</sup>

This isn't a criticism of Khalifa (who has been open about her own exploitative experiences in her former industry) or pornography (which, when ethically made, can be a source of sexual pleasure) but, rather, a criticism of a wider system that allows the hijab and Muslim women to be viewed and consumed in a way that, in the end, does affect our daily lives. Even something as 'satirical' as wearing a hijab during a porn film still has consequences for Muslim women, because what does this imagery ultimately represent? It shows a man 'conquering' a Muslim woman's body, with the act of removing her veil becoming a part of this process, adding another layer to the Othering and sexual domination of women. And it isn't exclusive to porn either. There's an entire culture surrounding Muslim women

where misogyny and Islamophobia intersect. It's there when a man shouts at a hijab-wearing woman to 'take it off' in the middle of the street, it's there when she's poked and prodded by men asking her for a 'peek', and it's there when her hijab is ripped off by a group of men on her way home from work. When added up, all these incidents – which many Muslim women deal with on a regular basis – lead to a much larger trope: Muslim women will only be free if we are sexually liberated by the white male gaze. A culture that white feminism reinforces every time it questions a Muslim woman's choice to pursue abstinence, dress modestly or to wear the hijab. It's just another environment where white feminism colludes with gendered Islamophobia to further exclude and dehumanise Muslim women.

Whether a woman chooses to wear the hijab or not is entirely her choice. Nobody else's but her own. It shouldn't invite judgement, political commentary or harm. But sadly, the hijab has become a significant political, social and sexual talking point around the world – a talking point that consistently and actively excludes Muslim women from the conversation.



## 4

# The ‘unique’ misogyny of Muslim men

*‘Muslim men may form part of the  
audience for people such as Tate,  
but they are not the only audience’*

Initially, I didn’t set out to write about men in this book, let alone dedicate an entire chapter to them. However, the more I delved into white feminism and how it creates and reproduces Islamophobia, the more I saw how instrumental Muslim men were in upholding the myths about and stereotypes of Muslim women. But, before we explore how white feminism has contributed to the demonisation of the men in our communities, as well as building an image of a ‘unique’ form of misogyny exhibited by Muslim men, we must first explore the misogyny that does exist in Muslim communities and start from there. Because Muslim women do have to navigate sexism and gendered violence, it’s just that liberals and white feminists take these experiences and repackage them into a very different and harmful context.

In December 2022, professional kickboxer-turned-social media influencer Andrew Tate was arrested by the Romanian authorities, along with his brother, on charges of rape and

human trafficking, which they have denied.<sup>1</sup> And following this arrest, *Vice* uncovered in its investigation that Tate was accused by an unnamed woman of rape in the UK but the charges were not followed through by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), who said that it ‘carefully reviewed all the evidence provided by the police regarding each complainant and concluded it did not meet our legal test, and there was no realistic prospect of a conviction’.<sup>2</sup>

Tate, who is a self-proclaimed misogynist and hailed by his followers for promoting (toxic) masculinity, is one of the most influential people currently on the internet and has amassed millions of views across various platforms. On TikTok, the Andrew Tate hashtag has more than 10 billion views, he has 4.5 million followers on X and a paid subscription-based website, Hustler’s University, which claims to teach more than 100,000 students. It feels as though Donald Trump getting elected as US president in 2016 signalled a marked shift in the normalisation of misogyny and we’re now seeing its effects play out – especially with Trump being re-elected once again in 2024. One of the most googled people in 2022, Tate has become so influential that schoolteachers in primary schools are having to contend with young children talking about him and mimicking his views. Chris Pine’s character in the 2022 Hollywood film *Don’t Worry Darling* was even based on Tate, according to the director, Olivia Wilde.<sup>3</sup> Tate has been banned from YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and TikTok, but his X account was recently reinstated following Elon Musk’s takeover.

What does this have to do with feminism and Muslim women? Well, in October 2022, Tate shared that he’d in fact taken the shahada and converted to Islam. Before becoming a

Muslim, despite his friendship with the far-right activist Tommy Robinson, Tate had a record of 'praising' Islam. He called it the 'last religion' and argued that 'no other religion has boundaries which they enforce', noting that people 'won't disrespect Islam. Nobody will disrespect it because they're scared'.<sup>4</sup>

In Islam, if a person converts to the faith, they effectively receive a fresh start in the eyes of Allah, where all previous sins are wiped clean. Many Muslims – mostly men – welcomed Tate to the religion and defended him by claiming that his future actions as a Muslim should be what we judge him on, not his previous sins (read: alleged crimes). However, Tate has continued to display the same misogynistic behaviour as a Muslim that he did before he converted. But this hasn't stopped some Muslim men from seeking him out and tirelessly defending him and his views on women, men and gender roles.<sup>5</sup> I've come across family, friends and acquaintances who have either been sympathetic to Tate's views and attitudes or have been full-on believers in him and his 'message'. Anecdotally, I've had people tell me that they may not agree with how he's conducting himself, but they do 'see where he's coming from' and another say that he's glad to 'finally see someone saying what we're all thinking'.

This is, of course, having quite an impact on women. Speaking to *Glamour*, a Muslim woman explained how Tate's influence was becoming more apparent when speaking to guys who her parents have set her up with. 'I was so shocked by how many of them seem indoctrinated by this red-pill ideology', she said, recalling how one man even had Tate as his WhatsApp picture. Another Muslim woman shared an

experience about a man she had rejected after seeing several red flags in his attitudes and behaviour. ‘He started to use misogynistic language, calling me a whore and a bitch, and said something about him having a God-given right to a good wife, meaning I had no right to reject him’.<sup>6</sup>

Another individual who claims to be defending ‘natural hierarchy’ and ‘traditional masculinity’ is the psychology professor and author Jordan B Peterson. Even though his main argument was directed against political correctness and what he dubbed the ‘radical left’, Peterson has also been outspoken on gender identity, the patriarchy (which he calls an ‘illusion’) and Islamophobia (‘a word created by fascists and used by cowards to manipulate morons’).<sup>7</sup> Like Tate, Peterson has become an influential and prominent voice in incel communities. And, regardless of his views on Islam, Peterson’s also proven to be popular amongst Muslim men. So popular, in fact, that in July 2022 he shared a message on his YouTube channel to his Muslim fanbase titled ‘Message to Muslims’. In the six-minute video, the retired professor tells his Muslim audience to stop ‘fighting amongst yourselves’, to ‘stop regarding the Christians and more specifically the Jews as your enemies’ and to ‘reach across the divide’.<sup>8</sup> He is speaking to Muslims as if they are children being scolded by a teacher, whilst reinforcing stereotypes around anti-Semitism and the inherent violence of Muslims.

But the question is, why are Muslim men finding commonality with people such as Andrew Tate and Jordan B Peterson? Is it a specific issue for Muslim communities or does it speak to a wider conversation surrounding masculinity? Or is it a mix of both?

Hussein Kesvani, author of *Follow Me, Akhi: The Online World of British Muslims*, has investigated the world of red-pill ideology (taken from the *Matrix* films, where taking a blue pill meant remaining in reality and a red pill led to seeing life-changing truths, with the red pill here applying to men seeing the 'truths' of feminism) and how Muslims are engaging with it, particularly in terms of how they tend to look past the anti-Muslim rhetoric of these forums.<sup>9</sup> In fact, one of the most popular subreddits was Redpill Islam, 'where members often criticised Muslim communities in the West for being too soft on issues such as gender segregation, promoting "halal dating", and allowing women to take on leadership roles in mosques'.<sup>10</sup> In his book, many of Kesvani's interviewees (men in their twenties and thirties) reiterated this rhetoric that's dominating such spaces, with one person defending Peterson, saying: 'He is very wise and knows the dangers that ideas like feminism and social justice can do to communities'. Another interviewee explained to Kesvani that Muslim men are feeling frustrated at what they see as a 'pervasive erosion of strict gender roles', citing women leading prayers and marrying later or to non-Muslim men as examples. However, the attraction of the manosphere may have less to do with Islam and more to do with how men's expressions of masculinity online tend to go unchecked, Kesvani explains. He goes on to say that this wider sense of male alienation is likely to be ingrained further in young Muslim men living in the UK, especially as they come to terms with their intersecting religious and social identities – something which we have definitely seen become more prevalent in recent years.

For her book *Men Who Hate Women*, Laura Bates spent

years researching the world of incels and the rest of the manosphere, and she found that members of these message boards and forums came from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.<sup>11</sup> But what they all seem to have in common is a ‘craving to belong’, especially when we look at why young boys at school are finding commonality with such extreme misogyny and violence. Bates explains that young boys may start out with the simple act of doing research online about feminism and then find themselves being served up ‘anti-feminist’ misogynistic content via online algorithms. This is something Ben Hurst, the Head of Facilitation and Training at Beyond Equality (a UK-based organisation that engages men and boys in the gender equality conversation across schools, universities and corporate spaces) has also talked about in his work. In December 2018, he gave a TEDx London talk titled ‘Boys won’t be boys. Boys will be what we teach them to be’, where he spoke about the pressure the patriarchal system places on men to repress their emotions and embrace toxic traits such as hypersexualisation and violence.<sup>12</sup> Hurst believes that we need to challenge our assumptions around toxic masculinity by providing spaces for men to express emotion, encouraging conversation that is free of judgement and building up more positive forms of masculinity. In a later TEDx conversation in February 2023, Hurst examines masculinity through the specific lens of online misogyny and the rise of ‘influencers’ such as Tate, looking at the real-world effects this is having on both young men and women. ‘A lot of this is rooted in ideas of domination over women, success equating to money, and “being a man”. And these ideas are now mainstream and everywhere’, he says.<sup>13</sup> He goes on to talk about how every

single school Beyond Equality visited in the last year has had Andrew Tate and online misogyny come up in at least one conversation, and how we're now seeing these online ideas translate into real consequences.

Hurst doesn't speak about Muslim men specifically, but a lot of what he's talking about can be applied to our communities too. Men are taught these stereotypical male traits from a very young age, traits that include men being strong, aggressive, showing no emotion, dominant and providers for their family. Like most women, I can recall many times during my childhood and teenage life where a boy was mean to me and an adult said it was because they liked me. This attitude seems to carry on into adulthood, with the whole 'treat them mean to keep them keen' perspective of (typically heterosexual) dating. But this only partly explains why some men go to extremes and subscribe to this form of toxic masculinity.

Speaking to CNN in February 2023, Javad Hashmi, an Islamic studies scholar at Harvard University, explained that 'red pill' Muslim influencers target young Muslim men who are struggling with their identity and their role in society, particularly when it comes to economic status and marriage. 'You feel second class, and so because of this inferiority complex that you have, you're looking for an ideology that can give you power and empower you', Hashmi said of this audience.<sup>14</sup> The red-pill movement provides that ideology by constructing a reality in which female privilege has shackled men to positions of weakness and disadvantage, allowing men to blame gender equality and feminism for their own positions in life. Muslim men – and men in general – are

dealing with social and economic uncertainties, but while things such as marriage or economic status are changing for women, they are still seen as key parts of masculinity for Muslim men, creating an identity crisis of sorts.

In a 2022 paper for *ReOrient*, researchers Sahar Ghumkhor and Hizer Mir explored this idea of a ‘masculinity in decline’ and how this has contributed to a growing online Muslim community of men who are ‘highly mobilised, engaged, frustrated, and sometimes even angry’.<sup>15</sup> The authors name this emerging community the Alt-Wallah, which has found commonalities with some far-right groups and is waging its own cultural war against the West through its biggest perceived threat: feminism. Some Muslim men feel there is an ongoing loss of traditional Islam and are convinced that feminism is to blame for the collapse of Muslim communities. Speaking to ABC News in January 2023, Dr Mir further explained why people like Tate are so influential on Muslim men: ‘He’s giving them a way of fighting their battles, these men see the visibility of women in certain spaces as basically being threatening to their masculinity’.<sup>16</sup> These are men who view their roles within marriage and the family as the breadwinners but this isn’t always reflected in modern day relationships. So, it isn’t so much a crisis of masculinity but more that we’re seeing the failures of capitalism take hold in some communities of men. The intense pressure and constraints of attempting to achieve capitalist goals, like a job with a high salary or owning a home, is a lot for anyone to have to navigate. However, because of how toxic masculinity is built and understood by men, these capitalist goals can end up being closely tied up with their identity and self-worth.

People who have subscribed to these ideas also have a tendency to create a false equivalence between feminism and incel culture, which is another dimension to consider when looking at the impact of red-pill ideology. Feminism is a social, political and historical movement that aims to tackle inequalities, whereas incel culture is a violent corner of the internet based on self-victimisation. They are not the same thing and in no world are their impacts comparable. Misogyny and gendered violence have killed countless women and continues to do so around the world, but the 'threat of feminism' has not harmed or killed men. With the existence of the patriarchy very much still a reality, it's hard to argue that feminism has had any major negative impacts on men and their position in society – physical, material or otherwise.

It's important to note here, however, that misogyny is not a unique feature of Islam or Muslim men. Islam is perceived as carrying and justifying an exceptionalised type of sexism and misogyny, with Muslim men viewed as the worst kind of perpetrators of misogyny and gendered violence. This is a dangerous trope that has now been pushed to the forefront of our societies, where men in our communities are demonised and vilified purely for practising and/or identifying with Islam. Muslim men may form part of the audience for people such as Tate, but they are not the *only* audience, with Tate attracting followers from a range of groups. The thing that these groups have in common is their subscription to 'traditional masculinity' rather than men being Muslim or coming from a particular demographic.

## The negative and damaging portrayals of Muslim men

We only need to turn to the media to see how Muslim men tend to be portrayed in both factual and entertainment genres. Looking at the world of news and journalism, there are countless examples of Muslim men being presented in derogatory and negative ways, particularly by the tabloid media. They are portrayed as inherently violent, aggressive, misogynistic, hypersexual and dangerous. But, most importantly, they are seen as having a particular type of misogyny that is different to other groups of men, which is linked back to their faith. For example, newly elected Scottish first minister Humza Yousaf shared a photo of him and his family praying on their first night in Bute House, which led to him receiving abuse on X for the lack of women in the photo.<sup>17</sup> Some of these comments were redolent of the stereotyping around Muslim men and their ‘unique’ misogyny. Whilst being interviewed by TalkTV host Julia Hartley-Brewer, Palestinian MP Dr Mustafa Barghouti was subjected to aggressive questioning which many considered Islamophobic (Ofcom investigated a large number of complaints and declined to investigate further, albeit finding that her words ‘had the potential to be highly offensive to viewers’).<sup>18</sup> The host continuously interrupted him and at one point exclaimed at him: ‘For the love of God let me finish a sentence man’, followed by, ‘Maybe you’re not used to women talking, I don’t know, but I’d like to finish the sentence’. Hartley-Brewer ended the interview with, ‘Sorry to have been a woman speaking to you but there you are’, insinuating that because he’s a Muslim man, he would have an issue with women having a voice – which is yet another harmful trope that follows Muslim men around.<sup>19</sup>

Another example is how the media covered the Rochdale and Rotherham grooming gang cases. A significant proportion of the news stories and comment articles surrounding these cases inferred a causal link between religion (and/or race) and sexual abuse, which then began to be repeated by politicians and high-profile figures on both the right and left of the political spectrum. In fact, in 2020, the Muslim Council of Britain's (MCB) Centre for Media Monitoring published a study which had researched how Muslims were portrayed in UK media.<sup>20</sup> It monitored thirty-four media outlets via their online websites and thirty-eight television channels (including all regional channels) between October 2018 and September 2019 and its findings included:

- Almost 60 per cent of online articles across all publications were identified as associating negative aspects and behaviour with Muslims or Islam.
- 47 per cent of all clips showed Muslims and/or Islam in a manner which presented negative aspects and behaviour.
- Right-wing pundits were on many occasions left unchallenged when making generalisations against Muslims, including in the promotion of falsehoods.

Furthermore, Miqdaad Versi, the director of the MCB's Media Monitoring team, has been collating news stories related to Muslims and Islam onto a spreadsheet since 2015, and lodging formal complaints to the press regulator, IPSO, if they contain factual errors. In these countless stories, Versi found a range of issues, including the identification of criminals as Muslims (even when their faith has no relevance to

their crime), misquoting Muslim figures of authority and fictionalising parts of stories that paint Muslims in a negative light. News articles on ‘terrorist’ incidents especially tend to generalise these horrific crimes as the work of all Muslim communities, particularly Muslim men. The sensationalist headlines and language in some articles (especially from right-wing and tabloid media outlets) invoke images of violent and dangerous Muslim men, on the one hand, and vulnerable and weak Muslim women, on the other – the major exception being the reporting on Shamima Begum, which will be explored more in Chapter 6. The overarching theme is that journalism, both online and broadcast, represents Muslims through the narrative of the Other, reinforcing a deep suspicion of our communities.

White women are just as complicit in upholding an agenda that has Islamophobic rhetoric and stereotypes right at the centre of it. Several of the UK’s news platforms which have faced criticism for allegedly anti-Islam content have been overseen by influential white women.

It’s not too different a picture in entertainment and fictional media. Since the 9/11 attacks in the US in 2001, there has been an abundance of films and television shows created that focus on ‘terrorism-related’ storylines. *Homeland* has already been mentioned in a previous chapter, but it’s not the only one. Other films and shows include but are not limited to: *Zero Dark Thirty*, 24, *Argo*, *London Has Fallen*, *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*, *Patriots’ Day*, *13 Hours* and all the *Iron Man* films. One of the most prominent Muslim actors in Hollywood, Riz Ahmed, supported a large-scale study into Muslim representation in the industry titled *Missing & Maligned: The*

*Reality of Muslims in Popular Global Movies.*<sup>21</sup> Researchers analysed 200 top-grossing films released between 2017 and 2019 across four countries: the UK, US, Australia and New Zealand. Their findings included:

- 39 per cent of Muslim primary and secondary characters were shown as perpetrators of violence, though it was mostly the secondary characters (41.7 per cent of all thirty-six secondary characters) who were responsible for acts of aggression.
- The overarching trend is that Muslim portrayals in popular films feed into the narrative of the 'outsider'. Many of the films analysed rooted stories about Muslim characters in historical 'foreign' settings and made Muslim characters distinct through their clothing, faith rituals and communities.
- There are two competing visions of Muslim characters: one is of Muslims as violent and aggressive, while the other is of Muslims as subservient to the needs of white characters.

The reinforcement of Muslim men as inherently violent and misogynistic in film and television continues to this day. Named after Ahmed, there's even a Riz Test now (a take on the Bechdel Test) which aims to highlight how Muslims are represented in entertainment media. One of the five components of the test is whether a male character is presented as misogynistic and, predictably, many of the films and shows mentioned already would fail on this one factor alone.

Many of these negative tropes have developed from white feminist thinking and how it views Muslim communities.

At the core of this feminism is the idea that Islam is an ‘anti-woman’ religion which displays an exceptionalised form of misogyny, with Muslim men being the cause and perpetrators of these beliefs. The misogyny of Muslim men is seen as existing within a patriarchal system that is separate to their own and, more significantly, worse than that of white men. A Muslim man is seen as more of a risk to women’s safety than a white man; a common trope that’s mentioned by these women is that Muslim men target white women and girls because they’re not Muslim. This isn’t to say that *some* Muslim men don’t have these kinds of attitudes, but it is certainly not a commonly held belief and is not anything to do with or reflective of Islam – even if some of these men use Islamic language to ‘justify’ their misogyny. To understand just how white feminism came to perceive Muslim men in this way, its relationship to white supremacy needs to be more widely explored. There’s a long and violent history of Black and brown men being viewed and stereotyped as predators and monsters, particularly when it comes to their interactions with white women. Men of colour are automatically seen as a threat by white feminism purely based on race and gender, with this view being connected to the concept of white women’s ‘purity’ and ‘innocence’ – a concept deeply rooted in white supremacy and created by men, who see themselves as the guardians and defenders of this innocence. In *Women, Race & Class*, Angela Davis argues that white women were complicit in the creation of ‘the myth of the black rapist’ and had an active involvement in lynchings.<sup>22</sup> A prominent example of this violence is the case of Emmett Till, a young Black boy who was tortured and lynched in 1955 after being accused of harassing Carolyn Bryant Donham.<sup>23</sup> Bryant’s

husband and brother-in-law kidnapped Till at gunpoint, tortured him, then killed him. A more recent example is the killing of nine Black people in Charleston, South Carolina, in 2015, where Dylann Roof reportedly told church members, 'You rape our women, and you're taking over our country, and you have to go'.<sup>24</sup>

However, white women are not without agency and can also be the ones responsible for upholding dangerous stereotypes around Black and brown men through their own actions. In what has been dubbed 'Karen' behaviour, some white women weaponise their femininity and position of innocence to (directly or indirectly) harm men of colour. 'White women in apparent distress have called the police on Black people for everything from sleeping in the student lounge of their own college dorms to waiting in line for the restroom at Starbucks' writes Ruby Hamad in *White Tears, Brown Scars*.<sup>25</sup> And there are several examples in the last five years alone that can be used to expand on Hamad's point. In May 2020, a video shared online by Christian Cooper showed his interaction with Amy Cooper in Central Park, New York. In the video, Mr Cooper is largely silent whilst Ms Cooper is shouting at him to stop recording her and proceeds to call the police: 'I'm going to tell them there's an African-American man threatening my life'.<sup>26</sup> In this case, Amy Cooper was the one to be disciplined for her actions as she was fired from her job, but with Black people at an increased risk of harm at the hands of the police, she could have been putting Christian Cooper in harm's way for something as mundane as an unleashed dog. Speaking at the time, Cooper did issue an apology and described her actions as unacceptable, 'I sincerely and humbly

apologize to everyone, especially to that man, his family'.<sup>27</sup> There was also the case of 'BBQ Becky' in 2018, where Jennifer Schulte was filmed on the phone to the police asking them to eject a Black family having a barbeque in an Oakland park.<sup>28</sup> The video shows the woman going from angry and defiant to emotional and helpless as soon as a white male police officer shows up, reinforcing the 'damsel in distress' trope. Schulte hasn't publicly responded or apologised for her behaviour in the video.

This vilification of Black and brown men also includes Muslim men. As mentioned previously in a discussion about how the media represents Muslim men, the dominant stereotypes attached to this group of men are that of either a 'terrorist' or a predator. He is violent, dangerous and out to destroy the 'Western way of life', which has become a particularly strong feature of the stereotype since the 9/11 attacks in the US (2001) and the 7/7 bombings in London (2005). In relation to white women, there's a fear of being raped or killed by Muslim men (aka the predator) in their attempts to destroy the West. In February 2016, Polish magazine *wSieci* (The Network) published a controversial cover depicting a young, blonde, white woman loosely covered in the European Union flag being groped by three men. This image was accompanied by the line: 'The Islamic rape of Europe'.<sup>29</sup> There's a long history behind the narrative of an 'Islamic takeover' of the West and a 'clash of civilisations', but it's one that's gained considerable traction in recent decades – especially when it comes to the increased migration into Europe from countries such as Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, which has fed into the far-right conspiracy theories such as the 'great replacement' theory. It's

something we've seen here in the UK too, with unfounded concerns around certain areas in the country becoming 'no-go zones' or 'sharia law zones' because Muslim communities live in those areas, or that Islam is taking over because people are migrating to the UK. The terms 'migrant' and 'Muslim' have become somewhat interchangeable when people express concerns about immigration or 'threats to the British way of life'.

The creation of the 'Muslim grooming gangs' narrative surrounding the Rotherham and Rochdale child sexual exploitation cases is another key example of this vilification. The central argument of the 'grooming gangs' narrative is that a 'disproportionate' number of Asian-Muslim heritage men are involved in grooming and abusing white British girls. Even though this narrative is not evidenced with facts or figures – in fact, government figures around child sexual exploitation show a completely different picture, which will be explored in a later chapter – the stereotype still holds and is weaponised by politicians across the board to fit in with their own agendas. The state embraces white feminist narratives such as this one, as it fits into its version of what women's liberation should look like and, more importantly, *which* women should be afforded freedom, safety and liberation.

This stereotyping, and what is effectively a moral panic, has real consequences for Muslim men. Darren Osbourne, the man behind the Finsbury Park Mosque attack in 2017, was reportedly obsessed with media depictions of Muslim men and went as far as to leave a letter in the van he used in the attack describing them as 'rapists' and 'feral'.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, the individual who firebombed a migrant centre in Dover in 2022 had shared anti-Muslim sentiments on his now-deleted

Facebook page.<sup>31</sup> When a narrative such as this is employed, it not only harms Muslim men, but it also minimises the misogyny that exists in different communities and the experiences of victims. For example, in the cases of the Rotherham and Rochdale sexual exploitation groups, the only visible victims of these cases were young girls from white backgrounds. The former home secretary, Suella Braverman, reinforced this in comments made in April 2023 where she ‘asserted that perpetrators are “almost all British-Pakistani” and reduces victims to “overwhelmingly white girls from disadvantaged or troubled backgrounds”’.<sup>32</sup> Writing in *The Guardian*, associate professor in security and crime science at University College London, Dr Ella Cockbain, went on to explain:

This narrative around protecting (white) girls from Pakistani-heritage men is actively dangerous. It erases and overlooks sexual abuse against boys and ethnic minority children. It deflects agencies’ attention from offenders who don’t meet the stereotypes, failing to learn from previous such mistakes. It further mainstreams far-right talking points, stigmatising whole communities as sexual predators. It empowers Islamophobic action, which can have deadly consequences.<sup>33</sup>

Focusing on Muslim men as the sole offenders in this type of violence and white girls as the sole victims both fuels the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ narrative and completely ignores the fact that victims are from diverse backgrounds. Both offenders and victims that do not meet stereotypical perceptions will likely be missed by the state and its institutions, instead leading to the possibility of further abuse and an increased likelihood of

false accusations being made against Muslims and/or Asian men. False accusations are rare but, when they do occur, they can cause a significant amount of damage to those involved. In January 2023, Eleanor Williams was found guilty of ‘perverting the course of justice by telling “malevolent” lies about being trafficked by an Asian grooming gang’.<sup>34</sup> This was a young white woman who launched the #JusticeForEllie campaign after posting graphic photos on Facebook where she alleged that she’d been beaten and raped by men around the north-west of England. In court, the prosecution accused Williams of ‘confecting the Asian grooming gang after watching the BBC drama *Three Girls*, which told the true story of girls who were sexually exploited in Rochdale’. They added that she also ‘took the Amsterdam auction plot from the 2008 film *Taken*, in which Liam Neeson plays a father searching for the sex traffickers who abducted his daughter’.<sup>35</sup>

One of the men accused by Williams, Mohammed Ramzan, shared the impact this false accusation has had on his life following Williams being sentenced to eight and a half years in prison for perverting the course of justice. Ramzan explained that his property had been damaged, his businesses ruined and his family targeted by abuse ‘in the most horrendous way’.<sup>36</sup> Ramzan and the others involved in this case experienced the personal consequences of Williams’ false accusations, but there’s also a much larger consequence to her actions, and that’s the impact this could have on victims coming forward and having their experiences believed and taken seriously.

## How do these negatives tropes of Muslim men affect Muslim women?

Viewing Muslim men as having a unique form of misogyny can have wide-reaching effects on Muslim women too. It creates an environment where Muslim women who defend the lives of Muslim men are accused of pandering to the patriarchy or being misogynists themselves. In 2021, when the US withdrew its troops from Afghanistan, some social media users commented that Afghan men should stay behind and the women and the girls should be the ones to escape the country. There is, of course, nuance to a conversation around who is prioritised when it comes to escaping violence, particularly with the Taliban and its extreme views on women. However, that isn't to say that we should be viewing the lives of Afghan men as worthless either – a point that I made on X at the time, which led to several angry comments and replies. When asked why these men do not deserve to escape the violence too, many resorted to racist and Islamophobic tropes that framed Muslim men as inherently misogynistic and violent, and so not worthy of help. The exact same rhetoric was employed when journalists and public figures were discussing the violence that Palestinians are experiencing online and on television, erasing the harm and victimhood that Palestinian men were also facing. 'Men' as young as thirteen years old. As Maya Mikdashi wrote in a 2014 *Jadaliyya* article, this trope serves two purposes: creating a homogenous group of women and children, and the reproduction of the Palestinian man as always dangerous.<sup>37</sup>

It's a rhetoric that's also been adopted when it comes to the government's 'hostile environment' policies around immigration,

which did include deporting migrants to claim asylum in Rwanda, before a new Labour government came to power in 2024 and scrapped the policy. The Rwanda deportation plan was mostly aimed at young men travelling to the UK, reinforcing the narrative that migrant men are not deserving of aid or support. Zoe Gardner, a migration policy expert, elaborated on this during a Women & Equalities Committee inquiry evidence session in 2022. 'You can be a man and a refugee. You can be a man and a victim of trauma, torture, sexual violence [...] The narrative that men are somehow not vulnerable and aren't in need of protection is completely false. Men are very often the ones targeted in the first place', she told MPs.<sup>38</sup>

Exceptionalising Muslim men's misogyny can also harm Muslim women by silencing their own experiences of misogyny and gendered violence. Do Muslim women feel that they can share their experiences of domestic violence, or do they feel that they must stay quiet so as not to cause more harm to their loved ones and community? In a *HuffPost* US investigation looking into the experiences of Muslim survivors of domestic violence, reporters found that several of the victims they spoke to were 'distrustful of U.S. state and federal agencies due to past experiences of discrimination'.<sup>39</sup> And when they did make the decision to seek support, they often had to deal with Islamophobic stereotypes by the very people they had gone to for help. Speaking to the publication, author Julianne Hammer said that, due to the stereotypes of Muslim men usually found in the media, there's a fear of judgement from those outside of Muslim communities which is likely contributing to Muslim women not coming forward with their experiences. 'Anti-Muslim hostility produces an atmosphere

where Muslim women – in addition to the abuse that they are recognising and want to do something about – are also realising that reporting or seeking help will reflect badly on men in their community but also on the community as a whole’, Hammer told *HuffPost*. Reporters also found that some domestic violence advocates told Muslim women that their ‘abuse was expected’, reinforcing the false belief that domestic violence is simply a part of Islam.<sup>40</sup>

In the UK, 6.7 per cent of Muslim women have been victims of domestic violence, according to 2022 ONS figures.<sup>41</sup> And the figure is very likely to be higher, as these statistics only account for women who have come forward and reported their experience to the police which, as the *HuffPost* investigation highlights, is not always the case for Muslim women. Gendered violence and domestic violence are already crimes that have low prosecution rates, which may mean many women do not report these to the police, particularly when trust in the police has dropped dramatically in recent years.<sup>42</sup> But when you consider the added layers of racism, Islamophobia and fear of judgement that factor into Muslim women’s decisions to report domestic violence to the police, the picture becomes quite stark. Muslim Women’s Network UK operate a national helpline for its service users and, in its analysis, it found that two-thirds of the calls received relate to some form of violence, such as domestic abuse, harassment and sexual violence.<sup>43</sup> And in its 2019 report on Muslim women’s experiences of the criminal justice system, it laid out several factors that ‘disempower and deter’ women, one being that police were ‘not alert to the fact that Muslim women may face additional barriers to reporting abuse’.<sup>44</sup> What this all seems to indicate is that the

stereotyping of Islam as a religion that condones violence and Muslim men as the instigators of this violence – more so than non-Muslim men – has an impact on Muslim women coming forward when incidents of violence do happen.

As well as the impact on an individual level, this is also impacting Muslims at a structural level. There's a worry that Muslim women coming forward with their experiences of misogyny and gendered violence could then be used by white feminism and the state to justify the creation and maintaining of Islamophobic practices and policies, such as Prevent. The relationships between white feminism, state violence and Islamophobia will be explored in more detail later, but there's a deep-rooted collusion between white feminism and how the state uses its version of equality to police Muslim communities, using Muslim women as an entry point and, ultimately, as pawns in the process.

### **Muslim women and the family**

'But aren't your parents going to force you to get married?' a friend said to me at school, aged fifteen. We were sitting on the school field, eating our packed lunches and talking about the future, as you do when you're a teenager. Up until this point, I hadn't thought about the prospect of marriage or how that would differ to my white friends – if at all. I grew up surrounded by marriages that were rooted in love, respect and friendship, particularly my parents' relationship. So I wasn't expecting my friends to think that, because I'm Muslim, my parents would force me into a marriage of their choosing. I'd

never properly spoken about it (mostly because I was fifteen), but they'd assumed that Islam equated to forced marriages for women. It once again brought up feelings of Otherness, a sense that I was inherently different to them, and they'd always see me that way. This wouldn't be the last time I'd hear comments like this and they aren't a unique experience to me. Many Muslim women have heard similar comments or sentiments simply because they're Muslim.

It's just another misconception and stereotype about Muslim women – that we are forced into marriage, children and family life because it's the only thing we exist for in the eyes of Islam. A stereotype that has no truth to it whatsoever. These stereotypes reinforce the idea that Islam is a barbaric and backwards religion that's stuck in the Dark Ages, which lies at the heart of the Islamophobic stereotypes that white feminism justifies on a regular basis. It links back to the examples in Chapter 3 regarding how Muslim women are depicted in fictional dramas and news media. A woman in the home who does not speak but is simply present to serve her husband. Silent, passive and obedient. Even though there may be instances of forced marriages, it is not a common phenomenon in Islamic communities, nor is it unique to one religion or community. It's also frequently misused to describe arranged marriages, which tends to involve two willing individuals entering into a marriage organised by their families. This is not to say that there cannot be an overlap between arranged marriages and forced ones but, again, this is not as common as you may think. *Love Is Blind*, one of the most popular dating reality shows on TV, is essentially based on the concept of an arranged marriage – but repackaged in a way that's appealing to Western audiences.

The family unit is yet another context that white feminism uses to alienate and Other Muslim women, viewing us as empty vessels with no agency. We are women who have our choices made for us by men, nothing more, nothing less. And the men? They are seen as uncaring and cruel to their wives and daughters, limiting their freedoms and existing as a source of oppression in our lives. It's assumed that our male relatives won't allow us to work, socialise or travel – and that our lives are surveilled and controlled by our families.

A central component of white feminism is equating women's liberation with employment, with more women in paid work signifying a major win for gender equality. The fact that women have significantly more access to work and economic independence is hugely important for feminism, but it comes with its own set of caveats. The relationship between white feminism and capitalism is intrinsic. As mentioned in the introduction, it's a feminism that holds a 'girlboss' narrative within it, focusing on equality and empowerment gained through capitalist means such as calling for an increase in female CEOs or pushing Sheryl Sandberg's *Lean In* approach to gender equality. The capitalist machine is hard at work and its influence on this form of thinking becomes even clearer when discussed in the context of Muslim women. The disproportionate levels of Muslim women in employment are invoked as evidence of this, but when we unpick these statistics, they tell a different story.

In *In the Name of Women's Rights: The Rise of Femonationalism*, Sara Farris delves into the relationship between the labour market and gender equality, and how this 'work will set women free' mindset is used by liberals to discriminate

against Muslims: ‘The lower rates of participation of these women in the workforce are attributed to their backward cultural backgrounds, which are deemed responsible for keeping Muslim and non-western migrant women in a state of subjugation and economic dependence’.<sup>45</sup> In recent UK census data, it was found that Muslims had the highest rate of unemployment in 2021, and that 68 per cent of the total Muslim population in England and Wales live in areas with the highest unemployment rates, compared with 26 per cent of Christians and 25 per cent of non-religious people. These unemployment discrepancies were explored in research published in the 2022 *Ethnic and Racial Studies* journal.<sup>46</sup> The research confirmed the existence of a ‘Muslim penalty’ in the labour market which could account for lower employment rates, rather than it being due to cultural and religious practices. For example, this penalty could include things like failing to secure a job due to having a ‘Muslim-sounding’ name or a hijab-wearing Muslim woman losing out on an opportunity because of her choice to cover up. The author of the paper and a doctoral researcher at the University of Bristol, Samir Sweida-Metwally, concluded that: ‘Sociocultural variables’ such as gender attitudes, language proficiency, and the extent of inter- and intra-ethnic social ties are not a convincing source of the unexplained ethno-religious differences in labour market participation and unemployment among Muslim men and women.<sup>47</sup>

Therefore, ideas around cultural differences or views on gender do not explain why the Muslim population has high rates of unemployment. However, when recent legislation around the hijab is considered, these unemployment figures begin to make more sense. For example, a recent EU ruling

allows employers to ban women wearing the hijab in the workplace. The court found that 'a prohibition on wearing any visible form of expression of political, philosophical or religious beliefs in the workplace may be justified by the employer's need to present a neutral image towards customers or to prevent social disputes'.<sup>48</sup> In other words, the hijab is now a political tool and in direct opposition to neutrality. It's not simply a personal religious choice to cover one's hair, but a political statement. Muslim women will now have their bodies controlled by their employers so that customers, clients and colleagues can feel 'comfortable' at work. With legal barriers such as this in place, Muslim women are already shut out of opportunities before they've even set foot in an office. In a workplace setting, Muslim women face discrimination from the get-go, particularly if they wear a hijab. A Muslim woman must navigate the interview process where stereotypes come into play, such as being asked about her career aspirations if she gets married or starts a family. She may be asked about her ability or availability for overnight travel. She may be pushed on how social she is at work or whether she can socialise with men. And if she manages to get through the interview process and get hired, she must *then* contend with a work environment where she is likely the only or one of a few Muslim women – dealing with microaggressions day in and day out. All because of her choice to wear the hijab and practise her faith.

The lower rate of labour participation by Muslim women is just another device that is used to justify the demonisation of Muslim communities, with liberals arguing that Western countries are more 'progressive' because a significant proportion of

women are in employment. Oh, and that men don't control women in these 'progressive' societies like Muslims do. But there's a hypocrisy to this thinking. As Farris points out in *In the Name of Women's Rights: The Rise of Femonationalism*, there's an exploitation of women's social and reproductive work that doesn't always get mentioned. 'It is migrant women's socially reproductive work that permits western European women and men not only to have the "cheap" care that enables them to be active in the labour market, but also to retain the illusion that gender equality has been achieved – at least for "them" ', she writes. It is this underlying trade-off that Caitlin Moran seemed to ignore when she wrote about employing a cleaner and how it was effectively a feminist act.

However, it isn't just work and employment that are used to criticise a Muslim woman's role in her family – and society in general – but also her choices around marriage and motherhood. These criticisms are levelled not only at women but also the men in our communities. One related topic here is that of so-called honour killings. I want to begin by saying that the murder of women by male partners and/or relatives is a global pandemic in itself and is not unique to any religion, race or community. Femicide happens everywhere and there is certainly no honour in any abuse or murder of women. According to UN Women, in 2022 an estimated 48,800 women and girls worldwide were killed by their intimate partners or other family members.<sup>49</sup> This means that, on average, more than five women or girls are killed every hour by someone in their own family. In fact, using 'honour' to describe this type of violence is an injustice to *all* women, not just Muslim women. It reframes the murder of

women through the eyes of the offenders, using the same language they use to justify such heinous acts.

The term 'honour' killings and the context within which it now exists in the West is worth unpacking a little further. The term tends to refer to the murder of an individual which has been motivated by 'shame' or 'protecting the family reputation'. In the UK, this falls under honour-based abuse, which also includes forced marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM). Before the Forced Marriage Act in 2007 and the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act in 2014, the question of whether forced marriage should be made a criminal offence had been circulating around the government and the gender-based violence (GBV) sector for nearly a decade. But many organisations in the GBV sector were united in pushing for forced marriage not to be criminalised and moved into police jurisdiction. Southall Black Sisters wrote in their consultation submission for the new legislation that 'our experiences show that few if any vulnerable young persons are willing to come forward to report a forced marriage if they believe that their parents will face criminal prosecutions and possible imprisonment'.<sup>50</sup> As Leah Cowan writes, this legislation (alongside other laws) is built on the notion that forms of violence identified as particularly prevalent in racialised communities are 'exceptional and pathological in their "barbaric" and "savage" nature'.<sup>51</sup>

According to data from several police forces around the country, the number of honour-based abuse cases had risen by 81 per cent from 2016 to 2021.<sup>52</sup> More recent data has shown that in the year ending March 2022, there were 2,887 honour-based offences recorded by the police in England and Wales; of these offences, seventy-seven were FGM cases and

141 forced marriages.<sup>53</sup> Even though police forces tend to caveat these statistics with improved recording of these crimes as possibly having an influence on the increasing rates, this type of brutality and violence seems to be on the rise in the UK. One of the most high-profile cases was that of twenty-year-old Banaz Mahmod in 2006 who was killed on the orders of her family in a so-called honour killing because she ended an abusive forced marriage and started a relationship with a man of her own choosing. Her father and uncle were convicted of her murder in 2007 and two cousins were later charged and sentenced for murder in 2010. There is now a campaign lobbying for the inclusion of Banaz's Law in the Victims and Prisoners Bill proposal – legislation that would see crimes committed for alleged cultural reasons treated as an aggravating not a mitigating factor during the sentencing process.

In September 2020, Banaz's case was turned into an ITV drama series, *Honour*, starring Keeley Hawes as DCI Caroline Goode, the officer who investigated the disappearance of Banaz in 2006. However, the series was criticised by many – including Banaz's sister, Pyazee – for focusing on the story of the white female detective instead of on Banaz and the violence she faced. The screenwriter Gwyneth Hughes even described the series as an 'ultimately [. . .] uplifting [story]' due to 'the sheer heroism and dedication of the police officers who hunted down her killers'.<sup>54</sup> In this case, the murder of a Muslim woman has been transformed into a strange and borderline offensive 'positive' story about the heroism of a white police officer.

Honour-based abuse tends to be associated with Muslim

communities. However, although there have been several cases where religion and/or culture formed part of the motive, it isn't a type of abuse that is exclusive to our communities. Cowan explains that naming these forms of abuse 'honour-based violence' implies commonalities around 'why' these violent acts were carried out: 'that there was something specific, mystic and foreign about these expressions of violence'.<sup>55</sup> But the murder of women by white men isn't deemed 'honour-based'. Herein lies the double standard: violence in racialised and Muslim communities is deserving of the full force of our criminal justice system, while violence by white men is normalised. In a 2021 interview with *The Cut*, Rafia Zakaria, author of *Against White Feminism*, also talked about the similarities between so-called honour killings and femicide more generally:

If you hear of an honour killing happening in Syria or somewhere else, it's framed as this idea that their culture is so bad, it's so inherently un-feminist. When a femicide happens here at home, it's supposed to be an aberration. That's just an unusual, bad thing that happened. The whole reason that categorisation is different is to entrap Black and brown women in the denialism that femicide is not happening here in the United States.<sup>56</sup>

The same can be said of the UK. Violence against women and girls is on the rise. In March 2014, Valerie Forde and her one-year-old daughter Jahzara were murdered by her ex-partner. In March 2021, Smita Mistry was murdered by her partner, who in 2023 was convicted of further rape and assault charges against two other women he'd been in a relationship with.<sup>57</sup>

And in March 2023, the headteacher at Epsom College, Emma Pattinson, and her seven-year-old daughter Lettie, died from shotgun wounds inflicted by her husband, George Pattinson. Speaking in Parliament in 2023, the Labour MP and former shadow minister for domestic violence and safeguarding Jess Phillips took more than five minutes to name the 109 women killed in the last year by men or where a man was the main suspect.<sup>58</sup> These examples are, sadly, just a drop in the ocean when it comes to women being murdered at the hands of men. As Zakaria explains, the male ego is at the centre of honour-based violence, just as it is with femicide. She argues that the two are still distinguished from each other so that white feminists can say they've freed their society of honour-based violence, but the feminism of Black and brown women is seen as 'weak and useless because honour killings are still happening'.<sup>59</sup>

Gender-based violence urgently needs to be tackled in this country and beyond, particularly as so much of it goes unnoticed or is hidden away behind a culture of fear and risk. Like the barriers Muslim women face when reporting incidents of domestic violence, many women may avoid going to the authorities to report 'honour-based' abuse due to being distrustful of the police or domestic violence services and charities. When these services tell Muslim women that their abuse was expected, it's harming Muslim women all over again and reinforcing the false belief that domestic violence and honour-based abuse is simply a part of Islam, or even possibly judging them for continuing to practise their faith.

The assumptions made about Muslim women, their relationships and their home lives only harm us and lead to us being treated as less than other women. We must contend

with microaggressions such as constantly having to explain that the oppression of women is not a part of Islam. Or defending our male relatives who have been stereotyped as violent or controlling. Or fighting to be included in spaces that we get locked out of because it's assumed our access is controlled by the men in our lives.

So, what does Islam say about women's rights? Well, our faith has instilled in both the Quran and Sunnah an abundance of rights – centuries before Western societies even began considering the genders as equal.

One of the most significant examples that I always find myself coming back to is a famous narration in which a man came to the Prophet Muhammed (pbuh) and asked, 'Who is most deserving of my good treatment?' The Prophet (pbuh) responded, 'Your mother', The man asked, 'Who after that?' And the Prophet (pbuh) again replied, 'Your mother'. The man asked again and the Prophet (pbuh) responded again, 'Your mother'. Finally, on the fourth time the man asked, the Prophet (pbuh) responded, 'Your father'. This alone highlights the status of Muslim women in the faith. In the Quran, Surah An-Nisa sets out just some of the rights and protections Islam gives Muslim women. One protection is that a husband must take care of his wife: 'Men shall take full care of women with the bounties Allah has bestowed on them, and what they may spend out of their possession [. . .]' This means that a man must provide for his partner the same standard of living he expects for himself. There's also a hadith that states that women are not owned, controlled or abused by men: 'Indeed I order you to be good to women, for they are under oath in your marriages. You do not own them'.

Another concept that is often invoked when talking about Islam is the fact it allows men to marry multiple partners. This is true; however, this comes with its own caveat, which includes the above protection. A man must be able to provide for his partners fully *and* equally. Surah An-Nisa also explicitly lays out a woman's right to an inheritance: 'Just as there is a share for men in what their parents and kinsfolk leave behind, so there is a share for women in what their parents and kinsfolk leave behind – be it little or much – a share ordained (by Allah)', as well as a woman's right to keep her last name after marriage and a right to a dowry: 'You shall give the women their due dowries, equitably. If they willingly forfeit anything, then you may accept it; it is rightfully yours'.

Another verse in the Quran, Surah Al-Baqarah, instils the right to divorce: 'And when you divorce women and they have (nearly) fulfilled their term, either retain them according to acceptable terms or release them according to acceptable terms, and do not keep them, intending harm, to transgress (against them) and whoever does that has certainly wronged himself'. Not only do Muslim women have a right to divorce in Islam (which can be initiated by both men and women), but also a right to separation that treats them with respect. When you consider that, in the UK, divorce was reserved for a very small proportion of wealthy men and had to be granted through an Act of Parliament until the 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act, it becomes interesting that Islam is viewed as such a backwards-thinking religion for women. Up until recently, women seeking a divorce in the UK had to prove their husbands were being unfaithful if they were citing grounds of adultery or prove additional faults such as cruelty.

Cultural norms and traditions can use Islamic language to justify misogynistic rules and laws, which are then invoked by white feminism as a criticism of Muslims, but Islam states that women have a right to education, a right to work and operate businesses and a right to our own wealth. In fact, education is one of the very first revelations revealed to the Prophet (pbuh), emphasising just how important education is in the religion. This isn't to say that some Muslim-majority societies don't warp these rights and use faith to justify treating women as second-class citizens. But these societies and governments have co-opted Islam to further their own social and political agendas and it shouldn't serve as a reflection on the religion itself – though it's often interpreted this way.

When it comes to misogyny in Muslim communities, it cannot be viewed as unique or in isolation to other patriarchal societies; they are one and the same, with the only difference being that, in our communities, religious language and customs are used to justify and reinforce the patriarchal rule which is now less common in Western societies that have moved away from religion. White feminism regularly frames Muslim men as the epitome of misogyny and a danger to the Western way of life, which not only paints all Muslim men with the same brush, but also implies that Muslim women are passive agents who are doing nothing to push back on misogyny in our communities. This way of thinking is quite common in how the far right approaches and talks about Muslims and, even though you may not expect it, white feminism has quite a few things in common with the far right.



## 5

# The relationship between women, feminism and the far right

*‘A feminism of compromise  
rather than liberation’*

Because of the nature of my job as a journalist, I regularly check the news and stay up to date with current affairs. But never in my life have I paid such close attention to the news than when the UK was facing far-right riots in August 2024. The news channels were constantly on in my home, I turned on news notifications on my phone and regularly checked various WhatsApp groups for any new information. I was in a constant state of anxiety and fear because these far-right groups were spouting Islamophobia and targeting Muslims. However, these far-right riots didn’t just happen overnight.

Since the 9/11 attacks in the US in 2001, as well as the 7/7 bombings in London in 2005, the vilification of Muslims reached new heights and continues to climb decades later. Even though Muslims make up just 6.5 per cent of the UK population, the myths and stereotypes surrounding our communities have only become murkier.<sup>1</sup> And these

stereotypes spread like wildfire, constantly picked up and peddled by the media and the political class, becoming worse and more terrifying in nature. But where do these ideas come from? And why are they reinforced week in, week out? To answer these questions, it's worth delving into the world of far-right groups and the relationship they have with both Islam and women's rights.

In March 2021, Switzerland became the latest in an ever-increasing list of European countries to vote through a ban on people wearing the burqa or niqab.<sup>2</sup> A proposal brought forward by the right-wing Swiss People's Party (SVP) passed to become legislation, banning the wearing of face coverings in public, including the burqa and niqab. These bans are nothing new, but what's worth exploring is how far-right groups and liberals seem to find common ground when it comes to the demonisation of Islam – and that common ground is white feminism.

White feminists and far-right movements usually sit on opposite ends of the political spectrum, but when it comes to Muslim women, both sit in a dangerously similar sphere of thinking. In the European context, this is the thinking that has now filtered all the way to the top and translated into sweeping legislation that surveils and controls the bodies of Muslim women, whilst also justifying violence against Muslims. In Switzerland, the SVP's proposal didn't mention Islam directly, but they campaigned with slogans such as 'stop extremism' and their campaign materials featured threatening looking women in black niqabs,<sup>3</sup> so it's safe to say Islam was very likely at the heart of this ban. And when you consider their previous proposal in 2009 to ban the building of

minarets (towers typically built into or adjacent to mosques) in Switzerland, the picture becomes clearer. The SVP claimed that minarets were a ‘sign of Islamisation’, and the proposed ban ended up being voted through to become law.<sup>4</sup> The SVP has regularly used Muslim women as symbols when it comes to their apparent anti-Islam sentiment. Tamara Funicello, co-president of the Swiss Social Democratic Party’s women’s movement, said in the *Financial Times* that ‘it is a mockery that the [SVP] played itself up as the saviour of women in the referendum campaign’. She added that this was a party that ‘considered marital rape as not problematic, denies wage inequality and opposes, still today, any improvement of the situation of women in this country and internationally’.<sup>5</sup>

You’d be forgiven for thinking there were lots of minarets and burqa-wearing women in Switzerland, but there are not. Before the ban on the building of minarets came into force, there were four in the whole country, and it’s estimated that only around thirty women in Switzerland were wearing the burqa or niqab.<sup>6</sup> So, why are these viewed as such large and pressing problems that require control through legislation when they affect such a small minority? It’s likely due to the symbolism they both represent, especially when it comes to Muslim women’s clothing and appearance, in what’s been dubbed ‘Islamisation’. It’s a term that bears no meaning to Muslims but is a concept that has been created in and normalised by the West.

## The homegrown nature of far-right politics

In the UK, you tend to hear stories or reports of people worried that areas are being subjected to ‘Islamisation’ because there’s a religious school round the corner or a large Muslim community happens to live there. The far right may not always be associated with a British way of life, but this type of politics is a lot closer to home than we think. This is something that the Trojan Horse Affair podcast covers in detail in their years-long investigation into the Trojan Horse scandal that shook British politics in 2014. This scandal involved a letter landing on a city councillor’s desk in Birmingham that laid out an elaborate plot by Islamic ‘extremists’ to infiltrate the city’s schools. This story, of course, exploded into the British political landscape and set off a moral panic about the ‘Islamisation’ of our schools and country in general. This one letter with an unknown author or origin that governments and institutions took at face value resulted in several investigations and strengthened ‘counter-terrorism’ policy and legislation. The podcast even revealed that, before the letter was made public, Michael Gove (then Tory education secretary) was warned numerous times it was almost certainly a hoax. But he persevered in legitimising it as a document and, even to this day, still refuses to admit this letter fanned the flames of a national scandal.

In an article she penned for *Novara Media*, the Labour MP Zarah Sultana wrote:

The scandal mainstreamed Islamophobic ideas about Muslims conspiring to undermine British society, depicting Muslims as an ‘enemy within’ – ideas that were already dominant on the

far right. Indeed, Gove was himself ahead of the curve, having fed these tropes and demonised British Muslims in his 2006 book *Celsius 7/7*. In a case of curious prescience, the book even had a chapter titled 'The Trojan Horse'. No surprise, then, that Gove and the Tories seized the moment and immortalised the hoax letter in government policy.<sup>7</sup>

As Sultana writes, 'Islamisation' was already a dominant narrative in the far-right sphere but has become a feature of mainstream media and political thinking. This Islamophobia is then fed back into the public consciousness via scaremongering and racist clickbait headlines, leading people to believe that Muslims are 'taking over' or 'invading' British society. In fact, more than a third of people in the UK believe that Islam is a threat to British life, according to a 2019 report by Hope Not Hate, with 32 per cent of respondents saying they thought there were 'no-go areas' where sharia law dominated.<sup>8</sup> When swathes of society have a problem with what they perceive as 'Islamisation', one of the first things they tend to prioritise in their arguments is how Muslim women dress. Muslim women choosing to cover up by wearing the hijab or the niqab is an instant signifier of Islam to people both within and outside of the religion. And with this hyper-visibility, especially in Europe and the West, Muslim women have become dominant symbols of the Other. We are viewed as people who don't fit in with 'Western' or 'modern' values and tend to be seen as inherently oppressed by both our religion and the men in our lives.

On the one hand, you have the white saviour attitude kicking in and, on the other, the vilification and Othering of Islam. And white feminists uphold both attitudes, which lends well

to far-right movements co-opting feminist rhetoric to further their violent agendas. The English Defence League (EDL), a far-right Islamophobic group once led by Tommy Robinson, is a good example of how these groups use Muslim women to further their own agenda of aggressive, anti-Islam and xenophobic views. Set up in 2009, the EDL claim that Britain is under attack from Muslims and ‘Islamisation’, and purport to be an organisation that oppose ‘militant Islam’.<sup>9</sup> This is a group known for its culture of toxic masculinity (especially when linked back to its football hooliganism roots) and upholding traditional gender norms<sup>10</sup> – up until they realised they could use the feminist narrative around Muslim women to drive home their hatred of Islam, as well as having a ‘defence’ to allegations of misogyny. Even though the EDL have seen a decrease in their membership over the years and have been banned from several social media platforms, they still allegedly maintain seventeen regional chapters across England. As academics Cynthia Miller-Idriss and Hilary Pilkington observed in *Gender and the Radical and Extreme Right*, ‘newer radical-right groups argue that western democratic traditions and values include supporting women’s rights, a wider range of sexualities, and tolerance toward the LGBTQ community’.<sup>11</sup> This seemingly progressive stance is then used to attack and Other Islam and immigration as well as serving as a tool for recruiting women into far-right movements – which is exactly what the EDL did, even setting up a LGBTQ division.

In a report conducted by King’s College, Alexander Melagrou-Hitchens looked into the history of far-right groups and found that the core themes that the EDL is built on are:

a pan-Islamic war against the West, Muslim demographics and the ‘decline of Great Britain’, state/media complicity in Islamisation and Muslim immigration.<sup>12</sup> These groups tend to firmly believe in the conspiracy theory of the ‘great replacement’, which is based on the false claim that so-called indigenous European people will be outnumbered by Muslims. And, with the support of some of the most outspoken critics of Islam in the US, Pamela Geller and Robert Spencer, the EDL has managed to spread its message across Europe, creating several other ‘defence leagues’.

However, with the EDL’s decline after Robinson’s initial exit, hard-line groups such as Britain First came to the forefront. Britain First’s key strategy was to aggressively target mosques and hand out leaflets stating that Muslims should police themselves or face the threat of violence from Britain First members.<sup>13</sup> There have been several cases over the years where members of far-right groups have either incited or committed violent acts against Muslims. And, where two in five religious hate crime offences targeted Muslims in the year ending March 2022, it seems that the hatred far-right groups (as well as the Islamophobia that permeates more centrist and liberal sections of society) have whipped up is resulting in real life harm and consequences. There have been numerous examples of far-right groups and/or individuals creating and distributing anti-Muslim leaflets across the UK, including in Preston and Bradford, where a leaflet read ‘kill scum Muslims’ and ‘why do Muslim women wear burkas [...] we are now going to do acid attacks’.<sup>14</sup> Within twelve weeks of the murder of Lee Rigby in May 2013, over thirty-five mosques in England and Wales were attacked.<sup>15</sup> One of these attacks

included the Al-Rahma Islamic Centre in north London, which was destroyed in a fire that the EDL was allegedly responsible for as the letters ‘EDL’ were graffitied on the outside of the building. Kevin Carroll, of the EDL, said the group ‘do not approve of any religious buildings being attacked’.<sup>16</sup> And in March 2018, leaders of Britain First themselves, Paul Golding and Jayda Fransen, were both found guilty of religiously aggravated harassment and sentenced to eighteen weeks and thirty-six weeks in prison, respectively.<sup>17</sup>

### **The far right’s linking of religion and sexual violence against women**

Their discriminatory and harmful policies weren’t reserved just for women either – they were also harmful to racialised men. The EDL have been instrumental in pushing the narrative around the exceptionalised misogyny and sexual violence of Black and brown men. A key example of this is the media coverage surrounding the Rochdale and Rotherham grooming gang cases, with the EDL contributing to the creation of the myth of ‘Muslim grooming gangs’. In Rochdale, nine men were sentenced to up to twenty-five years in prison for sexual offences against teenage girls between 2005 and 2013.<sup>18</sup> The men were charged and prosecuted under Operation Doublet, a police investigation into the sexual exploitation of teenage girls by men in Rochdale. More recently, two of the convicted men are set to be deported to Pakistan, after losing a seven-year legal fight to remain in the UK.<sup>19</sup> In Rotherham, seven men were convicted of sexual offences in 2018 that targeted

five teenage girls between 1998 and 2005.<sup>20</sup> The £90 million inquiry – Operation Stovewood – is currently looking into offences committed between 1997 and 2013 and has so far arrested 209 individuals, with twenty people being convicted to date.<sup>21</sup> A common thread between the cases in Rochdale and Rotherham is that these groups were predominately made up of men from South Asian and Muslim backgrounds. In the 2013 report from King's College London, the authors found that the EDL was exploiting concerns about grooming gangs to fuel its anti-Islam agenda and help forge networks with far-right groups across Europe. 'This "rape jihad", as it has become known, is a significant concern for the EDL', said one of the authors of the report, Alexander Melagrou-Hitchens. 'Interest has risen since revelations in the British media about the existence of sex-grooming gangs made up of Muslim men of south-Asian origin'.<sup>22</sup> In June 2012, the EDL even staged a demonstration in Rochdale to pressure the police into referring to the individuals in the case as specifically Muslim, so that a link could be established between the religion and the crime. Of course, the EDL's commitment to tackling child sexual abuse and exploitation doesn't quite reach within their own ranks, with senior member Leigh McMillan imprisoned in 2018 for sexually abusing a ten-year-old girl and continuing this abuse around one hundred times over a five-year period.<sup>23</sup>

This link between religion and sexual abuse has very real consequences. The EDL's manipulation of fears around child sexual exploitation and grooming became a contributing factor in Darren Osborne's 'radicalisation' which led to him driving a van into Muslims outside Finsbury Park Mosque during the month of Ramadan in June 2017. Osborne killed

fifty-one-year-old Makram Ali and severely injured nine others.<sup>24</sup> After gathering evidence from his devices, police uncovered that Osborne had been ‘radicalised’ in under four weeks and had a history of reading posts by the former EDL leader Tommy Robinson,<sup>25</sup> Britain First and other far-right groups. As well as this, Osbourne’s partner at the time claimed that the BBC drama *Three Girls* – a series which followed the abuse in Rochdale – played a pivotal role in his hatred for and obsession with Muslims.

‘A powerful modern racial myth has been exploded. What started as a far-right trope had migrated into the mainstream, meeting little resistance along the way’, Dr Ella Cockbain and Dr Waqas Tufail wrote in *The Guardian* in 2020.<sup>26</sup> Cockbain, an associate professor in security and crime science at University College London, and Tufail, a senior lecturer in criminology at Leeds Beckett University, wrote a joint paper on the ‘Muslim grooming gangs’ narrative and their research was used by the Home Office in its own two-year study of child sexual exploitation. The central argument of the ‘grooming gangs’ narrative is that a ‘disproportionate’ number of Asian-Muslim heritage men are involved in grooming and abusing white British girls. The authors of the paper write that ‘Muslim men have been stereotyped as both religiously fanatical and prone to committing violent, sexual acts motivated by a patriarchal, misogynistic culture and backward, barbaric religion’.<sup>27</sup> Cockbain and Tufail found that the term ‘grooming gang’ returned 5,647 results in news articles in the nine years since the term first emerged in a 2011 *Times* newspaper exposé, compared with zero in the nine years prior. And over half the results contained references to Islam, Muslim, Pakistan or Asian.

And it isn't just the right-wing press who have pushed this narrative, but liberals on the left too, including senior politicians. For example, the Labour MP for Rotherham Sarah Champion wrote an article for *The Sun* titled: 'British Pakistani men ARE raping and exploiting white girls . . . and it's time we faced up to it'. In the article, Champion wrote, 'For too long we have ignored the race of these abusers and, worse, tried to cover it up. No more. These people are predators and the common denominator is their ethnic heritage'.<sup>28</sup> Champion later apologised for her wording and distanced herself from *The Sun* article.<sup>29</sup> This is not to deny or detract from the horrific abuse experienced by young girls in organised child sexual exploitation but, rather, to point out that a racialised narrative has been built around Muslim men, when child sexual exploitation is not a 'Muslim problem'. This 'problem' has been carefully and meticulously crafted by far-right groups, like Britain First, to justify their prejudice and violence towards Muslim communities.

### Where do women and feminists fit into the far right?

A lot has been written and researched around why these types of fringe and 'extremist' groups are so popular with young men, but women also seem to be finding more of a home in these circles too. Even Jackie Griffin, wife of former British National Party (BNP) leader Nick Griffin, has stated her 'debt to feminism', saying that more women should join their movement and that she owes her 'feeling of empowerment and strength to women of my grandmother's generation who

were staunch feminists'.<sup>30</sup> And then there were the more recent far-right riots, sparked by the Southport attack on a Taylor Swift-themed dance and yoga class for kids. Soon after the horrific attack and subsequent murders hit news headlines in early August 2024, false claims began circulating on social media about the identity of the attacker – that he was a migrant and of a Muslim background. Far-right groups latched onto this pretty quickly (including Tommy Robinson and Andrew Tate), but one of the initial false claims has been traced back to a white woman who posted on X to her numerous followers that 'Ali Al-Shakati' was the suspect and that he was an 'asylum seeker who came to the UK by boat last year' and was on an 'MI6 watch list'.<sup>31</sup> The false information spread like wildfire across the internet and played a part in prompting a riot in Southport the following evening. The woman deleted the post an hour after she posted it, but the damage had already been done.<sup>32</sup>

This is not to say that the woman is to blame for the far-right riots that swept the UK following the Southport attack and the misinformation surrounding it, but her lack of nuance and critical thinking around sharing this information was utilised and weaponised by dangerous far-right groups who were already looking for a reason to attack Muslims. This shows how it's not just men inadvertently feeding far-right sentiment. Some evidence suggests that the gender gap in far-right support is decreasing, with more women supporting and voting for far-right groups and political parties across the Western world, as well as taking to the streets in far-right protests and rallies.<sup>33</sup> Another example of this in the aftermath of the Southport attack was a social media post by the

wife of a Tory councillor, Lucy Connolly. The forty-one-year-old was arrested on suspicion of inciting racial hatred after posting on X: ‘Mass deportation now, set fire to all the f\*\*\*ing hotels full of the b\*\*\*\*\* for all I care ... If that makes me racist, so be it’.<sup>34</sup> She has since apologised, saying she had acted on ‘false and malicious’ information, and has been given a prison sentence. But it wasn’t just women posting on social media. There were also women taking to the streets and playing an active role in the riots too.

In the US, 53 per cent of white women voted for Trump (who famously said he loved to grab women ‘by the pussy’) in 2016, with this number increasing to 55 per cent in 2020.<sup>35</sup> And in 2024, female voters’ support for Trump grew about 5 per cent from 2020, according to a review of election data by the *Financial Times*.<sup>36</sup> Their voting patterns serve as a grim reminder that some women are still more interested in protecting their privilege than fighting for equality. A similar picture has emerged in Italy. Giorgia Meloni – leader of the hard-right populist party Fratelli d’Italia (Brothers of Italy) – was sworn in as Italy’s new prime minister in October 2022 after running a campaign built on nationalism and a promise to ‘block migrant ships and support for traditional “family values” and anti-LGBTQ themes’.<sup>37</sup> After forming a majority government with the anti-Muslim far-right group Lega (The League), Meloni is now the country’s first female leader and it’s been estimated that around 25 per cent of Italian woman voted for her and her Brothers of Italy party.<sup>38</sup> But Meloni’s anti-Islam rhetoric began long before she joined forces with The League. In April 2019, she posted the following message on her Facebook page:

If Muslims think of bringing holy war into our house, it is time to take even drastic measures: all that remains is to block all forms of Islamic immigration until they clear up their ideas. We intend to defend our classical and Christian roots from the process of Islamization of Europe, do-gooders and sultans of half the world need to make a reason.<sup>39</sup>

Meloni has spoken about the ‘Islamisation of Europe’ consistently over the years and her anti-immigrant policies are interwoven with her other views. According to Sara Farris:

The femonationalist ideology [...] allows us to understand why Meloni waves the banner of women’s rights only when it comes to demonising immigrant men (as she did during this election campaign by posting a video of an asylum seeker raping a woman), or proposing family-work balance policies that would allow Italian women to have more children, so as to counter the supposedly excessive fertility of Muslim women who threaten to Islamise Europe, as Meloni has been saying for years.<sup>40</sup>

The far right seems to be taking centre stage in many of our political landscapes. In Germany, parliament group leader of the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) party Alice Weidel has a similar stance when it comes to immigration, family life and Islam. In its 2017 manifesto, the AfD adopted an openly anti-Muslim policy, running a section titled ‘Why Islam does not belong to Germany’, with one of its posters reading, ‘Burkas? We like bikinis’.<sup>41</sup> The section included policies on banning foreign funding of mosques in Germany,

banning the burqa, banning the Muslim call to prayer, as well as putting all imams through a state vetting procedure. AfD MP Nicole Höchst has talked about how she's concerned for Muslim women living in Germany and how many of them strive for integration into German society, 'only to find that in the summer holidays they're going to be married off to a husband they've never met in the country their families originated from'.<sup>42</sup>

In France, Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally party (formerly the National Front) successfully reached the final round in the presidential elections against France's current leader, Emmanuel Macron. Le Pen's party is known for its hard-line anti-EU and anti-immigration stances and has been mired in numerous allegations of racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and xenophobia over the years.<sup>43</sup> Even so, during her third presidential bid, Le Pen rose to become the second favourite political personality in France.

However, Le Pen has only become particularly popular amongst women recently. Towards the end of the 2000s, the Front National began to take advantage of the hot topic of women's rights within the context of its nationalist and xenophobic campaigns. And Le Pen has grown in popularity due to her stances on anti-immigration and 'Islamist fundamentalism'. Right-wing populist parties have been 'specifically targeting women with controversial and contested messages that immigration, particularly from Muslim countries, brings with it misogynistic cultures that threaten women's freedom in Europe – from catcalling women in short skirts to sexual assault'.<sup>44</sup> It's something Shareen Gokal at the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) echoed to

*openDemocracy* in 2018: ‘The idea that Muslim communities are singularly oppressive towards women is consistently mobilised to widen support’. She went on to say that these movements perpetuated ‘oppressive gender norms’ whilst simultaneously offering women ‘opportunities to experience some form of empowerment through political action, participation and even leadership’.<sup>45</sup>

Le Pen’s strategy has been to target working class women, playing on any fears they may have surrounding their jobs being ‘taken’ by migrants. In an interview with *The Guardian*, a Le Pen voter said: ‘The number one reason I vote Front National is Islam. Everything else can be resolved, but we have let Islam slip into this country. There’s too much Islam here’. Another woman in the article described feeling threatened by the rise in ‘radical Islam’ and said: ‘I was fed up with catcalls when I walked down the street in a skirt. For some groups of men, if your head isn’t covered and you dress as French, you’re a prostitute’.<sup>46</sup> What these voting intentions have in common is the fundamental trope that Islam is anti-women and anti-feminism. And pushing an Islamophobic stance has made Le Pen more popular amongst some groups of women because she can now shed her image of being ‘against feminism’ and appear to support women’s rights via her prejudice against Islam and Muslims.

Farris examined Le Pen as part of her investigation into the relationship between women’s rights and the unlikely coalition of right-wing nationalist parties, neoliberals and some feminists. She said that ‘the “appearance” of an opening of the Front National to the theme of women’s rights in particular has been further emphasised not only by the fact that its new president is

a woman, but also by the growth of the female vote for the Front National'.<sup>47</sup> But Le Pen's positions on women's rights are vague and contradictory, oscillating between defending women's liberation and defending the traditional family, except when it comes to Islam. 'While advocating women's emancipation as a central value of the European (Christian) social fabric, which Muslims and non-western migrants allegedly lack, these parties also promote policies that encourage the maintenance of traditional roles for women', Farris writes.<sup>48</sup>

She also argues that both nationalists and neoliberals frame Islam as a 'quintessentially misogynistic religion and culture' and draw on gender equality to 'advance xenophobic and racist politics'.<sup>49</sup> And, despite the numerous differences among them, Islam is the common battleground that unites them in their fight for gender equality and the 'victimised object' – otherwise known as Muslim women. For example, in February 2023, leaked documents revealed a secretive organisation accused of collaborating with far-right activists that included the Tory former deputy speaker of the House of Lords, Baroness Cox. Speaking about this group, Cox denied it was anti-Muslim but a 'meeting of people who support the aims of my bill'.<sup>50</sup> The bill she's referring to is one that 'aims to protect Muslim women in Britain from sharia law'.<sup>51</sup> The group also allegedly included Magnus Nielsen, who's previously described Islam as 'the enemy of every democratic and free society',<sup>52</sup> and Pamela Geller, the 'anti-Muslim movement's most visible and flamboyant figurehead' in the US, according to the Southern Poverty Law Centre.<sup>53</sup>

The far right has been leveraging women's 'fear' of migrants taking their jobs and painting migrants as a threat

to women's safety and the sole perpetrators of sexual violence. This is not based on any data or facts, but it is a narrative that plays on fears and emotions and has been powerful in recruiting more young white women to the far right. In her book *Me Not You*, Alison Phipps investigates the cultural power of mainstream white feminism and how it ultimately depends on the dehumanisation of people of colour.<sup>54</sup> She argues that white feminism has a long history of policing the border, with many of the suffragettes supporting eugenics programmes and positioning votes for women as key to blocking African-American communities from accessing systems of power in the US. And, even though Western borders are now reframed in the economic context, white feminism remains complicit in upholding oppressive systems through the pushing of the narratives of resource scarcity (i.e. the need to 'protect our own') as well as the myth of the migrant rapist. 'The "fascistic habit" of white feminism can easily move from latent to overt. It's a short step from seeing more marginalised people as collateral, to positioning them as enemies when they thwart our will to power', writes Phipps. The white saviour mindset of white feminism rarely reaches Muslim women migrants, though. There's so much rhetoric around 'saving' women in other countries, but as soon as those same women come to Western countries to seek refuge, the rhetoric is flipped on its head and it becomes a problem of integration, as former UK prime minister David Cameron famously said when introducing his controversial English language policy in 2016.<sup>55</sup>

This links back to the idea that white women justify their prejudice and discrimination against particular groups, such

as Muslims or migrants, because they're more interested in protecting their own lives and rights, even if it is at the expense of marginalised people. And, as their rights tend to be rooted in the structures and power of white supremacy, white women are willing to vote for people like Meloni and Le Pen in order to maintain the status quo and their position of power in society. So even when women reach these positions of power, particularly in politics, it doesn't mean that society is any better off. Second-wave feminists argued that concepts such as war, hierarchy and xenophobia belonged to the patriarchy and that, by contrast, women's leadership would create a more inclusive society. Yet women like Meloni, Le Pen and Weidel are evidence that is simply not the case. For these women, feminism is not about achieving freedom and justice for Muslims, Black people, disabled people, trans people and many others. Instead, it's about working within the existing structures which allow white women to sit at the top – it's a feminism of compromise rather than liberation'.<sup>56</sup> For these women, feminism is not about achieving freedom and justice for Muslims, Black people, disabled people, trans people and many others. Instead, it's about working within the existing structures which allow white women to sit at the top – it's a feminism of compromise rather than liberation.

And contrary to expectations, women do not have a passive or reduced involvement in far-right movements, but play an active role, even setting up their own campaigns. One such campaign is 120 decibels (#120dB) – named after the volume of a rape alarm – which uses 'sexual violence against women as a political tool to assert their nationalist agenda across Europe and the UK'.<sup>57</sup> The group claims that sexual violence

is imported and perpetrated by ‘criminal migrants’ from ‘archaic societies’ – feeding into the racial trope that migrant men are inherently dangerous.<sup>58</sup> Referencing the volume of a rape alarm in its name is an attempt to suggest sexual violence as an inherent behaviour trait of migrant men. As Sophia Siddiqui writes in her 2018 *gal-dem* report, #120dB is not about the experience of victims, but ‘instead centres on competing masculinities, whereby the bodies of women become a battleground of “honour”’ and uses sexual violence to serve its nationalistic ideology.<sup>59</sup>

In the US, Moms for Liberty is a campaign group that has framed itself as a ‘parental rights’ movement but has now been listed as a far-right ‘extremist’ group by the Southern Poverty Law Center. In an emailed response to *The Guardian*’s request for comment, the Moms for Liberty founders Tina Descovich and Tiffany Justice wrote:

Name-calling parents who want to be a part of their child’s education as ‘hate groups’ or ‘bigoted’ just further exposes what this battle is all about: Who fundamentally gets to decide what is taught to our kids in school – parents or government employees? [. . .] We believe that parental rights do not stop at the classroom door and no amount of hate from groups like this is going to stop that.<sup>60</sup>

Founded in 2020, Moms for Liberty is focused on the moral panic surrounding ‘wokeness’, especially when it comes to gender identity and sexuality and the teaching of its themes in schools. The façade that it’s purely a parental rights group is slipping, however, as a *Vice News* investigation uncovered

links between numerous Moms for Liberty chapters and ‘extremist’ groups like the Proud Boys and QAnon conspiracists<sup>61</sup> – as well as Moms for Liberty materials using Adolf Hitler quotes on several occasions.<sup>62</sup> And then there’s the case of Marjorie Taylor Greene, the extreme Republican from Georgia, who ‘paid tens of thousands of dollars for a promoted Parlor post stating the need for a grassroots army and created a Photoshopped image of her and Donald Trump’ that was used in her election fundraiser.<sup>63</sup>

The relationship between white women (and some white feminists) and far-right groups is a complex one that can include movements like #12odB as well as the more extreme, such as white nationalist groups like the EDL. It’s a section of the political spectrum that is commonly attributed to men, particularly men who subscribe to models of toxic masculinities, but it’s an assumption that minimises the power that women can hold in these circles. The woman who shared the misinformation about the Southport attacker was in disbelief that one tweet would have such a big impact. But I would disagree. Yes, a single tweet removed from all contexts wouldn’t cause nationwide riots, but one that stokes the fire of racism, Islamophobia and anti-migrant sentiment – fires that have been burning for some time – can absolutely contribute to the violence we all witnessed that week in August. Muslims were having to navigate public life, effectively with a target on their backs, not knowing when or where the danger (or risk of danger) would come from. I didn’t leave my home for a whole week, mostly as a precaution, but also because my local area in London was one of the locations circulated on an online riot hit list. Muslim women especially

were verbally abused, spat at and had hijabs ripped off their heads by individuals set on harming them. So, even though a social media post by this woman wasn't the root cause of the far right riots, she (and others) still played a role. She used her platform, perhaps from a place of ignorance, and is now using that same platform to remove herself from the situation after the damage has been done. In this chapter we have seen women use their power to simultaneously protect their own positions in society whilst furthering hateful and violent modes of thinking – gendered Islamophobia being one of many.

## 6

# Gendered Islamophobia, carceral feminism and UK state violence

*‘Girlbossing “counter-terrorism”’*

British Muslims are no strangers to state violence. We are one of the most, if not the most, surveilled community in the country. Any conversation or behavioural trait that’s considered ‘extremist’ or ‘radical’ will likely mean government agencies knocking on doors and interrogating whole families. As well as surveillance, Muslims also must contend with the risk of detention, or even deportation, simply because of our identity and faith.

It wasn’t long ago that Muslim and South Asian women were being subjected to so-called ‘virginity testing’ by Home Office border agents, as the British government was pushing to control migrants coming to the UK from Commonwealth countries through discriminatory immigration policies. This involved vaginal examinations on some South Asian women coming to the UK to ‘prove’ that they were unmarried and, therefore, eligible for entry into the UK without being put on a waiting list. Immigration rules at the time meant that a

woman coming to the UK to marry a fiancé didn't need a visa, if her wedding was to be held within three months. The racist and sexist assumptions behind 'virginity testing' were based on an assumed untrustworthiness of this community and the 'stereotype of the submissive, meek and tradition-bound Asian woman'.<sup>1</sup> It wasn't white feminists who put a stop to this discriminatory and invasive procedure, but Black and brown feminists standing shoulder-to-shoulder to prevent such border violence.

A few decades later and we're currently seeing our immigration system becoming more violent and draconian under the 'hostile environment' framework. In 2012, then home secretary Theresa May said in an interview with *The Telegraph* that she wanted to 'create a really hostile environment for illegal migrants' and, two immigration acts later, this framework has become a deeply embedded part of the UK's immigration system.<sup>2</sup> May set the precedent for subsequent home secretaries, such as Priti Patel, to become emboldened in not only enacting the hostile environment but pushing its policies even further, through the Conservative government's Rwanda plan. However, May's record in the Home Office didn't stop some feminist organisations from celebrating her becoming the country's prime minister in 2016. Alison Phipps pointed out in her work that when May stepped down as prime minister a few years later, the tears she shed at the podium outside 10 Downing Street 'did political work' to absolve her of her violent track record.<sup>3</sup> These white tears led to charities such as Women's Aid posting on social media their gratitude and thanks for May's work in office – a post that it later deleted. As Cowan says, 'this alignment of the

women's sector with one of the key players of neoliberal state building illuminates the hollowing out of the political core in anti-violence work'.<sup>4</sup> That Theresa May is a woman – and made some legal contributions to the gender-based violence sector – was evidence enough of her 'feminism' for some organisations and charities. The same can be said of former Met Police commissioner Cressida Dick, the first woman in the post and someone who often credits feminism as a driving force for her joining the police. White feminism celebrates these 'wins' in terms of women like Theresa May, Priti Patel and Cressida Dick coming to power, whilst also allowing a dangerous environment to be enforced by these very same women and the systems they work in – structures that tend to disproportionately affect Muslims and racialised people.

Muslims have seen a huge increase in the surveillance of their lives over the past few decades, mainly through the Prevent legislation. Prevent is a national 'counter-terrorism' strategy that was introduced in 2003 and gives the state wide-reaching powers to surveil and control communities it classifies as a 'terrorism risk'. And it's everywhere. Prevent is embedded in many key areas of society, including education and healthcare, and requires organisations to report any behaviour that's seen as a precursor to 'radicalisation'. But it's a policy that disproportionately targets Muslim communities and has done so for the last twenty years.

It isn't just Prevent either. In the wake of the 2005 7/7 London bombings and the continued 'counter-terrorism' discourse, the UK government announced the launch of its new national campaign, 'See It, Say It, Sorted', in 2016. This campaign was rolled out on our railways and it's probably

something you've heard on train announcements countless times. The rail minister at the time, Paul Maynard, said: 'We want to send a clear message to anyone threatening the security of the rail network that there are thousands of pairs of eyes and ears ready to report any potential threat'.<sup>5</sup>

This initiative encouraged train passengers to watch out for behaviours such as someone avoiding rail staff or police, unattended bags or luggage and anyone checking out security arrangements. It's a campaign that's arguably one of the government's most successful in terms of messaging – you're unlikely to come across someone who isn't aware of 'See It, Say It, Sorted'. Like Prevent, however, it's another way for the government to recruit members of the public and utilise them as agents of the state. It's yet another public surveillance initiative that relies on a certain understanding of the kinds of bodies that should be treated as suspicious. It's completely subjective, because what counts as suspicious? And, more importantly, who? It's rooted in the Othering of Black and brown bodies and the unconscious (and conscious) bias that people have when it comes to 'suspicious' or 'abnormal' behaviour. Would a hijab-wearing Muslim woman who was visibly nervous on a train be considered suspicious because she's constantly looking around? Or a bearded Black man because he has large luggage?

Even if you look at the 'See It, Say It, Sorted' posters, you can see that 'good' behaviour is illustrated using light colouring and 'bad' behaviour using dark colours and shadowy figures – i.e. the Other. As mentioned in previous chapters, we know that the Muslim community is one of the most Othered groups of people in the UK – and the West generally. In their

paper, University of Leeds researchers Yasmin Hussain and Paul Bagguley also argue that the ‘securitisation’ of British Muslims in the media, government and public narratives has firmly established them as a ‘suspect community’.<sup>6</sup> The ‘See It, Say It, Sorted’ campaign has only served to re-establish Muslims as inherent suspects and everyone else as inspectors for the state.

Then there’s facial recognition technology, the latest tool in state surveillance. Since 2015, several police forces have used live facial recognition surveillance technology in public spaces, scanning millions of people’s faces. These are special cameras that are used to capture images of people walking past with the goal of matching those faces to people on a watchlist. The cameras scan particular points of our faces and create biometric maps. You might think these watchlists are a list of people with criminal records or wanted for police questioning, but no, the lists can contain photos of anyone – whether suspected of a crime or not. Your personal data can be taken without your knowledge and without your consent, for example, in publicly accessible places like shopping centres and train stations. The technology has been said to work better for white men than any other group, meaning women and people of colour are more likely to be flagged by systems in error, and so stopped by the police and asked to identify themselves.<sup>7</sup> Amnesty International, who are working on the global ‘Ban the Scan’ campaign, reported that Black people are most at risk of being misidentified by facial recognition software.<sup>8</sup> It’s not just the software itself but the police using it as a surveillance tool for communities of colour – for example, the Met Police using it for events likely to be attended by people of colour, like Notting Hill Carnival, and

some US police forces using it during Black Lives Matter protests. Facial recognition cameras have also been used to police protests in the UK, such as the Kill the Bill protests in 2021 and 2022, where I saw this surveillance being used. This is all to say that facial recognition technology is yet another surveillance tool used by the state and its agents to police certain groups of people in society – namely the most marginalised communities.

With the rising tide of authoritarianism in the UK, an increase in state and police powers will mean that this type of surveillance will only get worse. A significant feature of white feminism is its belief in the state and it being the answer to gendered violence. Carceral feminism – which sits at a similar intersection with white feminism and has overlapping components – operates under the assumption that violence is caused by individuals in isolation and that the punishment of these individuals will lead to increased safety and security for women. It's a feminism that assumes that the police are on 'our side' and that the systems in place treat everyone equally and fairly, so the best possible solution is achieved for all. But gendered violence is structural, and the systems are geared to work in favour of a select few in society. In fact, there are many laws that already exist to tackle gendered violence, and yet the issue remains. Women are still harassed, attacked and killed on a daily basis.

Carceral feminism is not the answer to gendered violence. If anything, it is likely that it will make many women's lives worse – particularly Muslim women. The perception that Muslim men enact a unique kind of misogyny, coupled with the fact that they're already prime targets of Prevent, could

lead to even more Muslim men in prisons. The proportion of Muslim prisoners increased from 8 per cent in 2002 to 18 per cent in 2022, but Muslims only make up 6.5 per cent of the UK population.<sup>9</sup> More men in prisons will then lead to the break-up of families, potentially pushing many Muslim women into economic hardship as they single-handedly take care of their families. And it's unlikely that the state will step in to help them. If it has achieved its goal of 'protecting women' by locking up Muslim men, their security will no longer be a state problem. We must fend for ourselves. Instead of helping Muslim women live safer lives, carceral solutions will simply leave them in even more precarious and vulnerable situations.

The common feature in many of the conversations around gendered violence is the call for stronger punitive measures in laws and policing to help keep women safe. The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, publicly called for misogyny to be made a hate crime and public harassment against women a criminal offence. There have also been calls for longer prison sentences for crimes involving violence against women, with Labour MP Jess Phillips, the former shadow minister for domestic violence and safeguarding, calling for violence against women to be treated with the same force of 'terrorism' laws.

We all saw how the Met Police treated women at Sarah Everard's vigil on Clapham Common in 2021. Women were physically assaulted, kettled and violently arrested for attending the vigil. And that's not even mentioning that the perpetrator in Sarah's case was a police officer who had a decades-long history of harassing and assaulting women and 'should never have been a police officer', according to the 2024 Angiolini Inquiry.<sup>10</sup>

Putting the emphasis on the expansion of state control and power to tackle gendered violence ultimately ends up harming the same women you're trying to protect. Insecure immigration status is often used by perpetrators to control and exert power over migrant women, with the threat of deportation looming over them if they decide to come forward to expose their abuse to the police. Rape and sexual abuse survivors who come forward and report their experiences end up being re-victimised through the police having them recount their abuse repeatedly, or asking questions based in victim-blaming. And that's if a woman is even believed by the police in the first place. However, this doesn't stop many women from looking to the state for punitive solutions to this type of violence – especially if they are women who have perhaps never experienced oppression or harm at the hands of the state.

A focus on carceral feminist solutions could also lead to an even bigger justification for 'integration' initiatives that target Muslim women in an attempt to 'empower' them. It's something we've already seen with then prime minister David Cameron's push for English language courses for Muslim women in 2016.<sup>11</sup> As part of Louise Casey's 2016 review on opportunity and integration, these courses were aimed at reaching the 'most isolated' women, to build integration as part of the former prime minister's One Nation policy approach.<sup>12</sup> Cameron played on the negative tropes surrounding Muslim men, saying that a minority had 'backwards attitudes' and that, in the UK, men were 'not frightened of women's success'.<sup>13</sup> Language is no longer just a form of communication but a deeply politicised and securitised element of our lives, where those in

power are essentially saying that any language that isn't English has the propensity to lead to violence. It's one of the reasons why I spent so many years not speaking Arabic in public and why I still feel on edge when I do.

The Casey Review suggested that the UK needed a major new strategy focused on promoting the English language, British values and social mixing among young people. 'I found [...] cultural and religious practices in communities that are not only holding some of our citizens back but run contrary to British values and sometimes our laws. Time and time again, I found it was women and children who were the targets of these regressive practices', Casey wrote in the review. However, what isn't mentioned in the report is the discrimination and prejudice faced by Muslim women when we attempt to access education and employment. So, maybe our perceived isolation isn't due to our faith but the structural disadvantages that are upheld by the very people who commissioned the report in the first place.

These are integration initiatives that, again, operate under the assumption that Muslim women are submissive, oppressed and in need of liberation. They don't have the goal of ensuring Muslim women are active participants in society but, instead, attempt to erase the religion and cultures of Muslims by Westernising their lives.

### **'Counter-terrorism' in the UK**

A significant proportion of the violence that is inflicted upon Muslims by the state is centred around women's rights. In

the UK, this state violence is mainly inflicted through ‘counter-terrorism’ tools and legislation, such as Prevent. It’s been strengthened more and more over the years and encompasses nearly every part of a person’s life. ‘The UK is the first country in Europe to introduce a duty like this in its counter-terrorism legislation, making Prevent the “first ever large-scale soft-power counter-terrorism” approach’, reads an Amnesty International 2023 report on Prevent.<sup>14</sup> Because ‘extremist’ or ‘radicalised’ behaviour isn’t specifically defined anywhere, it’s left to the individual to judge what they deem to be ‘extremist’ attitudes or behaviour. As Farris notes in *The Rise of Femonationalism*, the frequent ‘sticking’ of words such as Islam, ‘terrorist’ and asylum seeker in close proximity naturalises a connection between them, creating a collective fear, which then informs people’s judgements and perceptions.<sup>15</sup>

This disproportionately affects Muslims, as Islam is very much linked in the public imagination to ‘extremism’ and ‘terrorism’. The Home Office relies on several categories of concern, but the two categories with the most referrals are ‘Islamist extremism’ and ‘right-wing extremism’. The terms ‘terrorist’, ‘terrorism’, ‘Islamist’, ‘extremism’, ‘extremist’ and ‘radicalisation’ are ill-defined, imprecise and very easily mis-used; they will be used here due to their prevalence in policy, but within quotation marks. The Prevent scheme functions based on referrals from local authorities and state institutions, but family, friends and local communities too. Once an ‘at-risk’ individual is referred to the programme, the police and/or local authority then decide whether that person poses a genuine risk of ‘radicalisation’ and needs to be referred on to Prevent’s ‘anti-radicalisation’ programme, Channel. The Home

Office describes this programme as voluntary and a ‘tailored support package’ that can include mentoring, theological guidance, education and careers assistance. However, according to official figures, 87 per cent of Prevent referrals don’t meet the criteria for intervention and aren’t adopted as Channel cases. Therefore, the policy isn’t preventing ‘extremism’ or ‘radicalisation’ but simply pulling people into a complex and intimidating system because someone had a ‘gut feeling’ about them. (Prevent training and guidance, indeed, does advise individuals to ‘trust their instincts’ and ‘gut feeling’ when making referrals.)

As of 2017, Muslims were fifty times more likely to be referred to Prevent than other groups.<sup>16</sup> Even though referrals for ‘Islamist radicalisation’ and ‘right-wing radicalisation’ are now beginning to balance out, referrals involving Muslims still increased by 6 per cent in 2020.<sup>17</sup> However, referrals for ‘Islamist concerns’ dropped to 11 per cent in the year ending March 2023, compared to 16 per cent in 2022 and 22 per cent in 2021. Muslim children have been referred to Prevent for meaningless reasons, such as a teacher mistaking an eight-year-old’s T-shirt slogan for ISIS propaganda, students wearing Free Palestine badges or reading books related to ‘terrorism’.<sup>18</sup> A child may say Allahu Akbar at school (a completely innocent act) and then suddenly find themselves sitting with the police answering questions about their family for the rest of the day. A kid should be able to go to school without being interrogated by the police because their teacher made a mistake. Even if you don’t get referred, the looming threat of Prevent is always there. It’s in the ‘random’ body searches at airports. It’s in the risks inherent in voicing your criticisms of

the state on social media. It's in my slight reluctance to speak Arabic in public out of fear that I may be harassed again or reported to the police. Communicating in Arabic is not a crime, but the way that the language has come to be framed within the context of 'extremism' means that people often associate Arabic with so-called 'Islamists' and view it as a sign of 'radicalisation'.

Prevent is also used as justification by authorities to surveil and censor Muslims until the fear is so ingrained in our lives that we begin to censor ourselves and surveil our own neighbours. Its impact is far reaching and deeply embedded in every part of British society: our schools, hospitals and workplaces. We move through our days never knowing when we'll be accused of 'terrorism' or, worse, questioned and detained by the police, simply for existing as Muslims.

As mentioned, more referrals are being made to Prevent for 'right-wing radicalisation' in recent years, but this hasn't been met with a respite for Muslims. Instead, William Shawcross's review into Prevent has called for the policy's focus to shift more towards 'Islamist terrorism' instead of 'right-wing terrorism'. This review also pits communities against each other by seemingly prioritising one form of 'extremism' over another. It sends out a message to victims of 'right-wing extremism' and their loved ones that the violence they have experienced is somehow less significant.

Many have questioned the appointment of William Shawcross to head up the review. In my opinion, this threatens the review's independence, as when Shawcross was in charge of the neoconservative Henry Jackson Society in 2012, he said: 'Europe and Islam is one of the greatest, most terrifying

problems of our future'.<sup>19</sup> In fact, almost 500 human rights organisations, Muslim-led civil society organisations and individuals boycotted the review due to his appointment.<sup>20</sup>

Instead of a discussion about whether Prevent policies should be scrapped altogether, the Shawcross review seems set to legitimise them. These findings simply emphasise that Prevent exists to target, surveil and censor Muslim communities, specifically under the facade of defence and security. And it is likely that more government officials will double down on the controversial strategy and attempt to include even more in Prevent's web. For example, Michael Gove, the secretary of state for levelling up, housing and communities between 2022 and 2024, proposed a new definition of 'extremism' which stated that 'core behaviours' of 'extremism' include attempts to 'overturn, exploit or undermine the UK's system of liberal democracy to confer advantages or disadvantages on specific groups'.<sup>21</sup> Gove may not have explicitly mentioned Muslims in his proposed definition, but the documents listed several organisations which may now be labelled 'extremist' groups including: the Muslim Council of Britain, Palestine Action and Mend (Muslim Engagement and Development). It was a clear attempt by the government to stamp out any organising and mobilising that even partially affects or involves Muslim communities.

On 2 March 2024, then prime minister Rishi Sunak stood outside Downing Street in a televised address (his first in this format for eighteen months) to 'warn' the public of the 'fragility of democracy'.<sup>22</sup> The fragility he's referring to? The regular pro-Palestine protests demanding a ceasefire in Gaza. 'On too many occasions recently, our streets have been hijacked by small groups [. . .] who are hostile to our values and have no

respect for our democratic traditions’, Sunak said. He also said that the government would ‘redouble our support for the Prevent programme to stop young minds being poisoned by extremism’ – including preventing people entering the UK whose ‘aim is to undermine its values’. The prime minister’s speech came only a few weeks after false claims from MPs that there were ‘no-go’ Muslim-majority areas in Birmingham and east London, as well as former Tory MP Lee Anderson claiming that ‘Islamists’ had taken control of London’s first Muslim mayor, Sadiq Khan. Anderson was suspended from the party, but Sunak never went as far as to describe his comments as Islamophobic.

The UK government has been mired in anti-Islamic behaviours on both sides of the political spectrum. To these politicians, this is simply a discussion or debate with little to no thought given to what this kind of inflammatory and hateful rhetoric does to Muslim communities in real terms. And half the time, it’s the most powerful people in the country trying to decide what does and doesn’t constitute Islamophobia, whilst Muslims attempt to navigate an increasingly hostile society. Speaking to *Open Democracy* in March 2024, the daughter of Makram Ali (the fifty-one-year-old who was killed in the 2017 Finsbury Park Mosque attack) described the government equating Islam with ‘extremism’ as ‘fuelling the fire’ and ‘inciting more hatred’ towards Muslims.<sup>23</sup> ‘It’s not just actions – words speak loudly as well. Politicians need to be really careful with what they say and how they say it, because every single word could potentially be a threat to someone’s life’, Ruzina Akhtar added. Contrary to the popular saying, sticks and stones can hurt us, but so can words. A

politician may not think twice about using harmful Muslim tropes or the ‘war on terror’ rhetoric – they can simply continue going about their day and chalk up their comments to either being a silly misunderstanding or accidental ignorance. But these words, which are constantly fed to society, are neither silly nor accidental. They’re creating a society where Muslims are vilified, demonised and completely Othered – an environment where hate and violence can thrive with minimal consequences. The state can give as much funding as it wants to protect mosques from Islamophobic attacks (more than £117 million is being set aside to bolster security at mosques, community centres and Muslim schools over the next four years<sup>24</sup>), but it’s unlikely to make a difference when the normalisation and justification of Islamophobia is coming from the very top. At this point, it’s sticking a plaster over a gaping wound.

### ‘Counter-terrorism’ and feminism

The government’s ‘counter-terrorism’ framework also contains a gendered element, which specifically harms Muslim women under the guise of extending women’s rights to them. According to the Amnesty International 2023 Prevent report, earlier versions of Prevent viewed Muslim women as being ‘at the heart of homes and communities’ and, therefore, ‘the first line of protection in the prevention of terrorism and extremism’. This was further proven by a leaked Home Office 2015 document that revealed how Prevent-funded Muslim community groups and initiatives were being used to strengthen state

agendas – particularly propping up Muslim women to ‘make a stand and take the lead to reject ISIL propaganda’.<sup>25</sup>

Empowering Muslim Women (EMW) initiatives formed part of New Labour’s Prevent strategy from 2008 – when they were launched – until 2010 when they were eventually disbanded. Parenthood (or motherhood, as fathers were rarely discussed) was a significant feature of these EMW initiatives, but Muslim mothers were seen differently in relation to their sons and daughters. Dr Naaz Rashid writes in her book, *Veiled Threats*:

With regard to sons, mothers are represented as being in need of empowerment to “build resilience” against extremism, either through countering extremist views, or being confident enough to report any suspicious behaviour which might indicate radical extremist tendencies to the police [...] In relation to daughters, however, it is mothers’ support for education which is seen as their primary purpose.<sup>26</sup>

Using this gendered narrative, the state targeted Muslim women’s organisations for funding as part of its ‘counter-terrorism’ strategy. I interviewed Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan, author of *Tangled In Terror*, for this book (you can read the interview in the appendix) and she tells me how ‘counter-terrorism’ funding was funnelled into projects that ‘empowered’ Muslim women. ‘The Home Office would set up social media accounts aimed at young Muslim women and girls that would push messages with undertones of “I love being British” and “I want to be a CEO” – very pro capitalism, pro state, patriotic – in an attempt to build a

state-sanctioned version of being a Muslim girl'. Manzoor-Khan believes this is the state trying to co-opt the identities of Muslim women in a way that depoliticises us and, therefore, reduces the threat of 'extremism' – in the eyes of the state. 'It reveals a logic that's based on the idea: if you "empower" Muslim women, you disempower "terrorists" '.

In its report, Amnesty International also found that the definition of 'extremism' in terms of British values references gender equality, which further risks 'securitising' the rights of Muslim women. In her research, Dr Rashid also highlights how topics such as the veil, forced marriage and FGM are regularly positioned on a continuum with 'extremism' and 'terrorism' within Muslim communities, despite this link between topics being unevidenced.<sup>27</sup> All it does is package and reduce all the 'problems' associated with Muslims into one and place it *all* within the context of 'extremism'.

And so, if a hijab-wearing Muslim woman is referred to Prevent, she may be perceived as being more vulnerable to 'radicalisation' purely due to how the hijab has come to be seen as at odds with white feminism and 'British values'. Prevent uses the gendered stereotypes perpetuated by white feminism to paint Muslim women as lacking agency and, ultimately, being disempowered by their faith. The liberal feminist narrative that views Muslim women as needing to be saved and lacking freedom and autonomy makes it easier for the state to justify policing women, but also their families. 'There's less of an outcry about state interventions when it comes to Muslim families because of these notions that the liberal state knows what's best for them', says Manzoor-Khan.

But as Manzoor-Khan rightly points out, there's a major

contradiction to how the state views and interacts with Muslim women – seeing them as the route to undermining ‘terrorism’ in their communities whilst also assuming Muslim women lack power or agency. Just as we saw in the Algerian war for independence, where the French colonisers saw Muslim women as the route to controlling and maintaining power over Algerians, the UK state is exhibiting a similar sentiment. ‘There’s this irony where Muslim women are seen to have so much power, influence and authority over our communities but also that we’re constantly at the whim of Muslim men’, explains Manzoor-Khan. We’re just collateral damage in a series of moral panics that are produced to justify an extension and expansion of state powers.

A significant element of the relationship between the state, feminism and Muslim women is the reproductive element of Islamophobia. It’s something Manzoor-Khan has researched in her work; she found that Muslim women face a different type of surveillance to men, to do with our reproductive potential and how we then raise our children.

Generally, the state deems heterosexuality to be normative and promotes and advocates for the nuclear family as a unit. But when it comes to Muslim nuclear heterosexual families, this heterosexuality is deemed as deviant. ‘Muslim men will always be seen as “too” heterosexual or they’re asexual – which is one theory why ‘terrorism’ exists, because of this apparent sexual repression that Muslim men have and so, they need violence as an “outlet” ’, explains Manzoor-Khan.

On the other hand, Muslim women in these heterosexual nuclear units must deal with the state’s concern of over-reproduction – a ‘concern’ that was highlighted in the 2016

Casey Review (where the report's author was particularly worried about Pakistani and Bangladeshi mothers), as well as transnational marriages. These types of marriages, where spouses were coming over from the subcontinent, were pointed out as an issue of social integration. 'To me, what you're saying is that the reproduction of Others is being promoted in these communities and that's dangerous to Britishness', says Manzoor-Khan on the Casey Review's findings. And because Muslim mothers are seen as raising a generation that isn't moulded on these 'British values', the indoctrination must happen at school, as that's the first point of call that the state can intervene in with regard to Muslim families. It isn't just children either that face these interventions, but women too, as we saw with David Cameron's English classes. Classes that represented the idea that if you teach Muslim women to speak English, then that might prevent their children from becoming 'extremists' or 'terrorists'.

An example of Muslim women being viewed as reproducers of the Other is in the case of Shamima Begum. In 2015, aged fifteen, Begum left her home in east London with two school friends, Kadiza Sultana and Amira Abase, to travel to Islamic State (ISIS) territory in Syria. Shortly after her arrival, Begum got married. However, instead of this being seen as a case of three children being groomed and exploited, the three girls were stripped of their adolescence and instead were framed as 'terrorists' and 'jihadi brides' – discarded by many of the British public. The victim-blaming narrative also overlooked Begum's inability to consent to marriage at fifteen under UK law. Once you're labelled a 'terrorist', it's near impossible to change that narrative, especially when the presumption of innocence (a significant part of our criminal

justice system) is not afforded to girls like Shamima Begum. I want to mention here that this isn't an attempt to remove the agency of these three young Muslim girls but, rather, to acknowledge and understand the wider context of their journey to ISIS and how this was repackaged and told to us through the state and media platforms.

In 2019, Begum was found by a journalist from *The Times* newspaper in al-Hawl refugee camp in north-east Syria, where she gave an interview expressing her hope to return to the UK but said she didn't regret her decision to join ISIS. This comment prompted outrage amongst the media and across the political spectrum and led the then home secretary Sajid Javid to strip Begum of her British citizenship, rendering her stateless. At the time, he told MPs that all those who travelled to ISIS 'supported a terrorist organisation and in doing so they have shown they hate our country and the values we stand for'.<sup>28</sup> Begum's lawyers have since tried to appeal the decision to revoke her citizenship but have so far lost their cases, including at the Court of Appeal. Begum isn't the only one, either. The UK government has been criticised for not repatriating its citizens from north-east Syria, unlike some of the efforts of other countries such as Canada and some European nations. In other words, the UK is claiming zero responsibility for its own people and, if anything, is stripping them of their rights and citizenship so they can never return home. It's yet another layer of the UK's 'hostile environment', where citizenship is now conditional for some (read: marginalised groups of people) and can be taken away at any moment. Begum's case has been used by the state to effectively create a two-tier citizenship system.

There's another layer to Begum's story though. A significant nuance that sheds light on how three teenagers successfully managed to reach ISIS territory – a notoriously difficult journey for adults, let alone children. In the BBC podcast, *The Shamima Begum Story*, journalist Josh Baker investigated her case and uncovered that there were other agencies involved in the case – or rather, there was interference from a Western government. To cross the border between Turkey and Syria, the three girls had to meet a smuggler so that he could arrange the crossing. This smuggler was known as Mohammed Al Rasheed and had allegedly helped many people make the journey into Syria and then ISIS territory. But when he was arrested by the Turkish authorities, Rasheed claimed he was working for the Canadian government, gathering intelligence for them, and passing it on to their embassy in Jordan. In his investigation, Baker and his team proved that Canada had some level of involvement in Begum's case, with a senior intelligence officer (at an agency which is part of the global coalition against ISIS), confirming that Rasheed was indeed providing information to Canadian intelligence.<sup>29</sup> The involvement of one of the Western allies prompted questions around how much the UK government really knew and how far they actually went to try and stop the girls reaching Syria. Rather than attempting to protect three British teenagers who had been groomed, the state chose to demonise them and use Begum as a poster girl for 'terrorism'.

Muslim women and girls are only viewed as in need of saving as long as they fit into the narrative created for them of the weak and silenced woman. However, when that narrative no longer fits a woman because she is deemed too 'radical',

like in the case of Begum, she is then discarded by feminists and becomes an enemy of the state. In their eyes, she is a Muslim girl who had too much agency and too much choice. She is no longer in need of saving. Crucially, she also becomes a reproducer of 'extremism', and so white feminism bolsters the state's control of Muslim women to prevent this reproduction. It is exactly what we saw happen when the UK government refused to accept Begum's child because they were both viewed as threats.

When Javid stripped Begum of her citizenship, he also refused to allow her young newborn baby to come to the UK. At the time of her interview with *The Times*, Begum was nine months pregnant, having already lost two children in previous years. In the interview she expressed her desire for her son to be British and raised in the UK. 'Losing my children the way I lost them, I don't want to lose this baby as well and this is really not a place to raise children, this camp', she said in a BBC interview.<sup>30</sup> However, along with taking away her own citizenship, the UK government also denied her request for her son, Jarrah, to be allowed into the country. He died of pneumonia a few weeks later, aged just three weeks. Putting aside all the complexities of Begum's case, this was a child who was entirely innocent but was not afforded a shred of care or compassion by the government. His crime? Being born to a Muslim mother accused of 'terrorist' acts. This decision by Javid and the Home Office was widely criticised by political parties across the spectrum, including several MPs from within the Conservatives. On the surface, the decision to leave this young child in a precarious and dangerous situation is contextualised as a UK safety concern, but it links

back to the idea that Muslim women are the reproducers of the Other. Because his mother is deemed a ‘terrorism’ risk, he automatically carries this risk too. ‘The racialised understanding of Muslims leads to the thinking that our babies are now “terrorists” too. Because of the nature of the mother, we restrict the children of their humanity. That’s why you have such an over-reporting of children to Prevent because again, they’re not seen as children’, explains Manzoor-Khan.

White feminism’s saviour complex certainly doesn’t encompass *all* Muslim women, it’s contingent on if that Muslim woman is considered a ‘good’ Muslim or a ‘bad’ one. And this is the insidious nature of how liberal feminists work in tandem with the state to harm Muslim women – from their singular focus on carceral solutions to providing the state with the exact narratives needed to justify and continue its oppressive and discriminatory ‘counter-terrorism’ strategies.

Yes, we need to figure out a solution to gendered violence. But we also need to ensure that proposed solutions don’t simply protect a small minority of women, leaving the majority facing even more harm than before. Increased state surveillance and control, the break-up of families and the erasure of religion and cultures will not protect Muslim women from gendered violence. That isn’t what we need. The collusion of white feminism with ‘counter-terrorism’ frameworks harms Muslim women repeatedly – all in the name of security and safety. But security and safety for who? Because Muslim women don’t feel secure or safe when we and our families are constantly surveilled and policed. I shouldn’t have to feel apprehensive of speaking my mother tongue of Arabic in public, especially if there’s a police officer nearby.

Or have to make light of the fact my family gets searched in airports nearly every time we travel. Allowing your feminism to seep into the world of 'counter-terrorism' isn't how gendered violence will be eradicated either; if anything, it's likely to only get worse. In the fight against gendered violence, what we need is an intersectional approach embedded in every step taken to prevent this type of violence from happening in the first place, rather than bringing in harsher laws that are just a knee-jerk reaction to the problem. And Muslim women, like all women, need to be included in the decision making. It's our protection, our safety, our lives at stake.

## Islamophobia in the European context

*‘Europe has an obsession with the veiled  
Muslim woman’*

In February 2020, two violent attacks on Muslims in Europe, one in Hanau in Germany, the other in a London mosque, happened within twenty-four hours of each other. In Hanau (just outside Frankfurt), the attacker opened fire at a shisha bar, killing nine people, in an area that was known for its diversity and tolerance. In London, the attacker was an unhoused individual known to the mosque who stabbed seventy-year-old Raafat Maglad, the muezzin of that day’s afternoon prayers. The attacks may have occurred in different contexts – the attacker in Germany was found to be a far-right conspiracist whereas the attacker in London knew the victim – but the target was ultimately the same: Muslims.

For the past two decades, Islamophobia has been woven into the fabric of European political life. If it’s not UK pundits parroting the great replacement theory, then it’s attackers subscribing to the idea of ‘Eurabia’ – the theory that Europe will be colonised by the Arab world – like the Norwegian

neo-Nazi ‘terrorist’ Anders Breivik, who believed in the ‘Islamisation of Europe and Norway’ and massacred seventy-seven people in 2011.<sup>1</sup> Even in countries where Islam wasn’t necessarily a prominent issue, politicians have inserted Islam into public discourse and transformed it into a ‘problem’. In Hungary, prime minister Viktor Orbán has spoken about Muslims in several speeches, including his first speech after his re-election in 2022 where he reinforced the great replacement conspiracy regarding migration. ‘They are trying to replace the lack of European, Christian children with adults from other civilizations – migrants’, he said.<sup>2</sup> Anti-Muslim sentiment is not only normalised in much of Europe, it’s also seen electoral success, with far-right political parties such as Belgium’s Vlaams Belang, the Sweden Democrats, the Swiss People’s Party and the Alternative for Germany garnering support and increasing their base over the past few years.

In a previous chapter, I explored the rise of female political figures using anti-Islam sentiment as a central part of their agendas, especially leaders such as France’s Marine Le Pen and Italy’s Giorgia Meloni. But they are certainly not the only ones, and it’s certainly not confined to any one part of the political spectrum. The rampant Islamophobia across Europe stretches from right to left and back again.

The European Islamophobia report found that, in 2022, one in four Muslims in Europe experienced a racist attack because of their origin or religious orientation.<sup>3</sup> And this Islamophobia goes all the way to the upper echelons of power. Several governments across Europe have adopted legislation that actively discriminates against Muslims, couched in

‘counter-terrorism’ language and justifications. Mosques have been closed in France and Austria (both governments have also identified ‘Islamist separatism’ and ‘political Islam’ as national security concerns), the construction of new minarets banned in Switzerland and imams have had to contend with government interventions and withdrawal of funding.

According to the European Islamophobia report, some European nations go even further with their anti-Islam sentiment. In Denmark, children born into immigrant (often Muslim) areas – labelled ‘ghettos’ by the government – must be separated from their families for twenty-five hours each week to learn Danish values. Over in Slovenia, the discrimination against Muslims is demonstrated by Muslim children needing to obtain a medical excuse form to abstain from eating pork, as refusal on religious grounds isn’t accepted. The problematisation of Muslims has seeped into European societies at all levels and reinforces the core perception of the Other.

Like in the UK, the prevailing Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism across Europe is linked to the polarising discussions around immigration. The terms ‘migrant’ and ‘Muslim’ tend to be used interchangeably, as concerns raised by European nations can usually be traced back to stereotypical and harmful perspectives on Islam and Muslim communities. There’s no better example of this prejudice in action than how Ukrainian refugees were viewed and treated in the immediate aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, compared to those fleeing other conflicts. In the weeks following the escalation of the conflict in February 2022, millions of Ukrainians fled their homes, seeking safety from the war in other European nations. In just three weeks, three million people left

Ukraine. The majority of Western Europe came together, united in their solidarity for Ukraine and their condemnation of Russia. Many nations welcomed Ukrainian refugees with open arms, with a German minister going as far as to say that Germany would help refugees ‘quickly and unbureaucratically’.<sup>4</sup> The European Union announced in March 2022 that Ukrainian citizens would be entitled to the new ‘temporary protection directive’ which allows them to live, work and study in EU states for up to three years.

People fleeing war and violence should absolutely be accepted and supported by everyone, and the fact Ukraine is in Europe does partly explain why a huge effort was made to help refugees, but there is also a glaring hypocrisy when it comes to the treatment of different kinds of refugees by European nations. Race, religion and culture were significant contributing factors explaining the ease with which Ukrainians were welcomed, particularly during a time when immigration is a dominant issue across the continent. In fact, in the early days of the invasion, there were incidents in which non-Ukrainians who were living in Ukraine were not allowed to cross the border or faced barriers in seeking protections that Ukrainians did not. According to interviews conducted by Human Rights Watch in March 2022, many foreign nationals spoke about a pattern of being blocked or delayed from boarding buses and trains, as Ukrainian women and children were being prioritised.<sup>5</sup> This opens up a discussion about who is deemed worthy of Europe’s protection and, more importantly, who is not.

The UK was relatively slow with its introduction of a Ukrainian resettlement scheme but, interestingly, the Home

Office scheme relied on the goodwill of the British public. The scheme would see individuals, charities and community groups sponsor and house Ukrainian refugees in their homes or separate properties for at least six months, including those with no family ties in the UK. In the first few days after the government made its announcement, 100,000 people signed up to the new resettlement scheme, offering their homes to Ukrainians. This approach wasn't adopted towards refugees from other humanitarian crises, such as the Syrian war or the recent conflict in Afghanistan. Instead, the UK agreed to welcome a small number of refugees from these crises, with the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme promising safety to just 5,000 Afghans. And this scheme only formally opened in January 2022, eight months after the Taliban started intensifying attacks across Afghanistan in May 2021. I'm a firm believer in the good of humanity but hundreds of thousands of people offering their help for Ukrainians does make you wonder whether those same people would open up their homes to Syrians or Afghans? Realistically, probably not. People tend to relate to or see themselves in those who look like them, so it's perhaps unsurprising that white Ukrainian refugees received a very different welcome to brown and Black refugees fleeing other countries. It also invokes an 'us' versus 'them' mentality, with Syrians, Afghans and now Palestinians seen as being fundamentally different to white Europeans. On Ukraine, the Bulgarian prime minister Kiril Petkov said:

These people are Europeans. These people are intelligent. They are educated people [...] This is not the refugee wave

we have been used to, people we were not sure about their identity, people with unclear pasts, who could have been even terrorists.<sup>6</sup>

Initially, in 2015, some European nations offered their support to Syrian refugees fleeing the conflict – particularly Germany. However, as time has gone by, this welcome soured and governments across the continent have toughened migration policies, earning the nickname ‘Fortress Europe’. The EU has spent hundreds of millions of euros over the past decade on technologies – such as military-grade drones and sensor systems – to track down and control refugees at its borders.<sup>7</sup> It even pays Libya to intercept migrants trying to cross the Mediterranean so that they don’t reach European shores, which the EU has been criticised for. One aspect that Syrian and Afghan refugees share is that many are either Muslim or have been racialised as Muslim by Europe. And it’s this aspect that marks the different and hypocritical treatment of these people compared to Ukrainian refugees.

As well as immigration fuelling Islamophobic sentiments, the ‘war on terror’ rhetoric has also played a huge role in the Othering of Muslims in Europe. The 9/11 attacks in the US in 2001 (and then the London bombings in 2005) launched a global military campaign to combat ‘terrorism’ – namely Islamic ‘extremism’ – and the after-effects can still be felt in the West today. The US president at the time, George W. Bush, officially launched the ‘war on terror’ on 8 October 2001, stating that you’re ‘either with us or against us’<sup>8</sup> when it came to the bombardment of Afghanistan, which will be discussed at greater length in the next chapter. Over two decades later,

the ‘war on terror’ continues. A major impact of the expansion and strengthening of ‘counter-terrorism’ policies is the criminalisation of immigrants, particularly those from Arab and Muslim-majority countries. You can see this criminalisation in the dehumanising language used to describe migrants. In 2022, the former UK home secretary, Suella Braverman, used the term ‘invasion’ to talk about the arrival of migrants via the English Channel.<sup>9</sup> It was a comment that was widely condemned, but exemplifies how the ‘war on terror’ rhetoric has become firmly embedded in policies and legislation around immigration. However, this stereotyping is not only reserved for migrants, either. I have lost count of the number of times my family and I have been ‘randomly’ searched when travelling through airport security. It has become a running joke between us as to who will get pulled aside for a full body search or to answer probing questions about our travel arrangements. We are automatically profiled as a potential security threat simply because we are a visibly Muslim family.

A significant part of Islamophobia in Europe is the gendered nature of this prejudice, where Muslim women are directly targeted through attitudes, policies and legislation. In the past few decades, several European nations have introduced bans and restrictions on Muslim women that effectively control their bodies in the public sphere – including work and education. In 2023, the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) upheld its 2017 ruling that companies in the EU can ban religious symbols, which includes hijabs, based on presenting an image of neutrality in the workplace. The cases were brought by two German Muslim women: a child-care worker and a sales assistant in a chemist. Both women

were told to remove their hijabs on their return to work after parental leave. In a statement, the court said the ban on religious symbols can be justified by ‘the employer’s desire to pursue a policy of political, philosophical and religious neutrality with regard to its customers or users, in order to take account of their legitimate wishes’.<sup>10</sup> As previously mentioned, the hijab is not seen as a personal choice but an inherently political statement. It is state-sanctioned gendered Islamophobia justified under the guise of neutrality, ensuring that Muslim women have limited access to public life.

### Islamophobia in France: The obsession with the veiled Muslim woman

The country that is home to Europe’s largest Muslim community and has consistently targeted Muslim women since the early 2000s and used white feminism to justify its harm is France. Over the past few years, we have seen a significant rise in several European countries adopting laws that directly target Muslim women, namely the banning of the hijab or burqa. France was the first country in Europe to ban the wearing of the veil, which initially just included public schools. Jacques Chirac, then president of France, brought in a law in 2003 that banned any visible sign of religious affiliation in public schools. This included the Jewish kippa, large Christian crosses and, of course, the Muslim veil. These restrictions became both wider-reaching and more targeted at Muslims when in 2011, another law was brought in to ban the wearing of the niqab in all public spaces. France has long

justified these laws and general Islamophobic attitudes as being based in the constitutional principle of ‘laïcité’ or secularism. In fact, these laws have led to the control of 1,727 Muslim institutions, 118 closures and 10 million euros seized between January and August 2022.<sup>11</sup>

In 2021, French president Emmanuel Macron introduced a religious separatism law that Macron claimed would give the country the means to fight Islamic ‘radicalism’ in response to state concerns that ‘extremists’ were creating communities and instilling ideas that separated them from the values of the French republic. Nowhere in the bill itself is Islam mentioned explicitly but, in his speech in October 2020, Macron referred only to examples of Islam, saying it is ‘a religion which is experiencing a crisis today, all over the world’, adding that there was a need to ‘free Islam in France from foreign influences’.<sup>12</sup> The French prime minister Jean Castex also only referred to Islam when talking about the legislation, citing examples such as children ‘refusing to play with non-Muslims’ or ‘reciting [Quranic] surats while closing their ears in music class’.<sup>13</sup>

The legislation includes overhauling the system that allows imams to train overseas and giving the state more control over religious funding. A significant part of the bill also talks about the dignity of people, particularly women. Some of these new laws and policies are a step in the right direction for tackling forced marriage, namely banning medical professionals from delivering so-called ‘virginity testing’. However, the focus on these issues (which tend to be viewed as Muslim problems) alludes to virginity tests and forced marriage being significant issues in France – but there’s no data to back this

up. Government officials have not been able to provide any data on the number of virginity tests carried out in the country, how widespread the issue of forcing young girls to wear the hijab is or statistics on forced marriages.

It's yet another way that the French state can reinforce the idea that Muslim women are inherently oppressed and need saving by the 'liberal' and 'progressive' West. This was evident in the reaction to *Dazed Magazine* spotlighting hijab- and abaya-wearing Muslim women on the cover of its 2023 winter edition.<sup>14</sup> Instead of commenting on how beautiful the cover is or the importance of platforming French resistance in the face of racism and Islamophobia, many of the comments on social media invoked offensive and harmful stereotypes – criticising the magazine for enforcing an apparent religious agenda, platforming misogyny ('romanticising the oppression of women', one Instagram comment read) and arguing that it's offensive to Iranian women.

There's also the relationship between freedom of expression and the freedom to express Islamophobia, especially when it comes to insulting and reproducing anti-Muslim caricatures in the name of this so-called freedom of expression. In Islam, the prophet Muhammed (pbuh) is not to be depicted in visual form and it's offensive to Muslims when our prophet is mocked through derogatory cartoons. This is exactly what the French publication *Charlie Hebdo* has done in the past and continues to do today. The magazine claims its work is satire, but publicly mocking a religion is not providing insight or interest, it is simply alienating an already isolated community and reaffirming that they are inherently different to the rest of the French population. Freedom of expression does not

automatically equate to anyone being able to say or write anti-Muslim hatred, even though it feels as though it is fast becoming that way.

More recently, the French Football Federation (FFF) was reported to have brought in a policy that prohibits Muslim athletes from fasting during the month of Ramadan while at the national team's training camp. In other major football leagues, such as the English Premier League and Germany's Bundesliga, match officials have been allowed to briefly pause games at sunset to accommodate Muslim players breaking their fasts. However, the French league not only does not permit this, but actively punishes match officials who pause games for this reason. The FFF's president said to the French newspaper *Le Figaro*, 'There is no stigmatisation of anyone, there is absolute respect for everyone's convictions. But when we are in the French team, we must respect a framework'.<sup>15</sup> The framework? The federation's principle of 'public service neutrality', which says that any speech of a 'political, ideological, religious or trade-union nature' is forbidden in events and competitions.

This 'neutrality' has also been used to reinforce the FFF's ban on women players wearing hijabs, which was upheld by France's supreme court after a group of Muslim players claimed that the ban was discriminatory and submitted an appeal. It isn't just football, either. The French sports minister, Amélie Oudéa-Castéra, also announced a similar ban on French athletes wearing hijabs during the 2024 summer Olympics, which were hosted in Paris.<sup>16</sup> This ban led to twenty-three-year-old basketball star Diaba Konaté not being able to represent her country in the sport. In a 2024 interview

with *The Guardian*, Konaté said she was ‘heartbroken’ at the hijab ban and is now playing college basketball in the US instead.<sup>17</sup> On 8 March 2024 (International Women’s Day), over eighty people signed an open letter that was sent to the CEO of the French Federation of Basketball, Jean-Pierre Siutat, urging the body to overturn the ban and allow Muslim women and girls to practise their faith and participate in the sport they love. The letter read:

Excluding a group of people from sports simply because of their religious beliefs and practices goes against the Olympic Charter, which affirms that access to sport is a human right. We will not allow the sport we love to be weaponized against Muslim girls and women [...] No Muslim woman or girl should have to choose between their religion and the freedom, community, and connection sports can bring.<sup>18</sup>

The French government is so committed to their apparent framework of secularism that they’re happy to lose world-class sporting talents in the name of ‘laïcité’. It goes back to how deeply politicised the hijab has become in France (and beyond) and how far the government will go in its pursuit of supposed neutrality. Would this principle be enforced if a woman decided to wear a small crucifix around her neck? Possibly. But I would hazard a guess that it would not be so heavily amplified and policed when compared to a Muslim woman’s choice to wear the hijab. This choice is not a political statement nor a sign of bias, but simply a personal religious choice that bears no relation to how a Muslim woman thinks, feels or views the world around her. There are

hijab-wearing Muslim women who embody very conservative and right-leaning views and then there are other hijabis that are more left wing and liberal in their attitudes. These hijab bans reinforce the notion that women who choose to cover up are making a political statement, but how can we when we all think and feel differently? We are once again lumped together as a homogenous group of women.

Donia Ismail, a French journalist, tells me that even though racism and Islamophobia have long existed in France, it has changed over the last few years ‘in a very exponential way’. There’s more liberated racist speech nowadays, which was something Ismail and many of us saw in the 2024 French elections. Ismail says that having a ‘xenophobic party, such as the Rassemblement National – that was founded on those particular values – winning the European elections and leading the first round of the legislatures encouraged people to share their racism and act accordingly’. And the growing popularity of the far right has had an impact on this growing racism because it legitimises this rhetoric within the population. Ismail tells me that a Marine Le Pen presidency is looking more and more likely for 2027. ‘People aren’t scared to be called or appear racist anymore, especially as racism is seen as an opinion and not a crime’, she says. She also explains that the word ‘Islamophobia’ isn’t used in France, as it is largely rejected based on the etymology of the term, making it hard for the problem to be acknowledged in the first place.

‘Muslim women have been the targets of racism ever since the 1989 Veils’ Creil, which was the first “scandal” involving women wearing the hijab in France’, Ismail says. ‘The laïcité law has been perverted and twisted into a new definition that’s

sole purpose is to restrict the lives of Muslims'. Ismail goes on to confirm that people tend to speak on behalf of Muslim women without ever inviting them into the conversation, effectively 'infantilising them'. She also saw the sad hypocrisy of how French people could stand for the liberation of Iranian women but never for the liberation of their own Muslim citizens.

### The historical context of France's Islamophobia

Gendered Islamophobia is deeply institutionalised in France and the nation's restrictions on Muslim women and their bodies are justified using gender equality and feminist arguments, echoing the white saviour trope. To better understand this gendered Islamophobia, though, we must go back a few decades. France's history is steeped in colonial rule and violence that spans centuries. The example of Algeria was already mentioned in a previous chapter, but it is significant in understanding France's Islamophobia, especially when it comes to the politicisation of the veil. For most of the twentieth century, France was a colonial power which occupied largely Muslim-majority nations in Africa and the Middle East. However, most of these lands were ruled as territories, except Algeria. Instead, Algeria was actually integrated into the French state as a part of the country.<sup>19</sup>

For nearly a century, until its independence in 1962, Algeria was ruled by France. Islam was seen as something to be eradicated by France and this formed the basis of their colonial rule. People were denied French citizenship unless they rejected

Islamic law and were also subjected to the Native Code (Code de l'Indigénat). This code laid out the inferior legal status of Algerians, as well as a range of repressive laws including: the enforcement of forced labour, dress codes and travel restrictions. France made life extremely difficult for anyone who had not assimilated or refused to assimilate into their Western 'modern' ways, which mainly meant leaving Islam behind.

As previously mentioned, during the Algerian war, the veil played a significant role for the French colonisers. Describing French colonial rule in Algeria, Frantz Fanon – a French-Martinican psychiatrist and anti-colonial intellectual – once said: 'If we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society, its capacity for resistance, we must first of all conquer the women; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide themselves and in the houses where the men keep them out of sight'.<sup>20</sup>

In other words, it was near impossible for the French colonial power to maintain its rule over Algeria without winning over Algerian women to its Western and European norms. And there was no better way for the French to do this than to firmly situate themselves within what would later become the core beliefs and values of white feminism, which served as the ideal approach in their war efforts. France prioritised this idea of liberating Muslim women through propaganda and unveiling ceremonies, to both win over Algerian women and prove to the opposing forces fighting for independence that their women had rejected Islam and chosen 'European' values. And this inflicted lasting harm on Algerian women. As sociologist Marnia Lazreg wrote in her book *The Eloquence of Silence*:

It brought into the limelight the politicisation of women's bodies and their symbolic appropriation by colonial authorities. It brought home to Algerian women their vulnerability [...] Their sexed body was suddenly laid bare before a crowd of vociferous colonists who, in an orgy of chants and cries of 'Long Live French Algeria' claimed victory for all Algerian women.<sup>21</sup>

Decades later and not much has changed. The French government (made up of any/all political parties, left and right) still uses gender equality arguments to disguise its Islamophobia and white feminists are either silent in the face of this prejudice or, worse, play an active part in the oppression of marginalised communities. White feminism's fight became a universal fight of good against evil and exposed a coloniality of sisterhood where white feminism takes the role of the big sister. She is in charge. She knows best. And, more importantly, she will look after you in *her* way. It is linked to the fraternalism part of the French constitution, the central elements of which are 'liberté, égalité, fraternité'. Everyone in society is connected by common interests and beliefs, creating and maintaining a sense of 'brotherhood'. White feminists in France have simply taken this notion of the French constitution and applied it to womanhood, especially when it comes to its attempts to integrate and assimilate Muslim women into what they deem French womanhood. Speaking to *gal-dem* in 2021, author and political scientist Françoise Vergès spoke about French feminism and its relationship to Muslim women over the years:

In the 1990s, French feminists centred their entire agenda around the question of the veil. They've used it to propel themselves into French politics. They've been invited to every public debate on the veil since, and they've no desire to hand the mic to French Muslim women. They believe them to be accomplices to the men who wish to take away the rights French women have courageously won. They've successfully pinned Islam and Muslim men as the number one enemy of the French nation.<sup>22</sup>

In the two decades since white feminism launched its agenda targeting Muslim women, we have seen this context and framework become deeply embedded in states and institutions – signalling that the 'European crusade against Islam stands for the defence of women's rights'.<sup>23</sup> Vergès rightly points out that, for white feminism to become a respectable and legitimate movement rather than a marginal ideology, it had to replace its previous adversaries (white patriarchy, the state and the capital) with Islam, so that it could both be admitted into the corridors of power and convince the state that 'a feminism could exist that was not only a threat but could potentially be an ideological and political weapon at their service'.

Vergès has also explored the dichotomy between the bikini and the burkini and how this erupted into a national debate in France, particularly in the summer of 2017. In 2016, the burkini was banned by municipal orders and police forces were ordered to fine women found wearing it on the beaches in southern France. 'The bikini has become the iconic clothing of women's liberation [...] and the symbol of the

opposition to the burkini', Vergès writes.<sup>24</sup> This was made clear in how the media and the French public reacted to an incident that occurred in Reims, where a young non-white woman assaulted a young white woman who was sunbathing in a bikini in a public park. Instead of being treated as an isolated case, however, the incident was contextualised as an attack on the French way of life and a way for white feminists (on the right and left) to spread accusations of 'religious police' and to praise the nude female body as a symbol of the republic. In *A Decolonial Feminism*, Françoise Vergès points to a particular example where, in August 2017, a woman published a photo series on her social media of women wearing headscarves who the media, politicians and feminists called 'veiled women'. The woman captioned her photos:

Voilà, an hour spent at the Rivetoile beach in Strasbourg, capital of Europe, the city of human rights [. . .] It's clear that it is not the city of women's rights [. . .] Liberty, equality between men and women? There are more veiled women than young women in short dresses and skirts [. . .] personally I'm shocked to see that.<sup>25</sup>

And her response when accused of Islamophobia? 'My message was more feminist than racist'. The woman's belief that veiled Muslim women are the antithesis to a liberated womanhood is so deeply engrained in her feminism that, when criticised for her post, she simply defended herself by stating she was being a feminist. Muslim women are so far removed from her idea of feminism and 'free' womanhood that the only aspect she apologised for was not hiding the identities of

the women pictured, rather than for using the images to make her point. To white feminists, a veiled Muslim woman will never be seen as having will or choice. As mentioned earlier, in Chapter 3, Muslim women are viewed as lacking sexual agency and so a significant part of our ‘liberation’ lies with us showcasing our sexuality. A ‘good’ and ‘liberated’ Muslim woman is seen as someone who doesn’t wear a hijab, dresses in typically Western clothing, like short dresses and skirts, and is sex positive. In other words, we are only accepted into the halls of progression and freedom if we assimilate to white feminism’s idea of womanhood.

Another key example of this white feminism in practice in France is when a series of high-profile French figures (more than fifty took part, including actors Juliette Binoche and Marion Cotillard) produced a video of themselves cutting their hair in solidarity with Iranian women in October 2022.<sup>26</sup> The Iranian protests and feminist movement in the region will be explored more in the next chapter, but it is worth mentioning here as it encompasses the superficial nature of liberal French feminism. The death of Mahsa Amini (or Jina, which was her Kurdish name) sparked mass outrage across Iran and the rest of the world, as it was revealed Iranian officials were allegedly to blame. The government crackdown on protests, however, did not stop people from taking to the streets to stand against the government. At the time, women were publicly removing their hijabs and even cutting their hair as a mark of solidarity. The cutting of the hair was a form of protest that spread right across the world, with others also taking to social media to share videos of themselves cutting their hair, including the former Iran

detainee Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe. So, high-profile French women cutting their hair on camera made sense as a statement of global solidarity, but what was interesting about their statement is why they chose to speak up for Iranian women but not for marginalised women in their own country.

When hijab-wearing Muslim women have been stabbed on the street, beaten by French policemen and constantly endure everyday racism, where was the statement of solidarity from these French liberals?<sup>27</sup> Where were their slogans of freedom and liberation for their fellow French women? Liberal feminists in France have long been silent in the face of the discrimination and violence Muslim women regularly face – signalling the selective nature of their feminism and, ultimately, their solidarity. This is not to take away from the West's solidarity with Iranian women, as state repression is hugely important to speak up about. But it does make you think about why French women are motivated to lend their voices to this particular oppression and not the oppression of Muslim women. The Othering of Muslims in France and other European nations has led to a collective binary thinking of Islam equals bad and West equals good. This mindset is so deeply embedded in the collective consciousness that French women likely do not think twice about the experiences of Muslim women but, when presented with a situation where women are being oppressed in the name of Islam, they're quick to support their cause as it is seen as a key part of their feminism. Islamophobia in Europe is rife, especially when it comes to the policing of Muslim women and our bodies. Women are blocked from so many parts of public life, including education and work, simply for practising their faith. But

it is not just the UK, France or Europe. This gendered Islamophobia, particularly the saviour mindset towards Muslim women, is bigger than nations or continents – it plays a significant role in global conflicts, foreign interests and how wars in certain regions of the world are repackaged and sold to us.



## White feminism and its role in global conflicts

*‘Wars are being justified under  
the guise of feminism’*

Since 9/11, the ‘war on terror’ has grown and evolved into different strategies and rhetorics across the world, but they all have one thing in common: the view that Islam is inherently connected to violence and ‘terrorism’. Therefore, limiting the lives of Muslims is seen as equivalent to preventing ‘terrorism’. ‘Counter-terrorism’ frameworks in the UK have been explored previously, but the relationship between the ‘war on terror’ and feminism is amplified on the global stage. The ‘rescuing the other woman’ and ‘Muslim women need to be saved’ tropes have been used to justify foreign wars and ‘involvement’, and have caused harm and damage on a huge scale. In other words, wars are being justified under the guise of feminism.

This isn’t a recent phenomenon, either. It dates back centuries to the height of colonial rule and the British Empire. As mentioned in a previous chapter, one such example is the British colonisation of Egypt and how Islam was vilified for

its apparent ill treatment of women to justify and legitimise the British rule. As Leila Ahmed writes in *Women and Gender in Islam*, feminism served as a ‘handmaid to colonialism’ and ‘whether in the hands of patriarchal men or feminists, the ideas of western feminism essentially functioned to morally justify the attack on native societies and to support the notion of comprehensive superiority of Europe’.<sup>1</sup>

This type of rhetoric was still being used in the way white and Western feminism understood and contextualised the 2012 revolutionary protests in Egypt, particularly the sexual violence inflicted on female protestors. Journalist and author of *Radius* Yasmin El-Rifae recorded a multi-year-long account of one feminist group fighting against this sexual violence, Opanitsh, and wrote about how Arab women are often imagined as passive victims or exotic constructs and that the world blames an Arab woman’s suffering on the ‘culture she is unfortunate enough to live in, as if that culture or religion is closer to some ancient script than it is to contemporary features of the international economy and media’.<sup>2</sup> El-Rifae puts some of the blame for this worldview on white feminism and explains that the systems of political, economic and social control in Egypt are propped up by the same forces that keep the prison industrial complex turning in the US and the powers that criminalise and prosecute Europeans for saving migrants found drowning on their shores. She further points out that understanding sexual violence as a problem of culture or class makes it very easy to demonise Arab or Muslim men. And this rhetoric is still used today to initiate and justify the foreign involvement of (i.e. invasion by) Western nations.

## Afghanistan

The United States' invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 is just one example where the Taliban's brutal treatment of women and the closure of girls' schools were used to justify a US military invasion as well as shutting down any criticism or debate on the matter. Not only does white feminism hamper our ability to make sense of imperial interventions, but it has also historically been used to justify them, couching colonial violence in the language of women's liberation. It's what Rafia Zakaria, author of *Against White Feminism*, called the 'first feminist war' due to the Afghanistan invasion having links to feminist organisations, namely the Feminist Majority Foundation.<sup>3</sup> Set up in 1996, this group was one of the first to draw attention to the erosion of women's rights in Afghanistan, launching its 'Campaign to Stop Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan'. It was a campaign built on stereotypes of Muslim women and, as it continued to garner support (from Hollywood actors to high profile feminists such as Gloria Steinem), it became a key player in the US government's justification for a military invasion. On 7 October 2001, the invasion was announced by then president George W. Bush. The US government saw a great sales tactic in getting their war agenda approved by the US public by using the rhetoric of 'terrorised' and 'oppressed' Muslim women in Afghanistan. Images of women in burqas flooded the US media, driving home the image of oppression.

And white women came out in their droves to condemn the treatment of their Afghan 'sisters', with Laura Bush, the First Lady at the time, giving a now-infamous speech on US radio in

which she condemned the ‘severe repression and brutality against women in Afghanistan’ and argued that America’s ‘recent military gains [...] has meant women are no longer imprisoned in their homes’.<sup>4</sup> Cherie Blair – the wife of former UK prime minister Tony Blair – made similar comments, arguing that the UK had a moral duty to ‘lift the veil and show what had been happening to women in Afghanistan under the Taliban’.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps one of the most shocking and insulting things to happen around the time of the invasion was when US Democratic congresswoman Carolyn Maloney attended Congress wearing a burqa in an apparent expression of solidarity with Afghan women.<sup>6</sup>

The sheer machinery behind contextualising the war on Afghanistan as a feminist one was huge. The US (and its Western allies) wanted the public to think that Afghan women were completely helpless and didn’t know any better, that way it becomes a matter of feminism saving its ‘sisters’ abroad. But Afghan women weren’t helpless. In fact, the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) was instrumental in bringing international attention to the Taliban’s mistreatment of Afghan women. And what did the US do with this attention? It used RAWA’s work to justify its imperialist efforts – even when the organisation opposed US interference from the very beginning. They firmly opposed the US bombings and called for the US armed forces to leave the country as well, repeatedly arguing that military policies were being motivated and organised around economic interests (i.e. the oil, arms and drugs industries). But, in the eyes of the West, RAWA was only useful for one thing: establishing the narrative that Muslim women needed saving.

Their work was taken and manipulated to serve the Western agenda, ignoring everything else.

Afghan women were also excluded from the peace process talks from the time they started in September 2018, even though women were direct victims of the war. They were invisible at the negotiating table, even though the conversations were about their lives and the decisions made would affect them directly. The heavy-handed US tactics have isolated large segments of Afghanistan's population and fuelled the return of the Taliban. Not to mention the rise of ISIS in the region, too. The country is now ranked one of the most dangerous places to live in as a woman, but the oppression of women is only a concern for nations like the US when they are looking for palatable reasoning for foreign intervention. There's a passage in Leila Abu-Lughod's book, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving*, that encapsulates this:

When you save someone, you imply that you are saving her from something. You are also saving her to something. What violence is entailed in this transformation, and what presumptions are being made about the superiority of that to which you are saving her? Projects of saving other women depend on and reinforce a sense of superiority by Westerners.<sup>7</sup>

Twenty years later, Joe Biden's US government announced in 2021 that American troops would be leaving Afghanistan that August. However, this withdrawal resulted in chaos as the US had not built a long-lasting infrastructure, instead propping up the country using charities and NGOs. The instability opened the door for the Taliban to take back control of

Afghanistan – this time promising that women’s rights would be safe. Unsurprisingly, this did not stop many Afghans from evacuating the country. At the time, news channels were flooded with images and videos of Afghan men and women scrambling to get on planes in order to escape the Taliban’s regime.

Meanwhile, on social media, a photo of an American evacuation plane seemingly full of Afghan men provoked a public outcry. Many commenters suggested the image implied that Afghan men were happy to leave their women compatriots behind, even took it as evidence of Islam’s inherent misogyny.<sup>8</sup> *The Guardian* columnist Polly Toynbee tweeted: ‘Notice anything about this picture of people escaping in a US plane? No women ... odd ...?’<sup>9</sup> She may have seen a feminist issue amidst the plight of these refugees escaping unimaginable violence, but the reason the plane was full of men was because, in its evacuation efforts, the US prioritised people – mostly men – who had worked for their government.

The 2021 American withdrawal reignited the international debate around Afghanistan and women’s rights, with liberals and white feminists shouting the loudest. However, one group that many of these commentators failed to ask or even just merely involve in the conversation is Afghan women. The West was dissecting and debating their lives, rights and futures without ever asking them what they want and need. Whether it’s intentional or based in ignorance, this type of thinking implies that Afghan women are without a voice or agency. Not only do they have both in abundance, but they have been fighting for their rights for decades, and they

certainly haven't been sitting idly by whilst Western states weaponise their lives for their own imperialist agendas.

And the thing about white feminism is that its 'allyship' is short term. These are feminists who may have been shouting the loudest in 2021 but are pretty quiet now, a few years on. In July 2023, the Taliban ordered the closure of beauty salons in Afghanistan. Salons provided women with jobs, services and a community space to meet and connect with other women – spaces that are already hard to come by for Afghan women. It was estimated that these closures would result in a loss of around 60,000 jobs (the majority of which belong to women), cutting off their income and a way for them to be financially independent. The beauty salon ban was the latest in a long line of restrictions imposed upon Afghan women, which included barring women from employment (including at the United Nations), education and public spaces such as gyms and parks.

'This news is devastating as beauty salons were one of the last areas where women could work', Zehra Zaidi, a campaigner with Action for Afghanistan, told me for a *Dazed* article. 'In a country where so many are widowed, this will leave many women unable to provide for themselves or their families. It simply adds to the millions of Afghans facing hunger and starvation and are yet more dependent on aid to simply survive'.<sup>10</sup> In another interview, Zaidi told me that salons were the 'last havens for sisterhood and community' and this decision was the Taliban attempting to 'break the resistance of women who have the main bulwark of protest against them'. Just after the announcement of the salon closures, women once again took to the streets in Afghanistan

to protest the closures and the wider restrictions on their freedoms. Protestors were met with fire hoses, tasers, and guns by security forces whilst women chanted ‘work, bread and justice’.

Even back in the late 1970s, following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, there were various underground networks of women who undermined the USSR-backed government. Female students took part in a huge anti-government protest in 1980 where many were arrested and even killed. Under the Taliban regime, Afghan women opened underground schools for girls – risking their lives, as female education was extremely restricted. Over four decades of military occupation has inevitably taken its toll on a people, but women are still finding ways to exercise their agency even within an oppressive system. Aid also became more restricted when the UK government cut their foreign budgets in 2023, which an internal civil service report revealed has meant that Afghanistan has faced a 76 per cent cut in aid. The report found that these cuts will ‘potentially leave some of the most vulnerable women and girls in the world without critical services’.<sup>11</sup>

Not only is Afghanistan effectively operating a gender apartheid, but there’s a mental health crisis amongst Afghan women. Zaidi told me:

Biden effectively abandoned Afghans to their fate. And the West left knowing that the freedoms of women and ethnic and religious minorities would be most at risk. It is important to remember that after 9/11 the intervention in Afghanistan was justified on the basis of women’s rights. And every time a

foreign ministry tweets out that women and girls' strategy is a cornerstone of their foreign and development policy, the inability to reverse what is going on in Afghanistan comes into full view – it is the biggest test of that strategy, and we are failing.

But hope is not lost. Zaidi also shares that the Afghan women fighting back for their rights are the 'bravest, most resilient and inspiring group of women I have ever met'. These are women fighting against the odds and, however hard it gets, they will not stop. And after the failure of the international community to improve the conditions for women and girls, they are still coming together to take collective action. There are the protestors who, despite being increasingly at risk, are still taking action to highlight the injustices. There are the teachers working in secret schools to continue the education of young girls, women like Pashtana Durrani and Parasto Hakim. There are the women in exile fighting for a place at the international table, such as Fawzia Koofi (the first female deputy speaker of the Afghan parliament) and Heather Barr (the associate director of the Women's Rights Division at Human Rights Watch). And there are the journalists still working to report on what's happening on the ground, such as Zahra Joya and her Afghan women-led media company, *Rukhshana Media*. All this just goes to show that the work is *still* being done to improve the lives of women in Afghanistan, even after Western allies withdrew from the country with few to no plans in place.

## Iraq

Like the invasion of Afghanistan, the US and UK set their sights on another Middle Eastern country – Iraq. In January 2002, then president George W. Bush identified Iraq (along with Iran and North Korea) as part of an ‘axis of evil’ in his State of the Union address. In the address, Bush talked about how ‘the mothers and daughters of Afghanistan were captives in their own homes, forbidden from working or going to school’ and that ‘today women are free’.<sup>12</sup> This was the start of the US government setting up the groundwork for convincing the public that their country had to engage in yet another war on foreign soil. The Bush administration pointed to several reasons for its interest in Iraq, among them the supposed presence of weapons of mass destruction, the plight of Iraqi women and there were even hints that Saddam Hussein supported Osama bin Laden, with many Americans believing that the two men were linked. Despite Bush’s continued efforts on the international stage to paint Iraq as harbouring ‘terrorists’ and weapons, the UN’s Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission failed to find weapons of mass destruction in its 700 inspections in Iraq.

This didn’t stop the situation from escalating when, in early 2003, Bush gave Saddam and his sons forty-eight hours to leave Iraq or face war and British prime minister Tony Blair won the backing of parliament to send UK forces into war in Iraq. In March 2003, the UK and US were officially at war with Iraq in what was dubbed ‘Operation Iraqi Freedom’. And, because Saddam Hussein had become a well-known evil figurehead in the West (Bush drove home his

message by regularly mispronouncing Saddam's name), he was easily used to represent the whole of Iraq.

This military intervention was partly framed as the West's attempt to liberate Iraqi women from the evil and tyranny of Hussein and Iraqi men in general. But, as with Afghanistan, this rationale didn't consider what would come *after* the war or what Iraqi women truly wanted and needed. This led to increased violence and the breakdown of communities, making life even harder for many women.

In her research, academic Nancy Jabbra found that there were three tropes used to tell the stories that explain 9/11 and justify American intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>13</sup> The first trope – which was seen for Afghanistan and Iran too – is the contrast between the liberated Western woman with the oppressed Muslim/Arab/Middle Eastern woman (these three identities were used interchangeably by Western powers and media). This oppression was shown principally through their clothing, either a hijab or a burqa. Jabbra found that, to Americans, these garments symbolise that Middle Eastern women are all the same: oppressed, repressed, voiceless and without agency or action. By comparison, American women were typically shown through the imagery of uncovered, smiling faces and short skirts or dresses – signifying that they could do and wear what they wanted because they were free. In the context of Iraq, media outlets regularly shared images of passive and abaya-wearing Iraqi women side by side with images of American women soldiers (white and attractive) – brave, free and self-sacrificing.

The second trope turns to men and contrasts the 'natural and wholesome' American man with 'abnormal Arab male

sexuality'. For this trope, the Other male is either effeminate (frequently conflated with homosexual) or hypermasculine and, therefore, a dangerous savage who needs punishment. Jabbra found that the effeminate image is more likely to be found where the Other male has been conquered and rendered harmless. 'But, as the Middle Eastern case shows, the two motifs may both be present, both to promote conquest and to insult the Other male', she writes. The third and final trope looks at the bigger picture and contrasts 'innocent good Americans' with 'evil violent Arabs' – a trope that emerged after 9/11. The American public could not (or perhaps would not) make the connection between the actions of their governments and anti-American sentiment, so these attitudes were packaged up as irrational and unfounded and surely the product of evil. A rationale that was backed up by the president himself, who in a 2001 press conference said: 'How do I respond when I see that in some Islamic countries there is vitriolic hatred for America? I'm amazed [...] that people would hate us [...] Because I know how good we are'.<sup>14</sup>

The combination of all three tropes as laid out by Jabbra formed the ideal environment for women's rights to be used as a defensive shield to invade countries like Iraq and Afghanistan. The average person picking up a newspaper or reading a news article online and seeing these stereotypical images and comparisons being made will start to believe that perhaps these wars and military invasions are indeed an act of feminist heroism. And when militarism forms a big part of white feminism, this is no real surprise. Many white women in the military received a lot of attention for their service, but

one example who became America's most famous female soldier and swept across the hearts and minds of the US public (and beyond) was Private Jessica Lynch. While serving in the Iraq war, Lynch – a nineteen-year-old blonde, white woman – was injured, captured and had to be rescued. However, she quickly became the object of military myth-making, with the media completely changing her narrative to fit in with that of the 'American hero', and Lynch became a symbol of the Iraq war.

The US government needed something to get the public back onside as, after the first few days of the invasion, stories of Iraqi women and children being gunned down at checkpoints and prisoners of war being paraded in front of cameras by their American captors began to emerge. The Nasiriyah rescue, where Lynch was freed, was a simple yet powerful narrative of American redemption, which changed the public's perception of the war – especially when footage of Lynch being carried out of the Saddam hospital in Nasiriyah was broadcast on national television. 'She was fighting them to the death. She did not want to be taken alive', said one US military official in Iraq, who described a scene in which Lynch fired her weapon until she ran out of ammunition.<sup>15</sup> However, in the months and years following her rescue and time in Iraq, Lynch has shared her real story and how she became caught up in this myth-making by the US military, including giving testimony before Congress in April 2007. In a *Glamour* article, she wrote:

Nobody likes to believe our military would mislead people – but they wanted a war hero so badly that they portrayed me as one.

They didn't get their facts straight before talking about what happened, and neither did the media. They said I went down guns blazing, like Rambo – but I never fired a shot, because my rifle had jammed.<sup>16</sup>

Lynch became the perfect image for the Iraq war: a blonde, white woman fighting against the evil and savage regime to both protect the oppressed and silenced Iraqi women and defend America's power and existence. She slotted in with the wider gender discourse of the war, where the government could point to this brave and loyal young woman and say, 'This is what feminism and gender equality looks like here'.

Then there's the case of Malala Yousafzai, the young woman who was shot by Taliban forces at fifteen years old on her way home from school in Pakistan in October 2012. *Yousafzai's* remarkable story quickly took hold across the world and she became a high-profile feminist figure in the global fight for education for women and girls. She established the Malala Fund and received the Nobel Peace Prize in December 2014. The work she's doing is urgently needed, but *Yousafzai's* name and story has also been co-opted by many liberals and Western powers to use her as the poster girl to justify the West's presence in places like Afghanistan. She's become *the* voice of experience, an expert on the lives of Muslim women. *Yousafzai* is not only accepted but welcomed into the world of white liberal feminism because her experience fits into the 'Muslim women need to be saved' narrative. She is an object of pity in their eyes, reminds them of their own generosity and reassures white feminists that they are, of

course, not racist or Islamophobic, because they have *Yousafzai*. The fact that Hillary Clinton and *Yousafzai* recently worked together to produce a Broadway show about the US suffragette movement shows how the young Muslim feminist has been ushered into the halls of Western ‘girlboss’ feminism.

## Iran

Another example of war and violence being justified as feminist is the case of Iran. Iran has been an Islamic Republic since 1979, which brought with it strict laws surrounding the hijab and clothing, particularly for women. The brutality of the regime has garnered a lot of international attention – and rightly so. Iranian women must navigate restricted access to employment, education, healthcare and social benefits, which all depend on a woman complying with the compulsory hijab laws. The ‘morality’ police are tasked with enforcing these rules, with the Iranian state arguing that these laws are based on Islamic teachings. But this could not be further from the truth.

The death of Mahsa (Jina) Amini in 2022 ignited anti-government protests in Iran on a scale that hadn’t been seen in the country since November 2019, when state repression killed hundreds of people and injured countless others. But that didn’t stop people from taking to the streets to stand against the compulsory hijab laws and the brutality of the Iranian regime. In the weeks following Amini’s death, protests erupted in over forty cities, including the capital Tehran.<sup>17</sup>

Amini, a twenty-two-year-old Kurdish woman, was visiting

Tehran with her family when she was arrested by officers for breaking the law around the wearing of the hijab. Amini was taken to a 're-education centre' by officers where she was allegedly severely beaten, causing her to fall into a coma. She passed away a few days later in hospital on 16 September 2022. The Iranian government has denied that it caused the death of Amini, claiming that she suffered a heart attack whilst detained, but her family refutes this claim, sharing that Amini was in good health and had no underlying heart conditions.<sup>18</sup>

In Iran, universities and schools staged protests and strikes, with young girls leading the charge by taking off their mandatory hijabs or cutting their hair as a mark of solidarity. In one city, Shiraz, unveiled young girls were filmed heckling one of Iran's feared paramilitary Basij force, shouting 'get lost, Basiji'.<sup>19</sup> At the Sharif University of Technology in Tehran, students also staged an anti-government protest, which then saw security forces trap students on campus, reportedly beating, blindfolding and arresting students.<sup>20</sup>

According to Amnesty International, hundreds of people were killed and injured by the state in the first few weeks of the protest, with at least 82 Baluchi protesters killed on September 30.<sup>21</sup> The death toll also includes sixteen-year-old Nika Shakarami and twenty-three-year-old Hadis Najafi, who were also reportedly killed by security forces and their families coerced into lying about their cause of death.<sup>22</sup> In the city of Isfahan, three women hung a banner depicting a blood-soaked map off a bridge with the message, 'One of us will be next'.<sup>23</sup>

On 3 October 2022, Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, broke his silence regarding the protests stating

that he blamed the US and Israel and gave his full backing to security forces confronting protesters.<sup>24</sup> But even with the threat of state-sanctioned violence and mass internet outages, Iranians continued to voice their demands for freedom and liberation from the regime, with chants of ‘woman, life, freedom’ and ‘death to Khamenei’.

Protests weren’t confined to just Iran, either. There have been widespread protests across the world, including in the UK, US and several European countries such as France, Germany and Sweden. The 2022 Iranian protests have been called one of the largest feminist movements in recent years, but this outcry didn’t start with the death of Amini. Iranian women have been voicing their concerns for years. Even though the compulsory hijab laws only became a collective issue for Iran’s women’s movement recently, there have been millions of individual acts of resistance across the country, such as Sepideh Rashno, who was filmed fighting back against harassment and vigilante enforcement of the hijab on a bus in July 2022 or Vida Movahed, who was pictured in December 2017 standing on top of a sidewalk utility box on Revolution Street, a crowded thoroughfare in Tehran, waving her white hijab on a stick in front of her.<sup>25</sup> Her protest inspired other young women to do the same, prompting them to become known as #TheGirlsofRevolutionStreet on social media.

There’s a danger that these protests could be taken out of context and repackaged as a movement that is fighting against Islam. It’s important to remember that these protests are not just about the hijab or the cutting of hair, but about a person’s ability to choose for themselves.<sup>26</sup> And the feminist heart of the Iranian protests also feeds into the bigger picture around

Iranians standing up against a repressive state that co-opts and exploits Islam to oppress its own people, all in the name of religion. But this repression isn't based in Islam or inherent to one religion, rather it is all about enforcing and maintaining state power.

In the immediate weeks following Amini's death, I remember seeing the same comparison being made on social media – usually involving side-by-side images. The first was usually an image of Iranian women in pre-1979, where they could be seen with unveiled hair and Western-style clothing, usually shorts or miniskirts. The second image would convey an Iranian woman now: dressed in a black hijab and a full abaya. The actor and model Julia Fox even shared a TikTok video at the time where she used this very comparison to talk about 'religious extremism'.<sup>27</sup> These side-by-side comparisons are utilised to drive home the point that the lives of Iranian women were very different to their current situation.

Now, that isn't a lie, but it is worth unpacking what these differences are and what these images represent. Before the 1979 Islamic Republic, Iranian women did have more freedoms when it came to dressing (though this tended to mostly apply to women from the upper classes), but women weren't frequenting bars and clubs in big cities – if anything, most Iranians lived in rural areas, didn't wear miniskirts and only a small minority of women attended college. Social inequalities still existed, albeit in a different context. For nearly forty years up until 1979, the country had been ruled by the pro-Western Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. On the face of it, economic and educational opportunities expanded and women were able to move around freely, gained the right to

vote in the 1960s and were elected to political positions. However, the Shah also ran a repressive and totalitarian regime – allowing no dissent and eventually dismissing multi-party rule. His pursuit of Westernisation led to him banning the hijab and an anti-Western resentment that had already begun to grow properly took hold – culminating in the 1979 revolution.

This tactic isn't just reserved for Iran, either. The same side-by-side comparisons have been used when discussing Afghanistan too. Allegedly, it was a black and white photo from 1972 of Afghan women in miniskirts smiling and walking through the streets of Kabul that convinced President Donald Trump in 2017 to recommit to the US occupation of Afghanistan – even though his presidential campaign had included a complete military withdrawal.<sup>28</sup> This photo is one of the most popular ones used to show what 'liberated' Afghan women look like, compared to the 'silent and oppressed' burqa-wearing women of today, and has effectively become an anti-Islam meme, especially in far-right spaces.

For Afghans, these images may represent a nostalgia for the past or dreams of a better future, but when they're circulated repeatedly in Western media, they serve a more strategic and colonial purpose. The use of comparative images suggests that Afghanistan (like Iran) can be Westernised – i.e. liberated – and the Afghan people could be 'just like us' if Islam didn't exist. Some Afghan people did live like the images suggest in the 1970s but, again, these were a select group in society and tended to be the middle-class urban elite. The average Afghan woman wasn't wearing a miniskirt or attending university in Kabul, as most Afghans weren't living in the

rich cities and experienced poverty and illiteracy. And Afghanistan wasn't a hijab-free nation pre-1970s, as many women were wearing the hijab or the burqa; the Taliban simply weaponised the hijab and removed all choice from women.

The sharing of these images erases all of these inequalities and the general context – making the *whole* conversation about miniskirts and hijabs. Amy Malek calls this clickbait orientalism, a form of ‘digital soft weaponry’ that ‘trades on orientalist tropes and simultaneously thrives on and contributes to sustained geopolitical tensions between Middle Eastern and Western publics’.<sup>29</sup> These types of images attract attention and clicks and pose two simultaneous thoughts to the viewer: imagining what *would* have happened in Iran had the 1979 revolution never occurred and what *could* happen in the West should Iranian and/or Muslim immigrants be allowed to ‘spread’ their religion and culture. The past is reduced to the length of a woman’s skirt. It’s the Western lens of womanhood taking hold once again, where women in miniskirts are seen as more liberated and freer than a veiled woman. A womanhood that is constantly pushed by white feminists, especially when war and violence break out in the Middle East and the Global South.

As part of International Women’s Day in 2024, Lord Young said to his peers in the House of Lords: ‘And the thought occurred to me that if young Muslim women in this country could show solidarity with their sisters in Iran and just take off their hijabs for an hour it might be a powerful gesture in the cause of women internationally’.<sup>30</sup> Apart from the fact Lord Young has completely missed or neglected to think

about why Muslim women wear the hijab in the first place, it's yet another comment that reduces the Iranian feminist movement to being solely about the hijab. The compulsory veiling laws play a significant role in their fight, and nobody should be forced to wear or do anything that they haven't chosen themselves, but Iranians are also standing up against a violent and repressive state regime that weaponises Islam to further its own power and agenda.

### Palestine

The experience of Palestinian women during the ongoing genocide also needs to be unpacked to understand how white feminism works in practice, especially on the global stage. Palestinian women have always faced a two-front struggle, with their oppression bringing into focus the link between patriarchy and colonial systems. And yet, the genocide of the Palestinian people has been met by silence from most feminists in the West, with many not viewing this violence as related to feminist struggles. And this silence has been decades long, not just months. The escalation of the current violence may have reignited on 7 October 2023 (after the Hamas attack on Israel), but the historical context of the region is important to understand what's been happening there over the last few years.

In 1917, the British government issued the Balfour Declaration, a public statement announcing the support for a 'national home for the Jewish people' in Palestine. The state of Israel was founded in May 1948, in the aftermath of the

Second World War and the Holocaust, ending previous British rule in the region of Palestine. This sparked the 1948 Arab–Israeli war, which saw many Arab nations – including Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt – mobilise against the new state of Israel. Around 750,000 Palestinians were expelled from or fled their homes in the region that became Israel. This became known as al-Nakba or the Palestinian Catastrophe. Around 10,000 Jews were also forced to leave their homes in Arab-majority parts of the region. However, between 1948 and 1951, 700,000 Jews immigrated to Israel, mainly into the former Arab parts. Over the following decades, the situation in the region has never really calmed down.

In 1967, Israel overpowered the Arab nations in the Six-Day War and millions of Palestinians were brought under Israeli rule – even though the United Nations passed UN Resolution 242 calling for Israel’s withdrawal from the occupied regions. Since 2007, a blockade has been imposed on Gaza by the Israeli state, with the area typically referred to as ‘the world’s largest open-air prison’.<sup>31</sup> This strip of land has seen fifteen wars over the last few decades, including the current war and genocide. And yet feminists remain largely quiet. At the beginning of this current war, 50,000 women in Gaza were pregnant and the United Nations estimated that more than 180 births were taking place every day within a collapsed healthcare system.<sup>32</sup> With a lack of medicine and supplies, women are having to give birth in some of the worst conditions imaginable. Caesareans are taking place without anaesthesia on the floors of hospitals. Even when women can give birth, they have no homes or a safe place to care for their children as the Israeli government continues to bomb homes,

hospitals and refugee camps. Due to the lack of resources, mothers are struggling to feed and clothe their newborn babies.

But feminism's ignorance and silence regarding the war is selective, as many high-profile feminists, activists and celebrities were quick to comment or share posts online condemning Hamas' attack on Israel. This condemnation is not in question, but why is it easy to condemn these attacks and then completely overlook the harrowing experiences of Palestinians? Are Palestinian women not women enough to be deserving of feminist empathy or solidarity? This silence is just another way that Palestinians have been dehumanised, so that Israeli military officials can describe them as 'human animals' and not be met with widespread international criticism or condemnation.<sup>33</sup> But another part to this silence and wilful blindness is the way that they slot Palestinian women into the typical stereotypes we have already discussed: a woman who is helpless, oppressed by the men in her life and, inherently, a victim. White feminism believes that Palestinian men are barbaric, violent and have a deep and unique misogyny within them. So, these women are then able to buy into Israel's claims that its war on Gaza will help 'liberate' Palestinian women from Hamas and to ignore the horrors and violence that women are currently experiencing.<sup>34</sup>

However, it isn't just silence that does harm, but also the way that white feminists invoke the defence of confusion and 'not knowing enough' about the region. A common tactic and rhetoric that Hillary Clinton recently used when she criticised campus protestors in a TV interview:

I have had many conversations, as you have had, with a lot of young people over the last many months now [. . .] They don't know very much at all about the history of the Middle East, or frankly about history, in many areas of the world, including in our own country.<sup>35</sup>

Not only are her comments belittling young people and students, but they give many people – including white feminists – an automatic out from discussing the Palestinian genocide. It allows them to turn a blind eye to war and genocide because they don't know any better or it is 'too complicated' to understand. In the UK, Pregnant Then Screwed (PTS) is a leading feminist organisation working to end the motherhood penalty. It released a statement in November 2023 on social media stating that it could not comment on 'world events' and had to remain 'non-partisan' due to its charity status. 'Every single member of PTS cares about world events, but that doesn't mean we can talk about that here. Every single member has a political view, but that doesn't mean we can talk about those views here. To say it again – we are a charity governed by charity law, we are not an influencer', reads part of its statement.<sup>36</sup>

This statement would be all well and good if the organisation hadn't shared and spoken up about the experiences of Iranian women in 2022. Pregnant Then Screwed were widely criticised for their 'neutral' statement as the organisation clearly did speak up about certain world events and not others. A few days after posting its initial statement PTS apologised, but attributed its inconsistency to recent changes in the Charity Commission social media guidelines.<sup>37</sup> Most other leading feminist organisations have remained largely

silent in the face of the experiences of Palestinian women. The perceived complexity of the war has meant most Western feminism has opted out of engagement with the Palestinian struggle in the name of self-declared ignorance or neutrality. And it is this collective silence that allows the Israeli state to continue its onslaught on Gaza (and other Palestinian territories) with little to no consequences or repercussions from the global community. In the end, silence is complicity.

White feminism has a huge role to play in the ‘war on terror’ and how the narratives around global conflicts and wars are perceived and understood by the public. It’s a lot easier to sell your country on a war that’s apparently about the fight for women’s rights rather than telling the truth. The majority of people do not want to go to war with any country, especially if that war is about mining oil, money or resources. But saving women and young girls in need? That’s an easy sell. And white feminists don’t push back on this narrative or that governments and world leaders are co-opting their values and beliefs, because it works for them. It maintains their position of power and privilege and allows them to continue playing the role of feminism’s ‘Big Sister’. And, more importantly, white feminists believe in the messaging of these wars. They believe that Muslim women in countries like Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran need their help, even though these countries never asked for foreign interventions. Or they believe that Palestinian women need saving from men and so stay silent in the face of a genocide.

This is why it is so important that we understand but move away from the white feminist lens and instead focus on the Muslim women who are doing the real work to liberate us and take us through to a much brighter and hopeful future.



## Muslim women: Loud and proud

*‘They all give me so much hope  
for the future of feminism’*

Muslim women have had our voices taken from us for too long. We are told we’re weak. Submissive. Uneducated. Backwards. In need of saving. And most of all? Definitely not feminists. Debates are constantly held that question and discuss our lives and our bodies without our voices ever being in the room, let alone invited. And on the rare occasion that we are invited into these rooms, it is usually so we can field racist and Islamophobic views in the name of ‘debate’. Newspapers regularly dedicate headlines and pages to dissecting our faith and womanhood. Being a Muslim woman is a minefield of dodging ignorance, a lack of education and malicious and violent mindsets and behaviours. The narrative that white feminism has created and reinforced around Muslim women is so deeply embedded in Western societies that you would be forgiven for thinking that many of us are married stay-at-home wives who have no views or opinions outside of the family unit. Now, there is absolutely nothing wrong or bad about

being a stay-at-home wife or mother – if anything, some of the strongest, most vocal women in my life are just that. But Muslim women are complex and varied and we occupy a range of roles, ideas and behaviours that don't fit into this harmful box that white feminism has put us in. We are doers and thinkers and, ultimately, women who have fundamentally changed this world for the better.

I have never hidden my faith, but I can still get people – usually older white women – who express surprise or slight shock that I am a Muslim woman. In one instance, a woman replied: 'Well, good for you'. They would never say outright where this shock comes from, but I can hazard a guess that it is because they do not expect a Muslim woman to be vocal about her political and social views in feminist spaces, to appear and speak on panels or to be confident enough to engage in male-dominated spaces, such as the media and journalism industries. In my own experience, the shock is only brief and is usually followed by small-talk style niceties, but I do find it an interesting response. These are women who have absorbed white feminism's idea of a Muslim woman and are then surprised to see that just is not the case. It also does not help that the feminist history we focus on in the UK (and in other Western nations) is very white-washed and very rarely includes the contributions of Black, brown, Muslim, queer or disabled feminists and activists. We are taught in schools about some racialised women, like Rosa Parks, but it is an overwhelmingly white and middle-class history of social justice.

This is one of the glaring problems with white feminism: it is teaching and shaping a history that is simply incomplete and inaccurate. This chapter isn't an attempt to prove our

worth or our contributions but simply to shine a light on our own feminist history. When there is an abundance of women from so many different backgrounds doing the work to better our world, it is a disservice to not share and platform their contributions too – especially Muslim women.

### **The leading Muslim women in Islamic history**

The ways Islam is perceived and understood in the West and across the world are all rooted in misunderstanding of the religion as being male-dominated and misogynistic – and some Muslim men in our communities do not help to challenge this damaging narrative. However, our Islamic history was formed and shaped by so many brilliant (but forgotten) women.

Khadijah bint Khuwaylid was the Prophet's (pbuh) first wife and the first follower of Islam. She was also a successful and wealthy businesswoman in her own right, managing caravans between Mecca, Yemen and Syria. It is believed that Khadijah inherited the business from her father and expanded it using her own skills, with many scholars stating that Khadijah's caravan equalled the caravans of all other traders of the Quraysh put together. In Islam, she became known as the 'mother of believers' and is one of the four 'ladies of heaven' – alongside her daughters – and was widely respected by the community for her kindness and generosity. When she married the Prophet (pbuh), Khadijah supported him both financially and morally and became his closest confidante when he was granted his prophethood by Allah. She not only became the first believer and the first witness of his prophethood but also helped him spread the

word of Islam and is a hugely important female figure in Islam. It is probable that she was the main financial aid in major Islamic events, like the first hijrah to Abyssinia.<sup>1</sup> Khadijah's twenty-five-year marriage to the Prophet (pbuh) was also unusually 'modern' for seventh-century Arabia, as Khadijah had been married twice before, she proposed to him and she was the breadwinner in their household. Their marriage and union – which was based on a deep love and respect – is a great example for Muslims today on how to challenge stereotypes and patriarchal interpretations of marriage.

Before Florence Nightingale, there was Rufaida Al-Aslamia. She lived during the time of the Prophet (pbuh) and was a pioneering figure in the field of Islamic medicine and social work. She founded the first Islamic health centre in seventh-century Medina and is widely acknowledged as the first female Muslim nurse and the first woman surgeon in Islamic history.<sup>2</sup> She accepted Islam early on and Rufaida and a group of volunteers asked the Prophet's (pbuh) permission to take part in his army's battles by assisting the injured soldiers. With his approval, she played a significant role in many key battles, such as Badr and Uhud, and likely saved many lives. The Prophet (pbuh) recognised her invaluable contributions to the war and rewarded her with an equal share of the spoils of war – the same that would have been received by the soldiers. After the wars ended, Rufaida kept her small clinic near Masjid Al-Nabawi and continued her work in educating women as nurses and providing much needed medical care to her community. Her name had been forgotten for many centuries, but scholarly work is bringing her work back to the forefront so that we can rightly

remember and immortalise her contributions to both Islam and the medical field.

A few centuries later, another Muslim woman changed the face of astronomy by pioneering the astrolabe – a scientific device used to calculate the position of the sun and stars. Maryam Al Ijlya, also known as Mariam Al Astrulabi, was the only female astronomer of her era and is now considered one of the 200 most famous astronomers in history.<sup>3</sup> As there are very few women on this list (let alone Muslim women), it is quite the feat. With an astrolabe, astronomers could work out the position of celestial objects, the time of day (or night), the time of year, the altitude of any object, the latitude and much more. For Muslims, the sun's position plays a vital role in prayer times, and so astronomy has always been important in Islam. Al Astrulabi's astrolabe<sup>4</sup> and wider mathematical calculations and precisions helped to track the position of the sun, moon, stars and planets, helping find the Qiblah (direction of the Ka'aba in Mecca) and ascertaining prayer times and the date of Ramadan. Her contributions to the field were officially recognised in 1990 when Henry H. Holy discovered the main-belt asteroid at Palomar Observatory and named it the 7069 Al Ijliyye.

Elsewhere during the Islamic Golden Age (750–1258 CE), Lubna of Córdoba was busy acquiring and building Al-Hakam II's royal library. In a BBC Radio 3 essay, writer Kamila Shamsie described Lubna's life as left in traces in the fragments of records but that 'there's no doubt she had a fine and piercing intellect and moved in some of the most interesting circles of the day'.<sup>5</sup> Shamsie also shares that some scholars found records of Lubna teaching kids basic maths

skills. The writer also claims that Lubna might have been two different women – Lubna and Fatima – combined into one woman, because the historian responsible could not comprehend that there were two female intellectuals at the same court. Even if there may be some ambiguities around Lubna's exact knowledge and roles within the Al-Hakam II Caliphate, historians and scholars do know that she was fiercely knowledgeable, particularly in mathematics, grammar and poetry, and was entrusted with writing and translating manuscripts (including by Aristotle and Euclid) in the library of Córdoba – which consisted of over 500,000 books. She also travelled solo across North Africa and the Middle East, acquiring books and manuscripts to add to the library's growing collection. It is thought that Lubna was one of a few hundred female intellectuals in Andalusia at the time, responsible for some of the most important documents and manuscripts across the Caliphate.

Another influential Muslim woman in our history is Fatima al-Fihri, who founded the world's first and oldest university. After her father's death, Fatima inherited a large fortune that she used to establish the University of Al-Qarawiyyin in Fez, Morocco. Formed in the year 859, the university was named after her birthplace in Tunisia and taught several subjects including astronomy, Quran studies, law, maths, geography and medicine. The university initially started off as a madrasah but quickly grew into the institution it still is today. It was also the first to introduce the system of awarding degrees according to different levels of study. The university's popularity became so overwhelming that Fatima had to introduce a strict selection system, requiring prospective students to know

the Quran by heart and have a good knowledge of Arabic.<sup>6</sup> Fatima's university brought Muslim scholars like Ibn Rushd and Mohammed al-Idrisi to its doors as well as Christian scholars such as Pope Sylvester II (946–1003) – which inspired European countries to form their own universities.<sup>7</sup>

### The history of feminist action, both in the UK and beyond

The British colonial rule over Egypt was not without its uprisings and revolutions, but the active involvement of women in the fight against the colonisers and liberation for Egypt – especially during the 1919 revolution – is rarely mentioned. Even when political leadership was granted to their male comrades in 1922, women were still not afforded their rights. However, this did not deter Egyptian women or push them into giving up the work. Instead, a whole host of informal networks of activism and action developed, such as Huda Sha'rawi founding the Egyptian Feminist Union in 1923.

Huda Sha'rawi was an Egyptian feminist who was born into the nation's harem system and, as a young girl, became frustrated at the lack of education opportunities for women and girls. Aged thirteen, she was married to her cousin (forty years her senior) but managed to suspend this marriage until she was twenty-one. As she got older, she began to organise lectures for women in public spaces for the first time. She also famously took off her veil outside Cairo train station: this became one of the first public rejections of the veil in Egypt. As well as creating the Egyptian Feminist Union, Sha'rawi

also successfully campaigned to raise the age of marriage for girls to sixteen.

Then there was Zaynab al-Ghazali's founding of the Muslim Women's Society in 1936. After a short stint in the Egyptian Feminist Union, al-Ghazali resigned and founded her own organisation that would move away from a secular and Western-oriented movement for women's liberation. Even though she believed that Muslim women needed to fulfil their roles as wives and mothers, she also believed that Islam equipped Muslim women with a strong tradition of individual rights that promoted and facilitated women's inclusion in wider society.

In the wake of the colonial revolution, Doria Shafik founded the Daughters of the Nile Union in 1948. With the support of the Egyptian Feminist Union and Sha'rawi, Shafik used her excellence in education to secure a government scholarship to study philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris. Returning to Alexandria in the summer of 1935, Shafik came across a beauty pageant that was being held to choose a Miss Egypt. Only women of European or Christian heritage had ever taken part in the contest – never a Muslim – but Shafik saw this as an opportunity to 'assert myself in the feminine sphere'.<sup>8</sup> She finished as the runner-up in the pageant but caused scandal in the Egyptian press and was blocked from a teaching position at Egypt's national university. Sha'rawi also shut out Shafik from her feminist organisation – due to her class background – and so Shafik started her own. The Daughters of the Nile Union was dedicated to educating and organising working women of all classes and ran literacy classes, mutual aid programmes, an employment programme and, most of all, fought for women's

political rights. The Daughters of the Nile was also actively involved in the campaign for independence from the British, and Shafik famously gathered a crowd of 1,500 women at a lecture hall at the American University of Cairo for what she billed ‘a feminist congress’ – which turned out to be an army of women about to storm Egypt’s all-male parliament. But when the monarchy was overthrown in 1952, women were still not allowed to vote or participate in politics. They were not granted the right to vote until 1956.

In more recent years, multiple waves of the Arab Spring have taken place, with women at the forefront of many of these protests and movements. Women-led feminist groups, like Opantish, fought to protect women protestors who were taking part in the revolutionary protests in Egypt from sexual violence and were also instrumental in the Arab Spring movements in Algeria, Iraq and Tunisia. In Lebanon, activist Malak Alawiye quickly became headline news and known as the ‘kick queen’ after kicking a bodyguard of a Lebanese minister in the groin when protests broke out in October 2019 after the government announced controversial new tax measures.<sup>9</sup> She even got married during a protest.

After the 2019 ‘honour’ killing of Israa Ghareeb in Palestine, the Palestinian feminist and anti-colonial movement Tal’at was born. Two weeks after Israa’s murder, a small group of Palestinian women issued a call to protest, urging women to take action: ‘This is a demonstration for Israa and the twenty-eight women that we have lost since the beginning of the year, and for those whose bodies and souls face daily violence [. . .] The safety and dignity of women in Palestine is not a women-only issue, but one that must be at the core of

our emancipatory politics in discourse and action, for there is no free homeland without free women'.<sup>10</sup> The protests that were organised by Tal'at spread all over Palestine and reached Lebanon, Jordan and Berlin, making violence against women a key topic of both online and offline discussions.

The image of a veiled Alaa Salah, a twenty-two-year-old Sudanese poet, addressing protesters standing on the roof of a truck went viral online in 2019 and she quickly became the symbol of the protest movement.<sup>11</sup> Sudanese women played (and currently still do) a vital role in mobilising communities to call for the removal of former president Omar al-Bashir after his government imposed austerity measures. In April 2019, protestors occupied the square in front of the military's headquarters demanding the army step in and force the president out. A few days later, the military announced that Bashir had been overthrown, but the military quickly turned on the demonstrations. 'Alaa was not the first woman that we saw being vocal on the street in this revolution, or in past ones', Sara Elhassan, a Sudanese writer, told *The Financial Times*. 'But the image highlighted the fact that as Sudanese women, we are not voiceless, and that we were active participants and integral to the revolution'.<sup>12</sup> Sudan is currently facing 'one of the worst humanitarian nightmares in recent history' as Generals Abdel Fattah al-Burhan (leader of the Sudanese Armed Forces) and Mohamed Hamdan 'Hemedti' Dagalo (leader of the Rapid Support Forces), remain engaged in a brutal and violent power struggle that erupted in April 2023.<sup>13</sup>

It can be easy to forget that, in many of these Muslim-majority countries, women are not sitting out of huge political and revolutionary moments in their country's history, but play

active roles in pushing for real and tangible change. The same has been the case in the UK. Bertha (Maryam) Cave was an important feminist campaigner and fought to open the legal profession to women in 1903 by making an application to join one of the four Inns of Court, Gray's Inn. Before the Sex Disqualification Act of 1919, it was only men who were allowed to join such an institution. Even though Cave's application was not the only one to be rejected based on her gender (and class position), she was the only woman who challenged the rejection. She also converted to Islam in 1905 when she married Colonel Ali Altof Khan – who was a barrister and a Muslim – which also challenged the social norms and conventions of the time. 'Her behaviour was radical as she took on the Bar of England and Wales and the Establishment [. . .] and, even after her rejection, sat in counsel's place in court when representing her father'.<sup>14</sup>

Anwar Ditta, a campaigner who fought back against the Home Office and the British government in the 1980s, is a Muslim woman who became a key figure in the history of British resistance against racism and state violence.<sup>15</sup> Ditta's experience with the immigration system highlighted just how deeply racial discrimination and prejudice ran through the UK's immigration laws and institutions. In the late 1940s and 1950s, as Britain faced devastation and a labour shortage after the Second World War, the government invited citizens from the Commonwealth to fill these vacant roles and start a life in the UK. Many families, like Ditta's, took the government up on their offer. Migrating from Pakistan in the wake of the partition of British India, Ditta's father made the decision to move to England, arriving first in Liverpool and then

settling in Birmingham. Ditta was born in Birmingham in 1953. A few years later her parents separated, with her father granted custody of her and her sister. They were both sent to Pakistan to live with their grandparents. In 1968, aged fourteen, Ditta was married to Shuja Ud Din. The marriage had been arranged by their families. They went on to have three children: Imran, Kamran and Saima. After Ditta and her husband moved to the UK, they chose to leave their three children behind in Pakistan while they found work and set up their new life there. In September 1976, now pregnant with their fourth child, Ditta submitted the applications for their other children to come to the UK.

But the British immigration system had changed a lot since Ditta's parents moved to the UK in the 1950s. The most notable of these changes was the Immigration Act of 1971, which removed the right of all Commonwealth citizens to migrate to the UK. These changes meant that, even though Ditta had a British passport, her children did not as they had been born in Pakistan. It took two and a half years for the Home Office to consider her children's applications but, after interviewing the couple, the government decided it was 'not satisfied' that her children were related to Ditta and her husband. Ditta and her husband began collecting as much evidence as they could to prove that their children were in fact their own and she even underwent medical 'virginity' testing to prove her marital status. Alongside all this happening, the Anwar Ditta Defence Campaign began to gather momentum and found support in a range of radical resistance groups (such as Asian Youth Movements in Bradford and Manchester). Ditta herself spoke at over 400 meetings and demonstrations about

her own situation and the injustices of the immigration system. The campaign's growing energy led to the making of a documentary by Granada TV's *World in Action* programme, screened in March 1981. The filmmakers not only covered the campaign but also flew out to Pakistan to film Ditta's children, where they took blood samples. Ditta had always offered to undertake blood tests, but this was an offer the Home Office never took up – Ditta's case was only the second to use it in British history. The day after the documentary was screened and facing mounting pressure from activist groups and the public, the Home Office overturned their refusal decision, with Ditta's children arriving in the UK in April 1981 – five years after the initial application.

Anwar Ditta's work as an anti-racist campaigner highlighted the power of community-led activism and self-organising in fighting injustice and, after her own victory, Ditta remained a steadfast defender of others facing discrimination from the Home Office, never forgetting how others had supported her fight for her family.

During this time, in north-west London, a group of South Asian women took to the streets to protest poor working conditions at the Grunwick film processing factory. Grunwick employed many migrant workers, including many Asian women stereotypically viewed by employers as submissive and hard-working. But, in 1976, this all changed. Jayaben Desai and almost one hundred other workers walked out in protest against their treatment and would go on strike for two years.<sup>16</sup> Their strike was not initially backed by any unions but did receive support from Brent Trades Council and it grew to pickets of around 20,000 people. Although the

strikers did not get their jobs back, some concessions were made relating to existing and future workers' pay and pensions.<sup>17</sup> However, what this strike and movement showed is that Asian women (with some from Muslim backgrounds) were not weak or submissive and, indeed, had the power as workers to push for real change. As Amrit Wilson writes in *Finding A Voice*, 'That strike has proved for always that Asian women workers can be strong, resourceful and courageous, that they can stand up, face the world and demand their rights'.<sup>18</sup> It was also quite the wake-up call for the unions as, before now, they had been neglectful of the struggles of Black and brown workers – showing that class struggle and action must be intersectional and incorporate an anti-racist worldview.

### The many journeys of Muslim women today

In a society that is effectively built to stifle and repress the lives of Muslim women, there are so many women doing brilliant and inspiring things. For this section, I wanted to encapsulate some of the conversations I have had with Muslim women about the work they do, why they do it and how they feel the work fits in with their faith and womanhood. The full interview transcripts will be available to read at the end of the book.

Whilst growing up, I didn't see many women who looked like me in magazines or on television news desks and, knowing how white and male the media industry was (and still is), I did not see writing or journalism as a viable career option for me. But now, there are Muslim women – from a range of backgrounds – carving out spaces in media and journalism

and ensuring that our voices and stories are heard. We are still a very small minority but it is a lot better than a decade ago. A writer that I have long admired and read is *Haaniyah Awale Angus*. I was already an avid reader of her cultural commentary on television and film, but I attended a British Film Institute panel event where *Angus* was giving a talk on the rom-com genre and it solidified for me how much of a force this young woman is in the media world. She is an essayist, culture journalist and screenwriter, regularly writing for publications such as *Dazed* and *Polyester* as well as her own newsletter. More recently, she also founded her own independent publication, *labaatan*, for work that may not typically fit into mainstream media. ‘I grew up thinking that I would be a Muslim writer, and I’d write articles and books about Islam and I’m navigating this odd feeling where I’m not doing that. And it’s not because I don’t care about my faith, it’s more self-preservation – which is honestly quite sad’, *Angus* tells me. She adds that it is upsetting that she does not feel like she can be as open about the way that she practises her faith, but with *labaatan*, a lot of our editorial team are Muslims, so this space has started to open up again for her and so many others.

Another writer that I have had the privilege of learning from over the years is Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan. She has written books and poetry collections such as *Tangled in Terror: Uprooting Islamophobia* and *Postcolonial Banter* (featuring her viral poem, ‘This is Not a Humanising Poem’) and is also an educator – disrupting understandings of history, race, knowledge and violence. I interviewed *Manzoor-Khan* in 2022 for *Huck* and there is a passage where she talks about disruption that I regularly think about. It partly read: ‘Disruption is a

really important first port of call in any movement to lead us towards resistance [...] Knowledge is what mobilises and galvanises people to change their material conditions'.<sup>19</sup> Suhaimah is also the co-founder of the abolitionist collective working in solidarity with Muslims in prison, The Nejma Collective. Inspired by the Black Lives Matter protests in 2021 and some new initiatives in US prisons, *Manzoor-Khan* and her team saw there was an opportunity to do something similar in the UK but focusing on Muslims in prison. 'Nejma is motivated by Islam's holistic approach to justice that contextualises harm rather than defining people solely by their actions, and that seeks accountability and reparation rather than simply caging people and making them more vulnerable', she tells me.

Finding a dedicated and safe space for Muslim women can be rare, but media company *Amaliah* has done just that. It started off publishing articles on its website and has grown into a vast and beautiful space that, through its articles, videos, events and brand partnerships, seeks to make visible the many different voices and experiences within our communities. Co-founded by Nafisa Bakkar, the *Amaliah* team has built and nurtured a caring community of Muslim women. Bakkar – who also authored *How To Make Money* – has won several awards for her work, including appearing on the 'Forbes 30 Under 30' list in 2020 and being named in *The Evening Standard*'s most influential people in media in 2019. 'Amaliah came about because we realised that we needed a space on our own terms, especially in the current media landscape', Bakkar tells me. It was about being able to create and cultivate a space that doesn't box Muslim women into thinking about things that relate to *just* the hijab or *just* the political

moments happening around the world. ‘We wanted a media that spoke to all the different sides of us – from relationships to fitness and everything in between that makes up the lives that other media outlets don’t typically represent’.

Muslim representation in British politics remains minimal, but there have been several Muslims who have achieved positions of power as MPs, or even the current Mayor of London. Elected in 2019 as the MP for Coventry South, Zarah Sultana is one of the youngest MPs in parliament and the youngest Muslim MP to be elected in the UK. She also has the largest TikTok following in parliament and is a vocal part of the Labour left (she left the party in July 2025) and, sadly, is now the most at-risk MP online when it comes to abuse.<sup>20</sup> *Sultana* avoids public transport when she can, she’s thinking of the exits of every building she walks into in case of threats and she is never alone on visits. In an emotional parliamentary speech in September 2021, *Sultana* told her peers about the abuse she experiences as an MP: ‘I have discovered that to be a Muslim woman, to be outspoken and to be left wing is to be subjected to this barrage of hate. It is to be treated by some as if I were an enemy of the country I was born in. As if I don’t belong’.<sup>21</sup> I spoke to *Sultana* during the 2024 General Election for *Stylist* and she shared some of these experiences, both good and bad. She explains to me that people’s reaction to her being an MP is a mixed bag: she can get people being impressed with her work, especially as an outspoken young Muslim woman. ‘They recognise that there are additional hardships involved in my perseverance to be an MP, but I stick to my principles’. But in and around parliament, it is different. ‘I always have to be ready, holding my pass out for security because I constantly

get mistaken for others or people don't think I'm a politician. I've even had it where I've been inside the chambers and senior politicians have mistaken me for a clerk, which speaks to the fact my demographic is seen as more likely to be a member of staff than an MP', she adds. However, *Sultana* is still motivated by the work to continue life as an MP. 'I receive a lot of horrific abuse and it's enough to make anyone think about packing it in. But I've been involved in politics for all of my adult life, and I'm motivated by the desire to win – not electorally speaking – but to see real change happen in our society and for everyone to feel like they have a stake in politics'.

During the Euro 2020 football competition, three British Muslim women met up in a bar to watch the quarter final game between England and Ukraine and shared a photo to social media captioned: 'Three hijabis walk into a bar . . .' But Shaista Aziz (a campaigner and journalist), Amna Abdullatif (a community psychologist, writer and speaker) and Huda Jawad (executive director of the Faith & VAWG Coalition) had no idea how viral their photo would go, and it led to the three women forming and mobilising a huge campaign calling for racists to be banned from football matches for life. An interview with the Three Hijabis can be found in the appendix. 'There was a lot of interest in this idea of women being fascinated or interested in football, which was bizarre to me. Because in my household, it was always my mum who was the football fan, not the men', says *Abdullatif*.

Following racist abuse against three Black England players (Rashford, Sancho and Saka) at the Euro 2020 final between England and Italy at Wembley, they wanted to leverage the power they had, and so created a petition and anti-racist

campaign. Within forty-eight hours of the petition going live, more than one million people had signed and backed the call to action. In the same week, the then prime minister Boris Johnson mentioned the Three Hijabis petition in parliament and committed to extending football banning orders to those convicted of online racist abuse. Since the success of the petition, #TheThreeHijabis have met with the Football Association (FA) to discuss how to address the issue of racism on the pitch and in online spaces. Like so many Muslim women, they have had to navigate racism, Islamophobia and misogyny along the way, but it hasn't stopped them from continuing on with their campaigning and work. As *Jawad* shares, 'Being a feminist is still seen as being in direct opposition to being Muslim. So, from that perspective, it's been really hard to maintain our resilience and, for me, being part of the Three Hijabis and having my sisters around as my sort of touchstones, it's been absolutely vital in taking up space'.

It is this idea of taking up space that is so important for Muslim women's feminism. When white feminism is constantly locking us out of doors and keeping us from sitting at tables of power, we must continue the fight to get our voices heard and tell our own stories in feminist spaces. And that's exactly what all these women (and many more) do every day in different but beautiful ways. It's true solidarity in action and they all give me so much hope for the future of feminism.



## Conclusion

White feminism is inherently harmful. Its focus on the experiences of cis-gendered, white, middle-class women means it is more caught up with changing the faces on banknotes, getting a rich, white female director nominated at a film awards ceremony and celebrating neoliberal and violent women simply because they achieved new successes in politics. It is so busy trying to get a seat at the table that it does not stop to think about what the table *really* represents. Is it worth carving out space in a room that will ultimately oppress everyone else? But this capitalist and economic power is at the heart of white feminism. To them, equal economic power to men is what gender equality looks like in a modern and progressive society. It is also why a carceral logic is so fitting for them; they put so much trust and confidence in the police, legal system and, ultimately, the state, because these institutions will protect their positions of power. White feminism cannot even consider other forms of liberation because of this power, but also because a radical and abolitionist feminist future is perceived as unrealistic.

This idea that a radical feminist future is ‘unrealistic’ is one that I have encountered many times over the years and

it is something I used to think when I first started reading about police abolition, Black feminism and a world without capitalism. I found that I could not see what these futures would look like and how society would function without these structures in place. Yet, not only would society function, but it would thrive. As soon as I realised that abolition does not mean just the *absence* of the police or the state as we know it, something clicked in my mind. Abolition is not simply the act of abolishing a system or structure, but also the act of replacing it with better alternatives that work for the majority and not just the minority. Our imaginations are powerful political tools that we can use to think up and dream of alternative ways of thinking, feeling and living. As a Muslim woman, I already use my imagination in my faith when I read about the angels, *jinn* and heavens – believing and knowing these things to be true but without ever seeing or hearing them.

A lot of the discussions in leftist and feminist spaces can be defeatist and lacking in hope, but this is why imagination plays such a huge and important role in the fight for social justice and bettering our world. As Zarah Sultana said to me: ‘You have to remind people that things aren’t just given to us by the political elite, they were hard fought for. It’s why I see myself in the business of hope – generating hope and making people believe that things aren’t impossible’. Without hope or imagination, many rights and liberations may not have happened. When workers’ union groups pushed for the concept of a two-day weekend, maternity leave and a minimum wage, I am sure many critics at the time could not envision what work would look like with these

changes. The same applies for when women fought for the right to vote or when campaigners were forging ahead with the abolition of slavery; there will have been people along the way who were so invested in, and had grown accustomed to, the status quo that they could not imagine what a different world could look like.

Even though white feminism is built on the back of many women who fought hard to make real change in society, it is now frozen within this lack of hope and imagination that means its liberatory goals are superficial and only ‘help’ a minority of already privileged and powerful women. It is this tunnel vision that also means it cannot – or will not – comprehend the complex lives and experiences of Muslim women around the world. It is why our contributions to feminism and a range of other fields are regularly erased in discussions, historical archives and textbooks. And when we are included in white feminist spaces, it is usually to prove our womanhood and humanity as Muslim women. Or serve as ‘talking points’ on International Women’s Day panels.

A common question I tend to get asked is, ‘Well, what can white feminists do? How can we be better allies to Muslim women?’ – and throughout the course of this book, I have had some time to unpack this and think about what allyship really looks like for our communities. It can be a frustrating question to receive – especially when it is not coming from a genuine position of wanting to know, but a place of defensiveness – but I understand why it gets asked. Every Muslim woman may see allyship in a different way but, for me, it is about learning how to actively listen to our

voices – and not simply listening with the goal of responding with your own thoughts and opinions. There is a huge difference between the two and I can tell pretty quickly if a person is genuinely listening to what I am saying or if they are just listening in order to respond with their own points. It is listening with openness and a willingness to learn, no matter how uncomfortable it may be for you. Allyship is, and should be, an uncomfortable experience. It requires you to sit with your own thoughts and biases and truly unpack these learnings, which tends to involve critically analysing your own privilege and power. Ultimately, it is realising that your feminism is not the only (or right) way of achieving liberation.

Others may not agree with me, but I believe that the overall struggle for women's liberation can operate with separate feminist spaces within it, as it is only then that marginalised women, including Muslim women, can feel truly safe to exist and work towards a future of freedom. It is lending your support (material or otherwise) to a range of causes and actions without centring your voices and experiences in the process. It is engaging with mutual aid and skill sharing to support Muslim women in their own fight against injustices, like racism and Islamophobia – a fight that has always been happening and is not anything new. We do not need white feminists to speak for us or do the work for us. Instead, we need them to unpack and dismantle their own harmful ways of thinking and imagine a more hopeful, caring and radical future where we are *all* liberated and free to live and co-exist.

# Appendix

## Interview with Haaniyah Angus

**SE:** With dwindling budgets and magazines shutting, journalism is hard! What was your pathway into the industry? And what was it like navigating it all?

**HA:** Because I was very online in my late teens and early twenties, I think I built up a reputation that I was somebody who's very staunchly opinionated – which is true. I remember one of my very first articles was with *Variety* and that was based on a Twitter thread I'd posted about a film I watched and hated. But it's a persona I've had to steer away from over the years. During university and the beginnings of my freelance career, I played into it and it was really fun! I had created this persona of being this really harsh critic who didn't like anything. However, looking back, it was probably more of a defence mechanism as one of the few Black women in these spaces and wanting to be taken seriously. I didn't want to get pushed aside. I'm still unlearning that, as I realised I don't need to be so hard on myself.

After I graduated from university, I worked at the BBC for a year and it was interesting work because I got to see the behind-the-scenes of a media company and I quickly decided that I never want to work at a media company. I felt very stifled – both politically and creatively – and wasn’t writing anymore. Yet, as soon as I started my Substack, the words just flowed out of me. I found a space where I could actually speak about my thoughts and feelings, without feeling judged or like I’m performing. I don’t post on Twitter as much as I used to, I haven’t gone offline but I’ve definitely restrained myself. And it’s helped a lot with my anxiety and my personhood – figuring out who I am outside of the internet. Because for so long, that was my identity.

**SE:** I’ve definitely found the same with coming off Twitter. Does this feed into why you created your own publication too?

**HA:** *labaatan* almost shielded me in a way, because being an editor versus being a writer gives you so much power and so much freedom to not have your identity be the most important thing. It feels almost as though I’m representing this brainchild of all my friends and our ideas. The concept initially came to me whilst I was pitching an idea to editors and it wasn’t really landing anywhere. I thought to myself, ‘This is a really good idea, but where’s it going to go?’ So, I decided to create my own space for those ideas that don’t typically fit into the ‘mainstream’.

I grew up thinking that I would be a Muslim writer and I’d write articles and books about Islam and I’m navigating this odd feeling where I’m not doing that. And it’s not because I don’t care about my faith, it’s more self-preservation – which

is honestly quite sad. It's sad that I don't feel like I can be as open about the way that I practise my faith, but with *labaatan*, a lot of our editorial team are Muslims which puts our publication in an interesting space in the media.

**SE:** I love that, because it means you get to have your own relationship with your faith and identity without it becoming the publication's identity.

**HA:** Absolutely!

**SE:** Have you ever felt pigeonholed into writing about certain issues or themes based on your identity?

**HA:** I was definitely pigeonholed into pieces about race and representation. Interestingly, I've never been pitched or asked to write about anything to do with Islam. Even though I have a Muslim name and don't hide my faith, I don't get considered for those things. I don't know if that's because I'm Black and so they don't think I'm the 'right' type of Muslim, but I've been asked to write about race and representation a lot.

**SE:** And what does feminism mean to you?

**HA:** Tumblr was the place where I began to learn about feminism and general history – learning about civil rights and political movements. It was very Taylor Swift-esque 'girlboss' feminism. As I got older, however, the more I read Audre Lorde, bell hooks and other pivotal Black feminists and realised that feminism isn't just one idea. I recently read *Feminism*

*and Nationalism in the Third World* by Kumari Jayawardena and it was such a fascinating book on the feminist movements in the Middle East, Africa and Asia. When you think about feminism in the Muslim community, it can be viewed with such disdain and harshness. I find this interesting because Islam has given women God-given rights but some people in our communities are somehow pretending those rights don't exist and that feminism is the problem. But for so many Muslim women, those God-given rights aren't acted upon.

## Interview with Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan

**SE:** How do white feminism and Islamophobia collude together?

**SMK:** It's always tricky to know where to begin with this, but history is probably the easiest place. For me, that's where I first discovered this collusion. Looking at the Algerian war of independence against the French, you see how the liberation of Muslim women was tied with the idea of French success. I also remember coming across people like Lord Cromer in Egypt and Orientalist writings and images. Throughout all of that, you see the same themes emerge which are that, in the construction of white supremacy, you always have agendas and comments about gender that often positions Muslim women as being at the mercy of their men and in need of saving from their culture, their land, their people, their religion. You can't tell one story without the other. The thing that is so frustrating is that everyone tells the story of feminism in the West without talking about how these liberal feminist ideals are built through racism. If we place feminism within this context, we can contextualise it as just another of these liberal values built through the golden age of capitalism. History is where we understand why and how these narratives exist.

**SE:** Sometimes it just feels like we're just pawns in a game. It's definitely how I felt growing up. As the years have gone by, I've noticed Muslim women have become much more politicised.

**SMK:** And that's the irony, isn't it? When you have fifteen-year-old girls growing up in Bethnal Green and experiencing the ways that teachers treat you and experiencing the way school is, it's very likely that you'll have legitimate political grievances. If you don't allow space for young people to express these grievances, then it's clear that you simply don't want them to. It'll be interesting to see how the next generation of Muslims navigate this. I work in a lot of schools and young people are really coherent in the analysis of what they're experiencing and it gives me hope.

**SE:** Could you tell me about the work you're currently doing with the Nejma Collective?

**SMK:** The idea came about during the Black Lives Matter protests in 2021 where we were seeing some exciting initiatives in US prisons and there was a question around how we do something similar in the UK – with abolition at the heart of our solidarity and thinking about what's the role of punitive measures in Islam? We weren't sure exactly how to support people in prison but alhamdulillah, we've evolved in lots of ways and made sure our collective is grounded in lots of solidarity work. Nejma is motivated by Islam's holistic approach to justice that contextualises harm rather than defining people solely by their actions, and that seeks accountability

and reparation rather than simply caging people and making them more vulnerable.

Isolation is a huge issue. A lot of Muslims in prisons are new Muslims and don't necessarily have access to that community aspect and feel as though they've been forgotten by the ummah, so it can be bolstering for them to feel that connection again. And the other thing is post-release, realising all the fears that people face when they leave prison, especially around housing, jobs and income. An interesting aspect of Nejma is how the Ministry of Justice and the prison service have responded to our organisation. There's been a lot of surveillance, suspicion and 'securitisation' and there's this whole issue around compliance with the Ministry of Justice. This response reaffirms just how powerful the act of extending solidarity is and reveals one of the defining logics of prison: separation as punishment. With an abolitionist mindset, we don't tend to look at what people have done to end up in prison, but even when it's disclosed and it's something that makes us uncomfortable, we have to think to ourselves: does this person still deserve food? Does this person deserve things like underwear and socks? Yes. And then bigger questions such as is prison actually transforming them? Or assisting the victims? No.

It's the women in particular, however. Muslim women in prison face unique challenges, including stigmatisation from families and communities as well as bullying and harassment from fellow prisoners and prison staff. There's a lot of difficulties they face in prison that I didn't even realise is a human rights violation. I remember one woman saying in one of the letters that she just wanted someone to buy her a hijab as she

was using a pillowcase to pray and another saying she was upset because she'd been violated and exposed in front of male guards. People have a right to live in safety and dignity with access to wellness and justice.

## Interview with Nafisa Bakkar

**SE:** How did *Amaliah* initially come about? And why was it so important that Muslim women had their own media space?

**NB:** *Amaliah* came about because we realised that we needed a space on our own terms, especially in the current media landscape. There's a great report by the Muslim Council of Britain that talks about representation in the media and how Muslims tended to be represented through negative stereotypes. It was being able to have a space that doesn't box Muslim women into thinking about things that related to *just* the hijab or *just* the political moments happening around the world. We wanted a media that spoke to all the different sides of us – from relationships to fitness and everything in between that makes up the lives that other media outlets don't typically represent. I didn't really understand or know that we were building a company, I just knew we were creating a space. It then became a business and grew into this rich community of Muslim women, which is really beautiful to witness.

**SE:** Inshallah it will continue to grow! How have you found

navigating the media landscape with *Amaliah*? Have you come up against any kind of barriers and challenges?

**NB:** It's been very eye opening and interesting. There's a reason why, over the last few years, you've seen so many publications that represent marginalised voices scaling back or shutting down. The way the media operates in terms of business is people are paying to get in front of the audience, and some audiences are worth more than others. So, when you look at it as a landscape, there's a reason why all these other publishers will always continue to thrive, as they're serving what's seen as the default audience. And they're also willing to do things that will get them more attention, which makes it very difficult for independent media to do well in the industry. I often think working with marginalised audiences is automatically seen as a political act. So, that means *Amaliah* is seen as 'less safe' and companies are inherently risk averse.

Journalism is already something that's tricky to make money from and it's made more difficult if you're from a marginalised background – especially in an industry where there's a lot of covert Islamophobia, racism and misogyny.

**SE:** As a Muslim woman in journalism, I really relate to this. What does feminism mean to you?

**NB:** To be honest, I associate feminism very much with white feminism. I don't think I've ever called myself a feminist, it's always been other people calling me a feminist because of my values and behaviours and also that my work is centred around women in particular. I've never felt a need to umbrella

myself under the term feminism or feminist. I don't know but it's probably because of the history of white feminism within these terms. But no, I've never felt a need to attach myself or my work to it.

**SE:** A lot of the conversations I've had with other Muslim women have echoed similar sentiments. We believe in equality and social justice but the actual act of calling yourself a feminist comes with more complicated feelings. How does the gender equality and social justice part of your work fit in with your relationship to your faith?

**NB:** In terms of my faith, I've had to come on my own journey of understanding that the gaze that I'm living in is the gaze of God, whereas I think sometimes what feminism can do is make you very considerate of the gaze of others, men in particular. My faith has recentred what my justice framework looks like, what my ethics and equality framework look like and that being God-centred and faith-centred. Knowing that, from the perspective of Allah, we are equal believers, and how that manifests looks different, but we are equals in His eyes. And that's perhaps where the bridge doesn't cross into white feminism. For example, with the hijab, white feminists have no reference point other than 'but a man doesn't have to cover his head'. I guess it's made me reject this feminism and what they fight for.

I also found the feminism we're seeing, especially at the moment with Gaza, there's no moral consistency or accountability. Whereas with Islam, there's a consistency with Muslims; we strive to be consistent in what we consider to be moral and ethical. Whereas with white feminism, I feel like a

lot of it has been shrouded within ego and a culture of misogyny and Islamophobia. It's the selective outrage of white feminists when they talk about Iran and the hijab compared to its silence on Palestine.

**SE:** Palestine has outed white feminism for what it is: contradictory and hypocritical.

**Interview with the Three Hijabis**  
**Shaista Aziz, Amna Abdullatif and Huda Jawad**

**SA:** I understood that the tweet that I put out was telling a real and emotional story of belonging and identity and what it means to be women who look like us, in that particular moment in the history of Britain.

One of the first comments we got on the petition was from a teacher. She thanked us for our campaign because the morning after the Euros final, she was worried about going into the classroom and having to try and explain to the kids why their footballing heroes were being racially abused – but the petition gave her and the kids something to focus on.

**SE:** And then you got the government response to your petition?

**SA:** So, we found out that Boris Johnson had referenced our petition in parliament as we were watching Prime Minister's Questions.

**AA:** We had a lot of conversations around how we engage with the Tory government. All of us were Labour members at the time: myself and Shaista were elected councillors. But we

didn't want to be co-opted by the Labour Party, which we also saw as problematic. How do you have any meaningful conversations with a Tory government that was becoming increasingly right-wing and attacking our communities? Did we want them to be part of these conversations? So, we decided to focus our campaigning on the footballing authorities rather than the government.

**SA:** We decided that we needed to speak to the Football Association (FA) and that was a really triggering experience. They spent so much time ignoring us and when we finally did get through we felt they minimised our work. So, we told them – you don't get to minimise us and our work. And you don't get to minimise our bravery and our commitment to anti-racism. Then we did start getting somewhere and had a second meeting. In our meeting we asked if we could hand over our petition to Gareth Southgate in person, which they rejected.

**SE:** What does feminism mean to you?

**HJ:** We've all worked in the space of women's so-called empowerment and particularly within movements and organisations that work to end violence against women and girls. We don't see anything that needs reconciling between our faith and our belief that justice is a human right for everyone. But being a feminist is still seen as being in direct opposition to being Muslim. So, from that perspective, it's been really hard to maintain our resilience and, for me, being part of the Three Hijabis and having my sisters around

as my sort of touchstones, it's been absolutely vital in taking up space.

And us taking up that space has enabled a form of feminist activism that's not really understood or practised in the UK or Europe. We're racialised as Muslims, but our faith and the secularist framework is never mentioned as part of our oppression and exclusion. I founded a collective called the Faith and Violence Against Women and Girls Coalition, which centres the idea that faith can be used to end violence against women and girls just like it's used as a weapon of abuse and oppression. Faith and feminism can and should co-exist in these spaces.

**SA:** We don't get to see Muslim women being joyful, especially in popular culture. So, for us, we have genuine sisterhood, friendship and joy at the heart of our work. We're not trying to gloss over anything. We're being as authentically ourselves as we possibly can. I think what we're showing, not purposefully but by being ourselves, is that we're unapologetically and fully ourselves. The conversation that we're having with you is the kind we would have even if you weren't here. It wouldn't be any different. We've also gotten a strong response from a lot of Muslim men too, who said to me that they were quite shocked that we were brave enough to do this, that we had the courage to do this.

We also don't talk about envy or the way envy materialises. We have 360 degrees of Othering, 360 degrees of misogyny, 360 degrees of envy, racism and everything in between. And envy is a real product of white supremacy. Because if you Other women who look like us, you're basically pushing the

perception that Muslim women need to be saved and rescued from ourselves and the ‘barbaric’ cultures that we live in. So, if you meet women who aren’t that, then automatically there’s a lot of envy that shows up in this space.

## Acknowledgements

*This book has been a labour of love for many years and could not have happened without my previous editors at Unbound, Marissa and Aliya, and my agent, Florence Rees. I also want to thank the brilliant team at Pluto Press for their care and passion for the book and giving it a new home. I also want to thank the Society of Authors and the Journalists Charity for awarding me grants that allowed me to work on the final months of writing and editing *The Othered Woman*.*

Thank you to every single person who pledged or preordered this book. It means the world and I cannot thank you all enough.

Thank you to all the editors I've worked with over the years and my *Stylist Magazine* team for the unwavering support, enthusiasm and laughter. Amy, your endless love and support will stay with me forever and it's an honour to call you one of my best friends.

My friends have truly seen the highs and lows of the writing process and I couldn't have finished the book without them. Jas and Yasmine (and little Elsa), who constantly held me up at home whilst I got to the final page. My longest and

oldest friends, Amy and Emma, for being my biggest cheerleaders. David, our conversations always fill up my creative cup. Lewis, for always challenging me (in a good way). Evie, writing a book alongside you has been such a beautiful experience. And my Manny lot, thank you. Emma, Emily, Aggie, Sarah and Lucy – doing life with you all is so much fun. Rach, you may live on the other side of the world now but there's still nobody I'd rather boogie with. And Georgia, you're my favourite person and I hope our daily voice notes continue for years to come.

I owe everything and the greatest of gratitudes to my family. Naseeb, Ayoub and my parents, Yousef and Khadiga; I wouldn't be the writer I am today without you and I love you all very much. Alhamdulilah.

# Notes

## Introduction

1. Shahed Ezaydi, 'How growing up with Islamophobia shaped my faith', *gal-dem*, 18 November 2022

### 1. An exploration of white feminism and its definitions

1. Terese Jonsson, *Innocent Subjects: Feminism and Whiteness*, Pluto Press, London, 2020
2. Rachel Elizabeth Cargle, 'When Feminism Is White Supremacy in Heels', *Harper's Bazaar*, 16 August 2018 at [www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/politics/a22717725/what-is-toxic-white-feminism/](http://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/politics/a22717725/what-is-toxic-white-feminism/)
3. All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims, 'Islamophobia Defined: The inquiry into a working definition of Islamophobia', 2018 at [appgbritishmuslims.org/publications](http://appgbritishmuslims.org/publications)
4. Lola Olufemi, *Feminism Interrupted: Disrupting Power*, Pluto Press, London, 2020
5. Koa Beck, *White Feminism*. Simon & Schuster, London, 2021
6. Leah Cowan, *Why Would Feminists Trust the Police?*, Verso Books, London, 2024
7. Pamela Hutchinson, 'MeToo and Hollywood: What's changed in the industry a year on?', *The Guardian*, 8 October 2018 at

- www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/08/metoo-one-year-on-hollywood-reaction
8. Halima Jibril, 'The demise of feminism', *Dazed*, 12 September 2022 at [www.dazeddigital.com/life-culture/article/56928/1/the-death-of-feminism-florence-given-jameela-jamil-women](http://www.dazeddigital.com/life-culture/article/56928/1/the-death-of-feminism-florence-given-jameela-jamil-women)
  9. Maya Salam, 'Hillary Clinton on Barbie snubs: You're more than Kenough', *The New York Times*, 24 January 2024 at [www.nytimes.com/2024/01/24/movies/hillary-clinton-barbie-oscars-snub.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/24/movies/hillary-clinton-barbie-oscars-snub.html)
  10. *Woman's Hour*, Zara Mohammed interviewed by Emma Barnett, BBC Radio 4, 4 February 2021 at [www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/moorvnn](http://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/moorvnn)
  11. BBC News, 'BBC Woman's Hour accused of "hostile" interview with Muslim leader', 18 February 2021 at [www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-56109939](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-56109939)
  12. Shahed Ezaydi, 'What is white feminism and how does it harm women of colour?', *Mashable*, 13 March 2023 at [mashable.com/article/white-feminism-explained](http://mashable.com/article/white-feminism-explained)
  13. Koa Beck, *White Feminism*, Simon & Schuster, London, 2021
  14. Caitlin Moran, 'Yes, I've got a cleaner: What's your problem?', *The Times*, 19 June 2020 at [www.thetimes.com/uk/politics/article/caitlin-moran-yes-ive-got-a-cleaner-whats-your-problem-wok6szcnd](http://www.thetimes.com/uk/politics/article/caitlin-moran-yes-ive-got-a-cleaner-whats-your-problem-wok6szcnd)
  15. Bim Adewunmi, 'What the Girls spat on Twitter tells us about feminism', *The Guardian*, 8 October 2012 at [www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/oct/08/girls-twitter-feminism-caitlin-moran](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/oct/08/girls-twitter-feminism-caitlin-moran)
  16. Caitlin Moran, *How To Be A Woman*, Ebury Press, London, 2012
  17. Shahed Ezaydi, 'What is white feminism and how does it harm women of colour?', *Mashable*, 13 March 2023 at [mashable.com/article/white-feminism-explained](http://mashable.com/article/white-feminism-explained)

## 2. The perception of single-issue oppression

1. Mikki Kendall, *Hood Feminism: Notes from the Women that a Movement Forgot*, Viking, London, 2020
2. Shahed Ezaydi, 'What is white feminism and how does it harm women of colour?', *Mashable*, 13 March 2023 at [mashable.com/article/white-feminism-explained](https://mashable.com/article/white-feminism-explained)
3. Katy Steinmetz, 'She coined the term "intersectionality" over 30 years ago. Here's what it means to her today', *Time*, 20 February 2020 at [time.com/5786710/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality/](https://time.com/5786710/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality/)
4. Black Muslim Forum, '100 Black British Muslims step forward to share experiences of anti-black racism in and out of the Muslim community in a report by Black Muslim Forum', *Amaliah*, 17 October 2020 at [www.amaliah.com/post/58658/100-black-british-muslims-step-forward-share-experiences-anti-black-racism-muslim-community-report-black-muslim-forum](https://www.amaliah.com/post/58658/100-black-british-muslims-step-forward-share-experiences-anti-black-racism-muslim-community-report-black-muslim-forum)
5. Sheymaa Ali Nurein and Humera Iqbal, 'Identifying a space for young Black Muslim women in contemporary Britain', *Ethnicities* 21.3 (2021), pp.433–453, at [doi.org/10.1177/14687968211001899](https://doi.org/10.1177/14687968211001899)
6. S. Rich and S. Troudi, 'Hard times: Arab TESOL students' experiences of racialization and othering in the United Kingdom', *TESOL Quarterly* 40.3 (2006), pp.615–627 at [doi.org/10.2307/40264548](https://doi.org/10.2307/40264548)
7. Beverly B. Mack and Jean Boyd, *One Woman's Jihad: Nana Asma'u*, *Scholar and Scribe*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2000, pp.1–2, at [chnm.gmu.edu/wwh/p/214.html](https://chnm.gmu.edu/wwh/p/214.html)
8. Damon Wilkinson, 'Family of girl, 12, who drowned in River Irwell slam school investigation after it finds no evidence of bullying', *Manchester Evening News*, 10 August 2019 at [www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/family-girl-12-who-drowned-16734651](https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/family-girl-12-who-drowned-16734651)

9. Nimo Omer, 'The death of Shukri Abdi: She was failed when she was alive and she's still being failed now', *gal-dem*, 24 March 2020
10. BBC News, 'Shukri Yahye-Abdi: Schoolgirl's river death "was an accident"', 4 December 2020 at [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-55187467](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-55187467)
11. Nimo Omer, 'The death of Shukri Abdi: she was failed when she was alive and she's still being failed now', *gal-dem*, 24 March 2020
12. National Zakat Foundation, 'Impact Report', 31 December 2022 at [nzf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/A200-NZF-Annual-Report-and-Financial-Statements-31-December-2022-Charity-Commission-Signatures-removed.pdf](http://nzf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/A200-NZF-Annual-Report-and-Financial-Statements-31-December-2022-Charity-Commission-Signatures-removed.pdf)
13. Social Mobility Commission, 'Young Muslims in the UK face enormous social mobility barriers', 7 September 2017 at [www.gov.uk/government/news/young-muslims-in-the-uk-face-enormous-social-mobility-barriers](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/young-muslims-in-the-uk-face-enormous-social-mobility-barriers)
14. Muslim Census Team, 'Muslims and the cost of living crisis', Muslim Census, 10 November 2022 at [muslimcensus.co.uk/cost-of-living-crisis/](http://muslimcensus.co.uk/cost-of-living-crisis/)
15. Amaliah x NZF The Muslim Women's Zakat Fund, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=fKKcZboiE-c&ab\\_channel=Amaliah](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fKKcZboiE-c&ab_channel=Amaliah)

### 3. Liberation politics and the veil

1. Jack Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies A People*. Interlink Books, Northampton, Massachusetts, 2015
2. David Smith, 'Claire Danes on the end of Homeland: "It was so nice to play such a badass"', *The Guardian*, 5 April 2020 at [www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2020/apr/05/claire-danes-on-the-end-of-homeland-it-was-so-nice-to-play-such-a-badass](http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2020/apr/05/claire-danes-on-the-end-of-homeland-it-was-so-nice-to-play-such-a-badass)
3. Decca Aitkenhead, 'Femen leader Inna Shevchenko: "I'm for any form of feminism"', *The Guardian*, 8 November 2013 at [www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/08/femen-leader-inna-shevchenko-interview](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/08/femen-leader-inna-shevchenko-interview)

4. Sara C. Nelson, 'Topless Jihad Day: Femen declare war on Islam in wake of Amina Tyler storm, warning "Our tits are deadlier than your stones"', *HuffPost* UK, 3 April 2013 at [www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/04/03/topless-jihad-day-femen-war-islam-warning-tits-deadlier-amina-tyler-stones\\_n\\_3006735.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/04/03/topless-jihad-day-femen-war-islam-warning-tits-deadlier-amina-tyler-stones_n_3006735.html)
5. France24, 'Femen activists in topless protest at French Islam conference on women', 14 September 2015 at [www.france24.com/en/20150914-femen-topless-protest-french-islam-conference](http://www.france24.com/en/20150914-femen-topless-protest-french-islam-conference)
6. Al Jazeera, 'Muslim women decry topless gender protests', 5 April 2013 at [www.aljazeera.com/news/2013/4/5/muslim-women-decry-topless-gender-protests](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2013/4/5/muslim-women-decry-topless-gender-protests)
7. James Copnall, 'Lubna Hussein: "I'm not afraid of being flogged. It doesn't hurt. But it is insulting"', *The Observer*, 2 August 2009 at [www.theguardian.com/world/2009/aug/02/sudan-women-dress-code](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/aug/02/sudan-women-dress-code)
8. Mazin Sidahmed, '"Rebel" Saudi Arabia woman who posted photo without head scarf is arrested', *The Guardian*, 12 December 2016 at [www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/12/saudi-arabia-headscarf-woman-twitter-arrest](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/12/saudi-arabia-headscarf-woman-twitter-arrest)
9. BBC News, 'Stacey Dooley hits back at MP Lammy's Comic Relief "white saviour" criticism', 28 February 2019 at [www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-47400300](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-47400300)
10. Mark Brown, 'Stacey Dooley "would do the same" after Comic Relief row', *The Guardian*, 24 May 2019 at [www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2019/may/24/stacey-dooley-comic-relief-row-david-lammy-white-saviour](http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2019/may/24/stacey-dooley-comic-relief-row-david-lammy-white-saviour)
11. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, Penguin, London, 2003
12. Lola Olufemi, *Feminism Interrupted: Disrupting Power*, Pluto Press, London, 2020
13. Katharine Viner, 'Feminism as imperialism', *The Guardian*, 21 September 2002 at [www.theguardian.com/world/2002/sep/21/gender.usa](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/sep/21/gender.usa)

14. Fadwa El Guindi, *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance*, Berg Publishers, Oxford, 1999
15. Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1993
16. Fadwa El Guindi, *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance*, Berg Publishers, Oxford, 1999
17. Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1993
18. BBC News, 'Rahaf Mohammed: Saudi teen says women "treated like slaves"', 15 January 2019 at [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-46873796](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-46873796)
19. BBC Panorama Team, 'Princess Latifa: "Hostage" ordeal of Dubai ruler's daughter revealed', BBC News, 16 February 2021 at [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-56075528](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-56075528)
20. Sky News, 'EU court rules headscarves can be banned at work "under certain conditions"', 15 July 2021 at [news.sky.com/story/eu-court-rules-headscarves-can-be-banned-at-work-under-certain-conditions-12356521](http://news.sky.com/story/eu-court-rules-headscarves-can-be-banned-at-work-under-certain-conditions-12356521)
21. Boris Johnson, 'Denmark has got it wrong. Yes, the burka is oppressive and ridiculous – but that's still no reason to ban it', *The Telegraph*, 5 August 2018 at [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/08/05/denmark-has-got-wrong-yes-burka-oppressive-ridiculous-still/](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/08/05/denmark-has-got-wrong-yes-burka-oppressive-ridiculous-still/)
22. Tell MAMA, *Normalising Hatred: Tell MAMA Annual Report 2018*, Faith Matters, 2019, [tellmamauk.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Tell%20MAMA%20Annual%20Report%202018%20\\_%20Normalising%20Hate.pdf](http://tellmamauk.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Tell%20MAMA%20Annual%20Report%202018%20_%20Normalising%20Hate.pdf)
23. Greg Heffer, 'Tory Islamophobia inquiry: Anti-Muslim sentiment "remains a problem" within Conservative Party, report finds', Sky News, 25 May 2021 at [news.sky.com/story/tory-islamophobia-anti-muslim-sentiment-remains-a-problem-within-conservative-party-report-finds-12316516](http://news.sky.com/story/tory-islamophobia-anti-muslim-sentiment-remains-a-problem-within-conservative-party-report-finds-12316516)
24. Matthew Taylor and Haroon Siddique, 'Woolwich murder: 200 Islamophobic incidents since Lee Rigby's killing', *The*

- Guardian*, 28 May 2013 at [www.theguardian.com/uk/2013/may/28/woolwich-murder-200-islamophobic-incidences](http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2013/may/28/woolwich-murder-200-islamophobic-incidences)
25. Vikram Dodd and Sarah Marsh, 'Anti-Muslim hate crimes increase fivefold since London Bridge attacks', *The Guardian*, 7 June 2017 at [www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/jun/07/anti-muslim-hate-crimes-increase-fivefold-since-london-bridge-attacks](http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/jun/07/anti-muslim-hate-crimes-increase-fivefold-since-london-bridge-attacks)
  26. Rebecca Barry, "I was terrified": Islamophobic incidents up by 600% in UK since Hamas attack', *ITV News*, 9 November 2023 at [www.itv.com/news/2023-11-09/i-was-terrified-islamophobic-incidents-up-by-600-in-uk-since-hamas-attack](http://www.itv.com/news/2023-11-09/i-was-terrified-islamophobic-incidents-up-by-600-in-uk-since-hamas-attack)
  27. Harriet Agerholm, 'Women "bearing brunt" of rising Islamophobic attacks in the UK', *The Independent*, 3 November 2017 at [www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/uk-islamophobia-attacks-women-bearing-brunt-hate-crimes-a8036581.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/uk-islamophobia-attacks-women-bearing-brunt-hate-crimes-a8036581.html)
  28. Ruby Hamad, *White Tears Brown Scars: How White Feminism Betrays Women of Colour*, London, Trapeze, 2020
  29. Kira Cochrane, 'Forty years of women's liberation', *The Guardian*, 26 February 2010 at [www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2010/feb/26/forty-years-womens-liberation](http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2010/feb/26/forty-years-womens-liberation)
  30. Julia Frank, 'Naked selfies are the new feminism', *Vogue Australia*, 8 April 2016 at [www.vogue.com.au/celebrity/news/naked-selfies-are-the-new-feminism/image-gallery/acaa4f3d482ed55d527cc7eb807a3fd4](http://www.vogue.com.au/celebrity/news/naked-selfies-are-the-new-feminism/image-gallery/acaa4f3d482ed55d527cc7eb807a3fd4)
  31. Taylor Harris, 'Emily Ratajkowski takes on feminism – one selfie at a time', *WWD*, 6 April 2016 at [wwd.com/eye/people/emily-ratajkowski-feminism-instagram-10404419/](http://wwd.com/eye/people/emily-ratajkowski-feminism-instagram-10404419/)
  32. Sirin Kale, 'How Islamophobia Hurts Muslim Women the Most', *Vice*, 7 January 2016 at [www.vice.com/en/article/how-islamophobia-hurts-muslim-women-the-most/](http://www.vice.com/en/article/how-islamophobia-hurts-muslim-women-the-most/)
  33. Alya Mooro, *The Greater Freedom: Life of a Middle Eastern Woman Outside the Stereotypes*, Brilliance Audio, Grand Haven, Michigan, 2019

34. Mariya bint Rehan, 'Unimagining Muslim women: The spurious art of representation', *Amaliah*, 16 May 2023 at [www.amaliah.com/post/66634/visual-culture-and-the-objectification-and-misrepresentation-of-muslim-women-in-art-media](http://www.amaliah.com/post/66634/visual-culture-and-the-objectification-and-misrepresentation-of-muslim-women-in-art-media)
35. Ibid.
36. Evette Jahangiri, 'How the Lensa AI app is hyper-sexualizing Muslim women', *Muslim Girl*, 20 February 2023 at [muslim-girl.com/ai-app-lensa-hypersexualizing-muslim-women-how/](http://muslim-girl.com/ai-app-lensa-hypersexualizing-muslim-women-how/)
37. Gareth May, 'Behind the rise of hijab porn', *Vice*, 15 May 2015 at [www.vice.com/en/article/behind-the-rise-in-hijab-porn/](http://www.vice.com/en/article/behind-the-rise-in-hijab-porn/)
38. Ash Sarkar, 'Inside HEROINE 12: Mia Khalifa on racism, sexism and exploitation', *Hero*, 16 June 2020 at [heromagazine.com/article/168477/mia-khalifa-on-racism-sexism-and-exploitation](http://heromagazine.com/article/168477/mia-khalifa-on-racism-sexism-and-exploitation)

#### 4. The 'unique' misogyny of Muslim men

1. George Wright and Matt Murphy, 'Andrew Tate detained in Romania over rape and human trafficking case', BBC News, 30 December 2022 at [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-64122628](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-64122628)
2. Jamie Tahsin, Matt Shea and Tim Hume, "I love raping you": What Andrew Tate told woman who accused him of rape', *Vice*, 11 January 2023 at [www.vice.com/en/article/andrew-tate-whatsapps-arrest/](http://www.vice.com/en/article/andrew-tate-whatsapps-arrest/)
3. Maggie Gyllenhaal, 'Olivia Wilde needs to be in charge', *Interview*, 1 September 2022 at [www.interviewmagazine.com/film/olivia-wilde-needs-to-be-in-charge](http://www.interviewmagazine.com/film/olivia-wilde-needs-to-be-in-charge)
4. Imran Mulla, 'Andrew Tate is no role model for young Muslims – he's a vulgar misogynist', *Middle East Eye*, 16 January 2023 at [www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/andrew-tate-no-role-young-muslims-vulgar-misogynist](http://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/andrew-tate-no-role-young-muslims-vulgar-misogynist)
5. Sana Noor Haq, 'Andrew Tate's Muslim fanbase is growing. Some say he's exploiting Islam for internet popularity', CNN,

- 16February2023atedition.cnn.com/2023/02/16/world/andrew-tate-muslim-men-manosphere-intl-cmd/index.html
6. Nadeine Asbali, “‘Red pill’ misogyny is thriving – here’s how Muslim women are challenging it in their communities’, *Glamour* (UK), 16 January 2023 at [www.glamourmagazine.co.uk/article/red-pill-misogyny-opinion-muslim-women](http://www.glamourmagazine.co.uk/article/red-pill-misogyny-opinion-muslim-women)
7. Dorian Lynskey, ‘How dangerous is Jordan B Peterson, the right-wing professor who “hit a hornets’ nest”?’ *The Guardian*, 7 February 2018 at [www.theguardian.com/science/2018/feb/07/how-dangerous-is-jordan-b-peterson-the-rightwing-professor-who-hit-a-hornets-nest](http://www.theguardian.com/science/2018/feb/07/how-dangerous-is-jordan-b-peterson-the-rightwing-professor-who-hit-a-hornets-nest)
8. Jordan B Peterson’s ‘Message to Muslims’ at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=7pdoHLeYKsE&ab\\_channel=JordanBPeterson](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7pdoHLeYKsE&ab_channel=JordanBPeterson)
9. Hussein Kesvani, *Follow Me, Akhi; The Online World of British Muslims*, Hurst Publishers, London, 2019.
10. Hussein Kesvani, ‘Losing the love of your life to the red pill’, *Hyphen*, 29 November 2022 at [hyphenonline.com/2022/11/29/losing-the-love-of-your-life-to-the-red-pill/](http://hyphenonline.com/2022/11/29/losing-the-love-of-your-life-to-the-red-pill/)
11. Laura Bates, *Men Who Hate Women*, Simon & Schuster, London, 2020
12. Ben Hurst, ‘Boys won’t be boys. Boys will be what we teach them to be’, TEDxLondonWomen, 2019 at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=3dp08bAUwi8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3dp08bAUwi8)
13. Ben Hurst and Jamie Windust, ‘We need to talk to boys about online misogyny’, TEDxLondonWomen, 2023 at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=yMXKIAd1MtA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yMXKIAd1MtA)
14. Sana Noor Haq, ‘Andrew Tate’s Muslim fanbase is growing. Some say he’s exploiting Islam for internet popularity’, CNN, 16 February 2023 at [edition.cnn.com/2023/02/16/world/andrew-tate-muslim-men-manosphere-intl-cmd/index.html](http://edition.cnn.com/2023/02/16/world/andrew-tate-muslim-men-manosphere-intl-cmd/index.html)
15. Sahar Ghumkhor and Hizer Mir. ‘A crisis of masculinity? The West’s cultural wars in the emerging Muslim manosphere’, *ReOrient* (2022), vol. 7.2, pp.135–157

16. Ryma Tchier speaking to Dr Hizer Mir, 'Social media star Andrew Tate loses appeal, remains in custody in Romania', ABC News Australia, 12 January 2023 at [www.abc.net.au/news/2023-01-13/social-media-star-andrew-tate-loses-appeal/101851796](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-01-13/social-media-star-andrew-tate-loses-appeal/101851796)
17. Humza Yousaf, X Post, X @HumzaYousaf, 23 March 2023 at [x.com/HumzaYousaf/status/1640820255080554496?prefetchTimestamp=1725192268648](https://x.com/HumzaYousaf/status/1640820255080554496?prefetchTimestamp=1725192268648)
18. Ofcom, 'TalkTV must ensure potentially offensive comments are justified, warns Ofcom', 8 April 2024 at [www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/broadcast-standards/talktv-must-ensure-potentially-offensive-comments-are-justified-warns-ofcom](http://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/broadcast-standards/talktv-must-ensure-potentially-offensive-comments-are-justified-warns-ofcom)
19. Meghna Amin, 'TalkTV host sparks 15,000 complaints after screaming at guest in "disgraceful" interview', *Metro*, 10 January 2024 at [metro.co.uk/2024/01/10/talktv-host-julia-hartley-brewer-sparks-15-000-complaints-20092312/](https://metro.co.uk/2024/01/10/talktv-host-julia-hartley-brewer-sparks-15-000-complaints-20092312/)
20. Faisal Hanif, *British Media's Coverage of Muslims and Islam 2018-2020*, Centre for Media Monitoring, November 2021 at [cfmm.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CfMM-Annual-Report-2018-2020-digital.pdf](http://cfmm.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CfMM-Annual-Report-2018-2020-digital.pdf)
21. Al-Baab Khan, Dr Katherine Pieper, Dr Stacy L. Smith et al, *Missing & Maligned: The Reality of Muslims in Popular Global Movies*, USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, June 2021 at [assets.uscannenberg.org/docs/aii-muslim-rep-global-film-2021-06-09.pdf](http://assets.uscannenberg.org/docs/aii-muslim-rep-global-film-2021-06-09.pdf)
22. Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race and Class*, Penguin Random House, London, 1981
23. Max Matza, 'Emmett Till accuser Carolyn Brant dies at 88', BBC News 28 April 2023 at [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-65420009](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-65420009)
24. Janelle Bouie, 'The deadly history of "They're raping our women"', *Slate*, 18 June 2015 at [slate.com/news-and-politics/2015/06/the-deadly-history-of-theyre-rapeing-our-women-](http://slate.com/news-and-politics/2015/06/the-deadly-history-of-theyre-rapeing-our-women-)

- racists-have-long-defended-their-worst-crimes-in-the-name-of-defending-white-womens-honor.html
25. Ruby Hamad, *White Tears Brown Scars: How White Feminism Betrays Women of Colour*, Trapeze, London 2020
  26. Amir Vera and Laura Ly, 'White woman who called police on a black man bird-watching in Central Park has been fired', CNN, 26 May 2020 at [edition.cnn.com/2020/05/26/us/central-park-video-dog-video-african-american-trnd/index.html](http://edition.cnn.com/2020/05/26/us/central-park-video-dog-video-african-american-trnd/index.html)
  27. Jasmine Aguilera, 'White woman who called police on a Black man at Central Park apologizes, says "I'm not a racist"', *Time*, 26 May 2020 at [time.com/5842442/amy-cooper-dog-central-park/](http://time.com/5842442/amy-cooper-dog-central-park/)
  28. Narjas Zatat, 'BBQ Becky's 911 calls released in full and they're shocking', *indy100*, 4 September 2018 at [www.indy100.com/news/woman-calls-police-black-people-barbe-quing-evaluated-psychiatry-recording-call-racism-8522336](http://www.indy100.com/news/woman-calls-police-black-people-barbe-quing-evaluated-psychiatry-recording-call-racism-8522336)
  29. Article available on wSieci, [www.sieciprawdy.pl/](http://www.sieciprawdy.pl/)
  30. BBC News, 'Finsbury Park attacker Darren Osborne jailed for minimum of 43 years', 2 February 2018 at [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-42920929](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-42920929)
  31. BBC News, 'Dover migrant centre attack driven by right-wing ideology – police say', 5 November 2022 at [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-63526659](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-63526659)
  32. Ella Cockbain, 'Not even Suella Braverman's own department agrees with her about "grooming gangs"', *The Guardian*, 4 April 2023 at [www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/apr/04/suella-braverman-grooming-gangs-child-seual-abuse-home-secretary-prejudice](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/apr/04/suella-braverman-grooming-gangs-child-seual-abuse-home-secretary-prejudice)
  33. Ibid.
  34. Helen Pidd, 'Woman who lied about grooming gang guilty of perverting course of justice', *The Guardian*, 3 January 2023 at [www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/jan/03/eleanor-williams-lied-grooming-gang-guilty-perverting-justice](http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/jan/03/eleanor-williams-lied-grooming-gang-guilty-perverting-justice)
  35. Ibid.

36. ITV News, 'Barrow businessman describes the abuse he suffered as result of Eleanor Williams' lies', 14 March 2023 at [www.itv.com/news/granada/2023-03-14/barrow-businessman-had-never-spoken-to-his-false-accuser-who-ruined-his-life](http://www.itv.com/news/granada/2023-03-14/barrow-businessman-had-never-spoken-to-his-false-accuser-who-ruined-his-life)
37. Maya Mikdashi, 'Can Palestinian Men be Victims? Gendering Israel's War on Gaza', *Jadaliyya*, 23 July 2014 at [www.jadaliyya.com/Details/30991](http://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/30991)
38. Women and Equalities Committee, 'Equality and the UK asylum process' meeting, Parliamentlive.tv website, 26 January 2022 at [parliamentlive.tv/event/index/59562b43-823a-4494-8e3f-051b41b67fdb](http://parliamentlive.tv/event/index/59562b43-823a-4494-8e3f-051b41b67fdb)
39. Rowaida Abdelaziz, 'Muslim Survivors Of Domestic Violence Need You To Listen', *HuffPost* (US), 20 March 2023 at [www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/domestic-violence-muslim-women\\_n\\_5dc59809e4bo0927b2325ac6](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/domestic-violence-muslim-women_n_5dc59809e4bo0927b2325ac6)
40. Ibid.
41. Office for National Statistics, 'Domestic abuse prevalence and victim characteristics', November 2023 at [www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/domesticabuseprevalenceandvictimcharacteristicsappendixables](http://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/domesticabuseprevalenceandvictimcharacteristicsappendixables)
42. Martin Brunt, "'Hanging by a thread": Public trust in police has fallen to its lowest level ever, watchdog warns', Sky News, 9 June 2023 at [news.sky.com/story/amp/public-trust-in-police-is-hanging-by-a-thread-watchdog-admits-12898981](https://news.sky.com/story/amp/public-trust-in-police-is-hanging-by-a-thread-watchdog-admits-12898981)
43. Muslim Women's Network UK, 'Muslim women's experiences of the criminal justice system', June 2019 at [www.mwnuk.co.uk/resourcesDetail.php?id=218](http://www.mwnuk.co.uk/resourcesDetail.php?id=218)
44. Ibid.
45. Sara R. Farris, *In the Name of Women's Rights: The Rise of Femonationalism*. Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, 2017
46. S. Sweida-Metwally, 'Does the Muslim penalty in the British labour market dissipate after accounting for so-called

- “socio-cultural” attitudes?’), *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 45.16 (2022), pp.359–388.
47. Ibid.
  48. Sky News, ‘EU court rules headscarves can be banned at work “under certain conditions”’, 15 July 2021 at [news.sky.com/story/eu-court-rules-headscarves-can-be-banned-at-work-under-certain-conditions-12356521](https://news.sky.com/story/eu-court-rules-headscarves-can-be-banned-at-work-under-certain-conditions-12356521)
  49. UN Women, ‘Facts and figures: Ending violence against women’, 25 November 2024 at [www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures#83917](https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures#83917)
  50. Written evidence from Southall Black Sisters (ASB 32), ‘Public Bill Committee: Anti- Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill – Debate on the Criminalisation of Forced Marriage’, Third Sitting, 20 June 2013 at [publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmpublic/antisocialbehaviour/memo/asb32.htm](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmpublic/antisocialbehaviour/memo/asb32.htm)
  51. Leah Cowan, *Why Would Feminists Trust the Police?*, Verso Books, London, 2024
  52. Haroon Siddique, “‘Honour-based” offences soared by 81% in last five years’, *The Guardian*, 31 October 2021 at [www.theguardian.com/society/2021/oct/31/honour-based-offences-soared-by-81-in-last-five-years](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/oct/31/honour-based-offences-soared-by-81-in-last-five-years)
  53. Home Office, ‘Statistics on so-called “honour-based” abuse offences, England & Wales 2021–2022’, Gov.uk website, 20 October 2022 at [www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statistics-on-so-called-honour-based-abuse-offences-england-and-wales-2021-to-2022](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statistics-on-so-called-honour-based-abuse-offences-england-and-wales-2021-to-2022)
  54. Adam White, ‘New Keeley Hawes drama under fire for “shifting focus” from Muslim murder victim to white detective’, *The Independent*, 26 June 2019 at [www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/keeley-hawes-banaz-mahmod-honour-killing-itv-controversy-a8975251.html](https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/keeley-hawes-banaz-mahmod-honour-killing-itv-controversy-a8975251.html)
  55. Leah Cowan, *Why Would Feminists Trust the Police?*, Verso Books, London, 2024

56. Andrea González-Ramírez, 'How Western Feminism Imposed Itself on the World', *The Cut*, 26 August 2021 at [www.thecut.com/2021/08/rafia-zakaria-against-white-feminism-book.html](http://www.thecut.com/2021/08/rafia-zakaria-against-white-feminism-book.html)
57. Greig Watson, 'Frank Farrell: Murderer convicted of rape and assault charges', BBC News, 11 May 2023 at [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leicestershire-65564228](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leicestershire-65564228)
58. Alexandra Topping, 'Jess Phillips reads to MPs list of women killed over past year', *The Guardian*, 9 March 2023 at [www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/mar/09/jess-phillips-reads-list-of-women-killed-over-past-year-in-commons](http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/mar/09/jess-phillips-reads-list-of-women-killed-over-past-year-in-commons)
59. Andrea González-Ramírez, 'How western feminism imposed itself on the world', *The Cut*, 26 August 2021 at [www.thecut.com/2021/08/rafia-zakaria-against-white-feminism-book.html](http://www.thecut.com/2021/08/rafia-zakaria-against-white-feminism-book.html)

### 5. The relationship between women, feminism and the far right

1. Muslim Council of Britain, '2021 Census: As UK population grows, so do British Muslim communities', 29 November, 2022 at [mcb.org.uk/2021-census-as-uk-population-grows-so-do-british-muslim-communities/](http://mcb.org.uk/2021-census-as-uk-population-grows-so-do-british-muslim-communities/)
2. Philip Oltermann, 'Switzerland to ban wearing of burqa and niqab in public places', *The Guardian*, 7 March 2021 at [www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/07/switzerland-on-course-to-ban-wearing-of-burqa-and-niqab-in-public-places](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/07/switzerland-on-course-to-ban-wearing-of-burqa-and-niqab-in-public-places)
3. BBC News, 'Switzerland referendum: Voters support ban on face coverings in public', 7 March 2021 at [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-56314173](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-56314173)
4. BBC News, 'Swiss voters back ban on minarets', 29 November 2009 at [news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/8385069.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/8385069.stm)
5. Sam Jones, 'Switzerland votes in favour of "burka ban" outlawing face coverings', *The Financial Times*, 7 March 2021 at [www.ft.com/content/2d576304-c241-422e-84df-b0b647f4eee8](http://www.ft.com/content/2d576304-c241-422e-84df-b0b647f4eee8)

6. Philip Oltermann, 'Switzerland to ban wearing of burqa and niqab in public places', *The Guardian*, 7 March 2021 at [www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/07/switzerland-on-course-to-ban-wearing-of-burqa-and-niqab-in-public-places](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/07/switzerland-on-course-to-ban-wearing-of-burqa-and-niqab-in-public-places)
7. Zarah Sultana, 'The Response to the Trojan Horse Affair Tells Us All We Need to Know About Islamophobia in Britain', *Novara Media*, 19 April 2022 at [novaramedia.com/2022/04/19/the-response-to-the-trojan-horse-affair-tells-us-all-we-need-to-know-about-islamophobia-in-britain/](http://novaramedia.com/2022/04/19/the-response-to-the-trojan-horse-affair-tells-us-all-we-need-to-know-about-islamophobia-in-britain/)
8. Frances Perraudin, 'Third of Britons believe Islam threatens British way of life, says report', *The Guardian*, 17 February 2019 at [www.theguardian.com/world/2019/feb/17/third-of-britons-believe-islam-threatens-british-way-of-life-says-report](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/feb/17/third-of-britons-believe-islam-threatens-british-way-of-life-says-report)
9. Matthew Taylor and Peter Walker, 'EDL supporters are young, male and anti-immigration, says survey', *The Guardian*, 30 October 2011 at [www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/oct/30/english-defence-league-membership](http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/oct/30/english-defence-league-membership)
10. Elizabeth Ralph-Morrow, 'The right men: How masculinity explains the radical right gender gap', *Political Studies*, 70(1), 26-44, doi.org/10.1177/0032321720936049
11. Anoosh Chakelian, 'The far right and feminism: a hollow and exploitative brand of "identity politics"', *The New Statesman*, 13 June 2012 at [www.newstatesman.com/politics/2012/06/far-right-and-feminism-hollow-and-exploitative-brand-identity-politics](http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2012/06/far-right-and-feminism-hollow-and-exploitative-brand-identity-politics)
12. Alexander Melagrou-Hitchens and Hans Brun, 'A Neo-Nationalist Network: The English Defence League and Europe's Counter-Jihad Movement', International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, London, 2013 at [icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/ICSR-Report-A-Neo-Nationalist-Network-The-English-Defence-League-and-Europe%E2%80%9999s-Counter-Jihad-Movement.pdf](http://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/ICSR-Report-A-Neo-Nationalist-Network-The-English-Defence-League-and-Europe%E2%80%9999s-Counter-Jihad-Movement.pdf)
13. Fiyaz Mughal, '"Tit for tat" extremism and the rise of far right anti-Muslim movements in the UK', *Open Democracy*, 5 September 2014 at [www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-](http://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-)

- it/tit-for-tat-extremism-and-rise-of-far-right-antimuslim-movements-o/
14. TellMAMA, 'Threatening anti-Muslim leaflet sent to family in Bradford', TellMAMA website, 26 August 2017 at [tellmama.uk.org/threatening-anti-muslim-leaflet-sent-to-family-in-bradford/](http://tellmama.uk.org/threatening-anti-muslim-leaflet-sent-to-family-in-bradford/)
  15. Fiyaz Mughal, "'Tit for tat' extremism and the rise of far right anti-Muslim movements in the UK', *Open Democracy*, 5 September 2014 at [www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/tit-for-tat-extremism-and-rise-of-far-right-antimuslim-movements-o/](http://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/tit-for-tat-extremism-and-rise-of-far-right-antimuslim-movements-o/)
  16. BBC News, 'Al-Rahma Islamic Centre destroyed in "hate crime" fire', 5 June 2013 at [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-22785074](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-22785074)
  17. Kevin Rawlinson, 'Britain First leaders jailed over anti-Muslim hate crimes', *The Guardian*, 7 March 2018 at [www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/07/britain-first-leaders-convicted-of-anti-muslim-hate-crimes](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/07/britain-first-leaders-convicted-of-anti-muslim-hate-crimes)
  18. Frances Perraudin, 'Rochdale grooming case: Nine men jailed for up to 25 years each', *The Guardian*, 8 April 2016 at [www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/apr/08/rochdale-grooming-case-10-men-sentenced-to-up-to-25-years-in-jail](http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/apr/08/rochdale-grooming-case-10-men-sentenced-to-up-to-25-years-in-jail)
  19. Josh Halliday, 'Rochdale grooming gang members to be deported to Pakistan', *The Guardian*, 26 October 2022 at [www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/oct/26/rochdale-grooming-gang-members-adil-khan-qari-abdul-rauf-to-be-deported-to-pakistan](http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/oct/26/rochdale-grooming-gang-members-adil-khan-qari-abdul-rauf-to-be-deported-to-pakistan)
  20. Ibid.
  21. National Crime Agency, 'Operation Stovewood – the NCA's investigation into child sexual abuse in Rotherham', accessed 6 December 2024 at [www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/what-we-do/crime-threats/operation-stovewood-rotherham-child-sexual-abuse-investigation](http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/what-we-do/crime-threats/operation-stovewood-rotherham-child-sexual-abuse-investigation)
  22. Alexander Melagrou-Hitchens and Hans Brun, 'A Neo-nationalist network: The English Defence League and Europe's

- counter-jihad movement’, International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, London, 2013 at [icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/ICSR-Report-A-Neo-Nationalist-Network-The-English-Defence-League-and-Europe%E2%80%99s-Counter-Jihad-Movement.pdf](https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/ICSR-Report-A-Neo-Nationalist-Network-The-English-Defence-League-and-Europe%E2%80%99s-Counter-Jihad-Movement.pdf)
23. *The Independent*, ‘“Senior member” of English Defence League jailed for sexually abusing 10-year-old girl’, 27 February 2018 at [www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/edl-english-defence-league-leigh-mcmillan-jailed-paedophile-old-bailey-a8231231.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/edl-english-defence-league-leigh-mcmillan-jailed-paedophile-old-bailey-a8231231.html)
  24. BBC News, ‘Darren Osborne guilty of Finsbury Park mosque murder’, 1 February 2018 at [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-42910051](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-42910051)
  25. Lizzie Dearden, ‘Darren Osborne: How Finsbury Park terror attacker became “obsessed” with Muslims in less than a month’, *The Independent*, 2 February 2018 at [www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/darren-osborne-finsbury-park-attack-who-is-tommy-robinson-muslim-internet-britain-first-a8190316.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/darren-osborne-finsbury-park-attack-who-is-tommy-robinson-muslim-internet-britain-first-a8190316.html)
  26. Ella Cockbain and Waqas Tufail, ‘A new Home Office report admits grooming gangs are not a “Muslim problem”’, *The Guardian*, 19 December 2020 at [www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/dec/19/home-office-report-grooming-gangs-not-muslim](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/dec/19/home-office-report-grooming-gangs-not-muslim)
  27. Ella Cockbain and Waqas Tufail, ‘Failing victims, fuelling hate: challenging the harms of the “Muslim grooming gangs” narrative’, *Race & Class*, 61.3 (2020), pp.3–32 at [journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0306396819895727](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0306396819895727)
  28. Sarah Champion, ‘British Pakistani men ARE raping and exploiting white girls . . . and it’s time we faced up to it’, *The Sun*, 10 August 2017 at [www.thesun.co.uk/news/4218648/british-pakistani-men-raping-exploiting-white-girls/](http://www.thesun.co.uk/news/4218648/british-pakistani-men-raping-exploiting-white-girls/)
  29. Jessica Elgot and Graham Ruddick, ‘Sarah Champion distances herself from Sun article on British Pakistani men’, *The*

- Guardian*, 16 August 2017 at [www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/aug/16/sarah-champion-complaint-sun-article-british-pakistani-men](http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/aug/16/sarah-champion-complaint-sun-article-british-pakistani-men)
30. Amelia Hill, 'Far Right woos women with vows on feminism and family', *The Guardian*, 21 September 2003 at [www.theguardian.com/politics/2003/sep/21/uk.thefarright](http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2003/sep/21/uk.thefarright)
  31. Tom Witherow, Shayma Bakht and Mark Sellman, 'The mother of three who sparked havoc with false claim about Southport suspect', *The Times*, 2 August 2024 at [www.thetimes.com/uk/crime/article/mother-of-three-sparked-havoc-with-false-claim-about-southport-suspect-bd6kkzgp](http://www.thetimes.com/uk/crime/article/mother-of-three-sparked-havoc-with-false-claim-about-southport-suspect-bd6kkzgp)
  32. Ibid.
  33. Prithvi Iyer and Shruti Jain, 'An unlikely match: Women and the far-right', Observer Research Foundation, 4 January 2021 at [www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/unlikely-match-women-far-right](http://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/unlikely-match-women-far-right)
  34. Maya Oppenheim, 'The women involved in far-right riots across UK as social media awash with hate speech', *The Independent*, 7 August 2024 at [www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/uk-riots-far-right-womens-role-b2592543.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/uk-riots-far-right-womens-role-b2592543.html)
  35. Lois Beckett, Rory Carroll, Carmen Fishwick, Amber Jamieson and Sam Thielman, 'The real "shy Trump" vote – how 53% of white women pushed him to victory', *The Guardian*, 10 November 2016 at [www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/10/white-women-donald-trump-victory](http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/10/white-women-donald-trump-victory)
  36. *The Financial Times*, 'US election results: How Trump won in charts and maps', 18 November 2024 at [www.ft.com/content/392e1e79-a8c1-4473-ab51-3267c415b078](http://www.ft.com/content/392e1e79-a8c1-4473-ab51-3267c415b078)
  37. Valentina Di Donato, Ben Wedeman and Antonia Mortensen, 'Giorgia Meloni sworn in as Italy's prime minister. Some fear the hard-right turn she's promised to take', CNN, 22 October 2022 at [edition.cnn.com/2022/10/22/europe/giorgia-meloni-italy-new-prime-minister-intl-cmd/index.html](http://edition.cnn.com/2022/10/22/europe/giorgia-meloni-italy-new-prime-minister-intl-cmd/index.html)
  38. *The New York Times*, 'Giorgia Meloni could be the first woman to lead Italy. Not all women are happy', 23 September

- 2022 at [www.nytimes.com/2022/09/23/world/europe/giorgia-meloni-italy-women.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/23/world/europe/giorgia-meloni-italy-women.html)
39. Giorgia Meloni, Facebook post, 23 April 2019 at [www.facebook.com/giorgiameloni.paginaufficiale/posts/10157082154732645](https://www.facebook.com/giorgiameloni.paginaufficiale/posts/10157082154732645)
  40. Sara R. Farris, 'Giorgia Meloni is a female face for an anti-feminist agenda', *Jacobin*, 19 December 2022 at [jacobin.com/2022/12/giorgia-meloni-far-right-feminism-nationalism-family](https://jacobin.com/2022/12/giorgia-meloni-far-right-feminism-nationalism-family)
  41. BBC News, 'Germany's AfD: How right-wing is nationalist Alternative for Germany?', 11 February 2020 at [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-37274201](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-37274201)
  42. Angelique Chrisafis, Kate Connolly and Angela Giuffrida, 'From Le Pen to Alice Weidel: How the European far-right set its sights on women', *The Guardian*, 29 January 2019 at [www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/jan/29/from-le-pen-to-alice-weidel-how-the-european-far-right-set-its-sights-on-women](https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/jan/29/from-le-pen-to-alice-weidel-how-the-european-far-right-set-its-sights-on-women)
  43. Paul Millar, 'How France's far right changed the debate on immigration', *France 24*, 20 June 2024 at [www.france24.com/en/france/20240620-how-france-s-far-right-changed-the-debate-on-immigration](https://www.france24.com/en/france/20240620-how-france-s-far-right-changed-the-debate-on-immigration)
  44. Angelique Chrisafis, Kate Connolly and Angela Giuffrida, 'From Le Pen to Alice Weidel: how the European far-right set its sights on women', *The Guardian*, 29 January 2019 at [www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/jan/29/from-le-pen-to-alice-weidel-how-the-european-far-right-set-its-sights-on-women](https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/jan/29/from-le-pen-to-alice-weidel-how-the-european-far-right-set-its-sights-on-women)
  45. Claire Provost and Lara Whyte, 'Why are women joining far-right movements, and why are we so surprised?', *Open Democracy*, 31 January 2018 at [www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/women-far-right-movements-why-are-we-surprised/](https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/women-far-right-movements-why-are-we-surprised/)
  46. Angelique Chrisafis, '"We feel very close to her": can "fake feminist" Marine Le Pen win the female vote?', *The Guardian*, 18 March 2017 at [www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/18/front-national-anger-marine-le-pen-female-supporters](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/18/front-national-anger-marine-le-pen-female-supporters)

47. Sara R. Farris, *In the Name of Women's Rights: The Rise of Femonationalism*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, 2017
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid.
50. Mark Townsend, 'Secret House of Lords circle "shown to have worked with far right"', *The Guardian*, 25 February 2023 on [www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/25/house-of-lords-worked-with-far-right](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/25/house-of-lords-worked-with-far-right)
51. Ibid.
52. Colin Cortbus and Russell Myers, 'Watch Ukip candidates spouting vile anti-Islam hate messages at the far-right rally', *Mirror*, 16 April 2015 at [www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/watch-ukip-candidates-spouting-vile-5526503?int\\_source=amp\\_continue\\_reading&int\\_medium=amp&int\\_campaign=continue\\_reading\\_button](http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/watch-ukip-candidates-spouting-vile-5526503?int_source=amp_continue_reading&int_medium=amp&int_campaign=continue_reading_button)
53. Southern Poverty Law Centre, 'Pamela Geller' at [www.spl-center.org/resources/extremist-files/pamela-geller/](http://www.spl-center.org/resources/extremist-files/pamela-geller/)
54. Alison Phipps, *Me Not You: The Trouble with Mainstream Feminism*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2020.
55. BBC News, 'Muslim women's segregation in the UK must end – Cameron', 18 January 2016 at [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-35338413](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-35338413)
56. Naomi Wolf, 'Fascism with a feminist face', *Project Syndicate*, 31 March 2014 at [www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/naomi-wolf-examines-the-rise-of-women-to-leadership-positions-in-major-far-right-european-political-parties](http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/naomi-wolf-examines-the-rise-of-women-to-leadership-positions-in-major-far-right-european-political-parties)
57. Sophia Siddiqui, 'Fascist white feminism is exploiting fears about sexual violence to push racist agenda', *gal-dem*, 23 August 2018
58. S. Adlung, M. Lünenborg, C. Raetzsch, 'Pitching gender in a racist tune: The affective publics of the #120decibel campaign', *Media and Communication* 9(2): 16–26, 2021.
59. Sophia Siddiqui, 'Fascist white feminism is exploiting fears about sexual violence to push racist agenda', *gal-dem*, 23 August 2018

60. Jason Wilson, 'Moms for Liberty listed as "anti-government" group by extremism watchdog', *The Guardian*, 6 June 2023 at [www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jun/06/southern-poverty-law-center-moms-liberty-extremist](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jun/06/southern-poverty-law-center-moms-liberty-extremist)
61. David Gilbert, 'Inside Moms for Liberty's close relationship with the proud boys', *Vice*, 20 June 2023 at [www.vice.com/en/article/moms-for-liberty-proud-boys/](http://www.vice.com/en/article/moms-for-liberty-proud-boys/)
62. David Gilbert, 'Moms for Liberty uses Hitler Quote to "Scare" Parents', *Vice*, 23 June 2023 at [www.vice.com/en/article/moms-for-liberty-hitler-quote/](http://www.vice.com/en/article/moms-for-liberty-hitler-quote/)
63. MacKenzie Ryan, "'Better martyrs": The growing role of women in the far-right movement', *The Guardian*, 12 August 2023 at [www.theguardian.com/world/2023/aug/12/conservative-women-tradwife-republican](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/aug/12/conservative-women-tradwife-republican)

## 6. Gendered Islamophobia, carceral feminism and UK state violence

1. Evan Smith and Marinella Marmo, 'Virginity Testing: Racism, Sexism, and British Immigration Control', Imperial and Global Forum, 25 August 2014 at [imperialglobalexeter.com/2014/08/25/virginity-testing-racism-sexism-and-british-immigration-control/](http://imperialglobalexeter.com/2014/08/25/virginity-testing-racism-sexism-and-british-immigration-control/)
2. James Kirkup and Robert Winnett, 'We're going to give illegal migrants a really hostile reception', *The Telegraph*, 25 May 2012 at [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/0/theresa-may-interview-going-give-illegal-migrants-really-hostile/](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/0/theresa-may-interview-going-give-illegal-migrants-really-hostile/)
3. Alison Phipps, 'White tears, white rage: Victimhood and (as) violence in mainstream feminism', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 24.1 (2021), pp.81–93 at [journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1367549420985852](http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1367549420985852)
4. Leah Cowan, *Why Would Feminists Trust the Police?*, Verso Books, London, 2024
5. Department of Transport and Paul Maynard, 'New National Rail security campaign starts today: See It. Say It. Sorted',

- Gov.uk, 1 November 2016 at [www.gov.uk/government/news/new-national-rail-security-campaign-starts-today-see-it-say-it-sorted](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-national-rail-security-campaign-starts-today-see-it-say-it-sorted)
6. Yasmin Hussain and Paul Bagguley, 'Securitised Citizens: Islamophobia, racism and the 7/7 London bombings', *The Sociological Review*, 60.4 (2012), pp.715–734 at [journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2012.02130.x](http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2012.02130.x)
  7. Amnesty International, 'Racial bias in facial recognition algorithms', 21 March 2023 at [amnesty.ca/features/racial-bias-in-facial-recognition-algorithms/](http://amnesty.ca/features/racial-bias-in-facial-recognition-algorithms/)
  8. Amnesty International, 'Call to ban facial recognition technology that amplifies racist policing', 26 January 2021 at [www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/call-ban-facial-recognition-technology-amplifies-racist-policing](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/call-ban-facial-recognition-technology-amplifies-racist-policing)
  9. House of Commons Library, 'UK prison population statistics', 8 July 2024 at [commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sno4334/](http://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sno4334/)
  10. Home Office, 'Angiolini Inquiry Part 1 Report', Gov.uk website, 29 February 2024 at [www.gov.uk/government/publications/angiolini-inquiry-part-1-report](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/angiolini-inquiry-part-1-report)
  11. Press Association, 'Muslim women to be taught English in £20m plan to beat "backward attitudes"', *The Guardian*, 18 January 2016 at [www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/jan/18/muslim-women-to-be-taught-english-in-20m-plan-to-beat-backward-attitudes](http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/jan/18/muslim-women-to-be-taught-english-in-20m-plan-to-beat-backward-attitudes)
  12. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2018 to 2021), 'The Casey Review: a review into opportunity and integration', Gov.uk, 5 December 2016 at [www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-casey-review-a-review-into-opportunity-and-integration](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-casey-review-a-review-into-opportunity-and-integration)
  13. Sebastian Mann, 'Muslim women to be taught English in drive to combat "backwards attitudes"', *The Standard*, 18 January 2016 at [www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/david-cameron-launches-language-drive-for-muslim-women-with-pledge-to-confront-backward-attitudes-a3158726.html](http://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/david-cameron-launches-language-drive-for-muslim-women-with-pledge-to-confront-backward-attitudes-a3158726.html)

14. Amnesty International, 'The Prevent duty and its chilling effect on human rights', 24 July 2024 at [www.amnesty.org.uk/Prevent](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/Prevent)
15. Sara R. Farris, *In the Name of Women's Rights: The Rise of Femonationalism*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, 2017
16. Cage International, 'Prevent stats: 95% referrals unnecessary and Muslims remain targets', 28 March 2018 at [www.cage.ngo/articles/prevent-stats-95-referrals-unnecessary-and-muslims-remain-targets](http://www.cage.ngo/articles/prevent-stats-95-referrals-unnecessary-and-muslims-remain-targets)
17. Home Office, 'Individuals referred to and supported through the Prevent programme, April 2019 to March 2020', Gov.uk website, 26 November 2020 at [www.gov.uk/government/statistics/individuals-referred-to-and-supported-through-the-prevent-programme-april-2019-to-march-2020](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/individuals-referred-to-and-supported-through-the-prevent-programme-april-2019-to-march-2020)
18. Jamie Grierson, "'My son was terrified": how Prevent alienates UK Muslims', *The Guardian*, 27 January 2019 at [www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/jan/27/prevent-muslim-community-discrimination](http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/jan/27/prevent-muslim-community-discrimination)
19. Amnesty International, 'UK: NGOs Condemn appointment of William Shawcross and announce civil society-led review of Prevent', 16 February 2021 at [www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2021/02/uk-ngos-condemn-appointment-of-william-shawcross-and-announce-civil-society-led-review-of-prevent/](http://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2021/02/uk-ngos-condemn-appointment-of-william-shawcross-and-announce-civil-society-led-review-of-prevent/)
20. Jamie Grierson, 'Hundreds of Islamic groups boycott Prevent review over choice of chair', *The Guardian*, 17 March 2021 at [www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/mar/17/hundreds-islamic-groups-boycott-prevent-review-william-shawcross-protest](http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/mar/17/hundreds-islamic-groups-boycott-prevent-review-william-shawcross-protest)
21. Jon Ungood-Thomas and Mark Townsend, 'Revealed: Plan to brand anyone "undermining" UK as extremist', *The Guardian*, 4 November 2023 at [www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/nov/04/plans-to-redefine-extremism-would-include-undermining-uk-values](http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/nov/04/plans-to-redefine-extremism-would-include-undermining-uk-values)

22. PA Reporters, 'Read Rishi Sunak's Friday night speech on extremism in full', *The Independent*, 2 March 2024 at [www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/rishi-sunak-speech-in-full-b2505829.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/rishi-sunak-speech-in-full-b2505829.html)
23. Anita Mureithi, 'How the UK government rebranded protest as extremism', *Open Democracy*, 11 March 2024 at [www.opendemocracy.net/en/uk-palestine-protesters-extremism-islamophobia-gove-makram-ali/](http://www.opendemocracy.net/en/uk-palestine-protesters-extremism-islamophobia-gove-makram-ali/)
24. James Gregory, '£117m to protect UK mosques and Muslim schools from hate attacks', BBC News, 11 March 2024 at [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-68529601](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-68529601)
25. Laura J. Shepherd, 'White feminism and the governance of violent extremism', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 15.3 (2022), pp.727-749
26. Naaz Rashid, *Veiled Threats: Representing the Muslim Woman in Public Policy Discourses*. Bristol University Press, Bristol, 2016
27. Ibid.
28. Haroon Siddique, 'Who is Shamima Begum and what are her prospects of returning to UK?', *The Guardian*, 23 February 2024 at [www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/feb/23/who-is-shamima-begum-citizenship-prospects-of-return-to-uk](http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/feb/23/who-is-shamima-begum-citizenship-prospects-of-return-to-uk)
29. Josh Baker, 'Shamima Begum: Spy for Canada smuggled schoolgirl to Syria', BBC News, 31 August 2022 at [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-62726954](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-62726954)
30. BBC News, 'Shamima Begum: "I didn't want to be IS poster girl"', 18 February 2019 at [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-47276572](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-47276572)

## 7. Islamophobia in the European context

1. Helen Pidd, 'Anders Behring Breivik spent years training and plotting for massacre', *The Guardian*, 24 August 2012 at [www.theguardian.com/world/2012/aug/24/anders-behring-breivik-profile-oslo](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/aug/24/anders-behring-breivik-profile-oslo)

2. Zach Beauchamp, 'The European country where "replacement theory" reigns supreme', *Vox*, 19 May 2022 at [www.vox.com/2022/5/19/23123050/hungary-cpac-2022-replacement-theory](http://www.vox.com/2022/5/19/23123050/hungary-cpac-2022-replacement-theory)
3. Enes Bayrakli and Farid Hafez, ed., *European Islamophobia Report 2022*, Leopold Weiss Institute, Vienna, 2023 at [islamophobiareport.com/islamophobiareport-2022.pdf](http://islamophobiareport.com/islamophobiareport-2022.pdf)
4. Ruairi Casey, '“The least we can do”: Germany welcomes Ukrainian asylum seekers', *Al Jazeera*, 3 March 2022 at [www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/3/germany-welcomes-ukrainian-asylum-seekers](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/3/germany-welcomes-ukrainian-asylum-seekers)
5. Human Rights Watch, 'Ukraine: Unequal treatment for foreigners attempting to flee', 4 March 2022 at [www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/04/ukraine-unequal-treatment-foreigners-attempting-flee](http://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/04/ukraine-unequal-treatment-foreigners-attempting-flee)
6. The Associated Press, 'Europe's different approach to Ukrainian and Syrian refugees draws accusations of racism', *CBC News*, 28 February 2022 at [www.cbc.ca/news/world/europe-racism-ukraine-refugees-1.6367932](http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/europe-racism-ukraine-refugees-1.6367932)
7. Kaamil Ahmed and Lorenzo Tondo, 'Fortress Europe: The millions spent on military-grade tech to deter refugees', *The Guardian*, 6 December 2021 at [www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/dec/06/fortress-europe-the-millions-spent-on-military-grade-tech-to-deter-refugees](http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/dec/06/fortress-europe-the-millions-spent-on-military-grade-tech-to-deter-refugees)
8. Frank Gardner, 'Will the “war on terror” ever end?', *BBC News*, 24 June 2020 at [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-53156096](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-53156096)
9. Alasdair Sandford, '“Inflammatory”: UK interior minister Suella Braverman slammed over migrant “invasion” remark', *Euro News*, 1 November 2022 at [www.euronews.com/2022/11/01/inflammatory-uk-interior-minister-suella-braverman-slammed-over-migrant-invasion-remark](http://www.euronews.com/2022/11/01/inflammatory-uk-interior-minister-suella-braverman-slammed-over-migrant-invasion-remark)
10. Jennifer Rankin, 'EU companies can ban employees wearing headscarves, court rules', *The Guardian*, 15 July 2021 at

- www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jul/15/eu-companies-can-ban-employees-wearing-headscarves-religious-symbols
11. Enes Bayrakli and Farid Hafez, ed., *European Islamophobia Report 2022*, Leopold Weiss Institute, Vienna, 2023 at [islamophobiareport.com/islamophobiareport-2022.pdf](http://islamophobiareport.com/islamophobiareport-2022.pdf)
  12. Élysée, 'Fight against separatism – the Republic in action: speech by Emmanuel Macron, President of the Republic, on the fight against separatism', 2 October 2020 at [www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2020/10/02/fight-against-separatism-the-republic-in-action-speech-by-emmanuel-macron-president-of-the-republic-on-the-fight-against-separatism.en](http://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2020/10/02/fight-against-separatism-the-republic-in-action-speech-by-emmanuel-macron-president-of-the-republic-on-the-fight-against-separatism.en)
  13. Olivier Faye, Nicolas Chapuis and Alexandre Lemarié, 'Jean Castex: "L'ennemi de la République, c'est une idéologie politique qui s'appelle l'islamisme radical"', *Le Monde*, 9 December 2020 at [www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2020/12/09/jean-castex-l-ennemi-de-la-republique-c-est-une-ideologie-politique-qui-s-appelle-l-islamisme-radical\\_6062698\\_823448.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2020/12/09/jean-castex-l-ennemi-de-la-republique-c-est-une-ideologie-politique-qui-s-appelle-l-islamisme-radical_6062698_823448.html)
  14. Tiara Ataii, 'The schoolgirls and sportswomen resisting France's abaya ban', *Dazed*, 29 November 2023 at [www.dazeddigital.com/life-culture/article/61451/1/dazed-abaya-france-cover-schoolgirls-and-sportswomen-resisting-ban](http://www.dazeddigital.com/life-culture/article/61451/1/dazed-abaya-france-cover-schoolgirls-and-sportswomen-resisting-ban)
  15. Martin Couturié et Baptiste Desprez, 'Mbappe-Benzema at the Olympics, Deschamps-DTN clash, door closed for Zidane: The truths from the president of the FFF', *Le Figaro*, 20 March 2024 at [www.lefigaro.fr/sports/football/mbappe-benzema-aux-jo-clash-deschamps-dtn-porte-fermee-pour-zidane-les-verites-du-president-de-la-fff-20240320](http://www.lefigaro.fr/sports/football/mbappe-benzema-aux-jo-clash-deschamps-dtn-porte-fermee-pour-zidane-les-verites-du-president-de-la-fff-20240320)
  16. Tyrese King, 'Paris Olympics 2024: The controversial hijab ban at sport's biggest party', BBC Sport, 16 April 2024 at [www.bbc.co.uk/sport/olympics/68739487](http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/olympics/68739487)
  17. Remona Aly, 'Diaba Konaté loves France. But a hijab ruling stops her playing there', *The Guardian*, 15 March 2024 at [www.theguardian.com/sport/2024/mar/15/diaba-konate-loves-france-but-a-hijab-ruling-stops-her-playing-there](http://www.theguardian.com/sport/2024/mar/15/diaba-konate-loves-france-but-a-hijab-ruling-stops-her-playing-there)

18. Diaba Konaté et al, 'Open Letter to the French Federation of Basketball (FFBB) and The International Federation of Basketball (FIBA)', 8 March 2024 at [www.amnesty.org/fr/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/EUR2177952024ENGLISH.pdf](http://www.amnesty.org/fr/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/EUR2177952024ENGLISH.pdf)
19. Abdulaziz Ahmet Yasar, 'France's Islamophobia and its roots in French colonialism', *TRT World*, 2019, accessed 9 December 2024 at [www.trtworld.com/magazine/france-s-islamophobia-and-its-roots-in-french-colonialism-25678](http://www.trtworld.com/magazine/france-s-islamophobia-and-its-roots-in-french-colonialism-25678)
20. Ayan Ali, 'How the veil became a tool for freedom against the French colonial reign', *Amaliah*, 23 February 2021 at [www.amaliah.com/post/61394/ibrahim-frantz-fanon-french-muslim-women-colonial-reign](http://www.amaliah.com/post/61394/ibrahim-frantz-fanon-french-muslim-women-colonial-reign)
21. Marnia Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question*. Routledge, Abingdon-on-Thames, Oxon, 1994
22. Hanna Bechiche, 'I've never needed to read de Beauvoir: Francoise Verges on reclaiming feminism for racialised women', *gal-dem*, 21 May 2021
23. Françoise Vergès, *A Decolonial Feminism*, Pluto Press, London, 2021
24. Ibid.
25. Céline Rousseau and Olivier Vogel, 'Strasbourg: la justice saisie contre une femme qui critique les musulmanes voilées sur Facebook', *Ici, France 3*, 24 August 2017 at [www.francebleu.fr/infos/faits-divers-justice/une-plainte-deposee-strasbourg-contre-une-femme-qui-critique-sur-facebook-les-musulmanes-voilees-1503594733](http://www.francebleu.fr/infos/faits-divers-justice/une-plainte-deposee-strasbourg-contre-une-femme-qui-critique-sur-facebook-les-musulmanes-voilees-1503594733)
26. France 24, 'Leading French actresses cut hair in solidarity with protesting Iranian women', 2022, accessed 9 December 2024 at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=g4a-vjTBkU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g4a-vjTBkU)
27. *The New Arab*, 'France: two hijab-wearing women to file complaint against police after violent attack', 19 April 2022 at [www.newarab.com/news/france-two-muslim-women-file-complaint-against-police](http://www.newarab.com/news/france-two-muslim-women-file-complaint-against-police)

## 8. White feminism and its role in global conflicts

1. Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*. Yale University Press, New Haven, 1993
2. Yasmin El-Rifae, *Radius: A Story of Feminist Revolution*, Verso Books, 2022
3. Rafia Zakaria, *Against White Feminism*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 2021
4. Laura Bush, 'Text: Laura Bush on Taliban oppression of women', *The Washington Post*, 17 November 2001 at [www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/laurabushtext\\_111701.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/laurabushtext_111701.html)
5. Lucy Ward, 'Cherie Blair pleads for Afghan women', *The Guardian*, 20 November 2001 at [www.theguardian.com/politics/2001/nov/20/uk.september11](http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2001/nov/20/uk.september11)
6. Rana Abdelhamid, X Post, 16 August 2021 at [x.com/RanaForNY/status/1427269269843218441?s=20](https://x.com/RanaForNY/status/1427269269843218441?s=20)
7. Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2013
8. Ash Sarkar, X Post, 17 August 2021 at [x.com/AyoCaesar/status/1427570914074451978?s=20](https://x.com/AyoCaesar/status/1427570914074451978?s=20)
9. Ibid.
10. Shahed Ezeydi, 'What the Taliban's beauty salon ban means for Afghan women', *Dazed*, 3 August 2023 at [www.dazeddigital.com/beauty/article/60516/1/what-the-taliban-s-beauty-salon-ban-means-for-afghan-women](http://www.dazeddigital.com/beauty/article/60516/1/what-the-taliban-s-beauty-salon-ban-means-for-afghan-women)
11. Sky News, 'UK foreign aid cuts could lead to thousands of deaths, report warns', 2 August 2023 at [news.sky.com/story/uk-foreign-aid-cuts-could-lead-to-thousands-of-deaths-report-warns-12932322](https://news.sky.com/story/uk-foreign-aid-cuts-could-lead-to-thousands-of-deaths-report-warns-12932322)
12. George W. Bush, 'Full text: State of the Union Address', BBC News, 30 January 2002 at [news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/1790537.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/1790537.stm)

13. Nancy Jabbra, 'Women, words and war: Explaining 9/11 and justifying US military action in Afghanistan and Iraq', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 8.1 (2006), pp.216-235.
14. Ibid.
15. Lawrence Donegan, 'How Private Jessica became America's icon', *The Guardian*, 6 April 2003 at [www.theguardian.com/world/2003/apr/06/iraq4](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/apr/06/iraq4)
16. Abigail Pesta, 'I'm Jessica Lynch and here's my real story', *Glamour* (US), 3 June 2007 at [www.glamour.com/story/jessica-lynch](http://www.glamour.com/story/jessica-lynch)
17. Nadeen Ebrahim, 'What you need to know about Iran's raging protests', CNN, 26 September 2022 at [edition.cnn.com/2022/09/26/middleeast/iran-protests-explainer-mime-intl/index.html](http://edition.cnn.com/2022/09/26/middleeast/iran-protests-explainer-mime-intl/index.html)
18. Jessie Yeung, Jomana Karadsheh, Ramin Mostaghim and Sahar Akbarzai, 'Iran protests rage as Mahsa Amini's father says authorities lied about her death', CNN, 22 September 2022 at [edition.cnn.com/2022/09/22/middleeast/iran-protests-mahsa-amini-father-internet-blackout-intl-hnk/index.html](http://edition.cnn.com/2022/09/22/middleeast/iran-protests-mahsa-amini-father-internet-blackout-intl-hnk/index.html)
19. David Gritten, 'Iran protests: Schoolgirls heckle paramilitary speaker', BBC News, 5 October 2022 at [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-63143504](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-63143504)
20. Maziar Motamedi, 'Riot police raid Iran's Sharif University after student protest', Al Jazeera, 3 October 2022 at [www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/10/3/students-injured-after-security-forces-raid-iran-university](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/10/3/students-injured-after-security-forces-raid-iran-university)
21. Amnesty International, 'Iran: At least 82 Baluchi protesters and bystanders killed in bloody crackdown', 6 October 2022 at [www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/10/iran-at-least-82-baluchi-protesters-and-bystanders-killed-in-bloody-crackdown/](http://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/10/iran-at-least-82-baluchi-protesters-and-bystanders-killed-in-bloody-crackdown/)
22. Parham Ghobadi, 'Nika Shakarami: Iran protestor's family forced to lie about death', BBC News, 6 October 2022 at [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-63154994](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-63154994)

23. BBC News, 'Iran protests: Women hang "blood-soaked map over highway', 6 October 2022 at [www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-middle-east-63155090](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-middle-east-63155090)
24. Sky News, 'Mahsa Amini: Iran's supreme leader says 22-year-old woman's death "deeply broke my heart"', 3 October 2022 at [news.sky.com/story/mahsa-amini-irans-supreme-leader-says-22-year-old-womans-death-deeply-broke-my-heart-12711069](http://news.sky.com/story/mahsa-amini-irans-supreme-leader-says-22-year-old-womans-death-deeply-broke-my-heart-12711069)
25. Azadeh Maaveni, 'How the Trump Administration is exploiting Iran's burgeoning feminist movement', *The New Yorker*, 9 July 2018 at [www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/how-the-trump-administration-is-exploiting-irans-burgeoning-feminist-movement](http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/how-the-trump-administration-is-exploiting-irans-burgeoning-feminist-movement)
26. Hoda Katebi, 'Iranian women are rising up to demand freedom. Are we listening?', *LA Times*, 24 September 2022 at [www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2022-09-24/iran-protests-mahsa-amini-hijab-morality-police](http://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2022-09-24/iran-protests-mahsa-amini-hijab-morality-police)
27. Ethel Cains Fly, X Post, 9 October 2022 at [x.com/ethelfiles/status/1579104614929924097](https://x.com/ethelfiles/status/1579104614929924097)
28. Philip Rucker and Robert Costa, "It's a hard problem": Inside Trump's decision to send more troops to Afghanistan', *The Washington Post*, 21 August 2017 at [www.washingtonpost.com/politics/its-a-hard-problem-inside-trumps-decision-to-send-more-troops-to-afghanistan/2017/08/21/14dcb126-868b-11e7-a94f-3139abce39f5\\_story.html?hpid=hp\\_hp-top-table-main\\_trumpdecision-838pm-winner-new:homepage/story](http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/its-a-hard-problem-inside-trumps-decision-to-send-more-troops-to-afghanistan/2017/08/21/14dcb126-868b-11e7-a94f-3139abce39f5_story.html?hpid=hp_hp-top-table-main_trumpdecision-838pm-winner-new:homepage/story)
29. Amy Malek, 'Clickbait orientalism and vintage Iranian snapshots', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 24.2 (2021), pp. 266–289.
30. Richard Wheeler, 'Peer suggests removing hijabs to show solidarity during International Women's Day debate', *The Independent*, 8 March 2024 at [www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/hijab-iran-mahsa-amini-lord-young-b2509493.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/hijab-iran-mahsa-amini-lord-young-b2509493.html)
31. Sarah Al-Arshani, 'After a week of fighting, photos show destruction in Gaza, the world's largest "open air prison" where

- Israeli airstrikes killed hundreds', *Business Insider*, 18 May 2021 at [www.businessinsider.com/photos-show-destruction-in-gaza-after-week-israeli-airstrikes-2021-5](http://www.businessinsider.com/photos-show-destruction-in-gaza-after-week-israeli-airstrikes-2021-5)
32. Al Jazeera, '50,000 women pregnant in Gaza amid "decimation" of its health system', 24 December 2023 at [www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/24/50000-women-pregnant-in-gaza-amid-decimation-of-its-health-system](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/24/50000-women-pregnant-in-gaza-amid-decimation-of-its-health-system)
  33. Oscar Rickett, 'Israel–Palestine war: The incendiary rhetoric deployed by Israeli leaders', *Middle East Eye*, 12 October 2023 at [www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-palestine-war-extremist-incendiary-language-rhetoric](http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-palestine-war-extremist-incendiary-language-rhetoric)
  34. Maryam Aldossari, 'For feminists, silence on Gaza is no longer an option', Al Jazeera, 4 January 2024 at [www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/1/4/for-feminists-silence-on-gaza-is-no-longer-an-option](http://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/1/4/for-feminists-silence-on-gaza-is-no-longer-an-option)
  35. *The New York Times*, 'Hillary Clinton accuses protestors of ignorance of Mideast history', 9 May 2024 at [www.nytimes.com/2024/05/09/us/hillary-clinton-morning-joe-israel-history.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/09/us/hillary-clinton-morning-joe-israel-history.html)
  36. Pregnant Then Screwed, Instagram Post, 14 November 2023 at [www.instagram.com/p/Czn5DVqoXup/?igsh=MjZ5dmoyd2N1MWt2](https://www.instagram.com/p/Czn5DVqoXup/?igsh=MjZ5dmoyd2N1MWt2)
  37. Pregnant Then Screwed, Instagram Post, 22 November 2023 at [www.instagram.com/p/Cz9F8EaIFDG/?img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/p/Cz9F8EaIFDG/?img_index=1)

## 9. Muslim women: Loud and proud

1. Sania Rahman, '5 Ways That Khadijah (RA) and Prophet Muhammad's marriage challenges current norms', *Amaliah*, 25 November 2022 at [www.amaliah.com/post/66089/lessons-from-khadijah-prophet-muhammad-marriage-islam](http://www.amaliah.com/post/66089/lessons-from-khadijah-prophet-muhammad-marriage-islam)
2. Ufuk Necat Tasci, 'Rufaida al Aslamia: Companion to Prophet Muhammad, nurse and founder of Islam's first health centre', *The New Arab*, 20 June 2023 at [www.newarab.com/features/rufaida-al-aslamia-first-nurse-and-surgeon-islam](http://www.newarab.com/features/rufaida-al-aslamia-first-nurse-and-surgeon-islam)

3. Pantheon, 'Occupation: Astronomers', accessed 9 December 2024 at [pantheon.world/profile/occupation/astronomer](https://pantheon.world/profile/occupation/astronomer)
4. Ufuk Necat Tasci, 'Mariam Al Astrulabi: The 10th century Muslim astronomer and eye of the skies', *The New Arab*, 4 May 2023 at [www.newarab.com/features/mariam-al-astrulabi-10th-century-muslim-eye-skies](https://www.newarab.com/features/mariam-al-astrulabi-10th-century-muslim-eye-skies)
5. Kamila Shamsie, 'The Islamic Golden Age: Lubna of Córdoba', BBC Sounds, 17 February 2014 at [www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b03vd5xt](https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b03vd5xt)
6. *Daily Sabah*, 'Al-Qarawiyyin, world's oldest, continually operating university, was founded by a Muslim woman', 7 June 2020 at [www.dailysabah.com/life/history/al-qarawiyyin-worlds-oldest-continually-operating-university-was-founded-by-a-muslim-woman](https://www.dailysabah.com/life/history/al-qarawiyyin-worlds-oldest-continually-operating-university-was-founded-by-a-muslim-woman)
7. Aaisha Mukhtar, 'Fatima Al-Fihri – The woman behind the oldest university of the world', *Amaliah*, 1 February 2024 at [www.amaliah.com/post/67738/first-university-of-the-world-islamic-golden-age-morocco](https://www.amaliah.com/post/67738/first-university-of-the-world-islamic-golden-age-morocco)
8. *The New York Times*, 'Overlooked no more: Doria Shafik, who led Egypt's women's liberation movement', 22 August 2018 at [www.nytimes.com/2018/08/22/obituaries/doria-shafik-overlooked.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/22/obituaries/doria-shafik-overlooked.html)
9. *Middle East Monitor*, 'Lebanon protest icon "kick queen" to face military trial', 20 February 2020 at [www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200220-lebanon-protest-icon-kick-queen-to-face-military-trial/](https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200220-lebanon-protest-icon-kick-queen-to-face-military-trial/)
10. Hala Marshood and Riya Alsanah, 'Tal'at: A feminist movement that is redefining liberation and reimagining Palestine', *Mondoweiss*, 25 February 2020 at [mondoweiss.net/2020/02/talat-a-feminist-movement-that-is-redefining-liberation-and-reimagining-palestine/](https://mondoweiss.net/2020/02/talat-a-feminist-movement-that-is-redefining-liberation-and-reimagining-palestine/)
11. Yasmina Allouche, 'In pictures: The women driving protests across the Arab world', *Middle East Eye*, 8 March 2020 at [www.middleeasteye.net/news/how-arab-women-have-defined-protests-middle-east](https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/how-arab-women-have-defined-protests-middle-east)

12. Siona Jenkins, 'How Sudan's women brought down a president', *Financial Times*, 5 December 2019 at [www.ft.com/content/0e46f0f8-1624-11ea-9ee4-1f260415385](http://www.ft.com/content/0e46f0f8-1624-11ea-9ee4-1f260415385)
13. Martin Griffiths, 'UN relief chief: Sudan is reeling after six months of war', OCHA, 15 October 2023 at [www.unocha.org/news/un-relief-chief-sudan-reeling-after-six-months-war](http://www.unocha.org/news/un-relief-chief-sudan-reeling-after-six-months-war)
14. Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor and Jamie Gilham, *Muslim Women in Britain, 1850–1950: 100 Years of Hidden History*, Hurst Publishers, London, 2023
15. Shahed Ezaydi, 'Remembering Anwar Ditta', *Tribune*, 24 November 2021 at [tribunemag.co.uk/2021/11/anwar-ditta-hostile-environment-immigration-deportation-family-reunification-history](http://tribunemag.co.uk/2021/11/anwar-ditta-hostile-environment-immigration-deportation-family-reunification-history)
16. Dr Shirin Hirsch, 'Jayaben Desai and the Grunwick Strike', People's History Museum, 1 April 2022 at [phm.org.uk/blogposts/jayaben-desai-grunwick-strike/](http://phm.org.uk/blogposts/jayaben-desai-grunwick-strike/)
17. Bethan Bell and Shabnam Mahmood, 'Grunwick dispute: What did the "strikers in saris" achieve?', BBC News, 10 September 2016 at [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-37244466](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-37244466)
18. Amrit Wilson, *Finding A Voice: Asian Women in Britain*, Daraja Press, Wakefield, Quebec, 1978
19. Shahed Ezaydi, 'Why Islamophobia is a threat to all people', *Huck* magazine, 18 March 2022 at [www.huckmag.com/article/why-islamophobia-is-a-threat-to-all-people](http://www.huckmag.com/article/why-islamophobia-is-a-threat-to-all-people)
20. Serena Barker-Singh, 'A day out with Labour MP Zarah Sultana reveals how she constantly has to think about her safety', Sky News, 13 March 2024 at [news.sky.com/story/a-day-out-with-labour-mp-zarah-sultana-reveals-how-she-constantly-has-to-think-about-her-safety-13093690](http://news.sky.com/story/a-day-out-with-labour-mp-zarah-sultana-reveals-how-she-constantly-has-to-think-about-her-safety-13093690)
21. BBC News, 'Coventry MP Zarah Sultana recounts "Islamophobic hate"', 10 September 2021 at [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-coventry-warwickshire-58515751](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-coventry-warwickshire-58515751)



Shahed Ezaydi is a writer and editor, specialising in features and reporting on politics, feminism, and social issues. She was a freelance editor at *Bustle UK* and is currently working as a staff writer at *Stylist Magazine*. She's written for a range of publications, across both digital and print, including *Dazed*, *Glamour* and *gal-dem*. Shahed is also the former deputy editor of *Aurelia Magazine* – a platform for the thoughts and feelings of marginalised communities. *The Othered Woman* is her first book.









