



British Muslim women and political activism

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Declaration

I confirm that the thesis submitted is entirely my own work and based on my own research; that all sources used are appropriately acknowledged and that where the words of others are used these are clearly placed in quotation marks.

This work has not been previously submitted, either in whole or part for any other qualification at Birmingham City University or other higher institutions.

Signed: *S. Begum*

Abstract

Using qualitative research methods of interviews and a discussion, this thesis examines British Muslim women's political activism, which is broadly defined to capture the diverse ways in which these women participate in British society. The conceptual framework is built around the concept of space invaders (Puwar, 2004), intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) and faith inspired activism (Mahmood, 2005) to classify micro (local), meso (national) and macro (international) activism performed by participants. First, I argue that British Muslim women (participants) are motivated by their religion (Islamic principles, values and ethics) to uphold justice and contest the negative stereotypes and representations of Muslim women in the UK. I call my participants' activism faith-inspired activism rooted in a variety of political activities from grassroots campaigning, volunteering, charity work to community organising, leadership roles and political office.

Second, I use the concept of intersectionality and space invaders to make the argument that participants face barriers to their faith-inspired activism (marginalisation and stereotyping) due to being female, Muslim and from an ethnic minority (non-white) background. Participants are seen as space invaders, 'trespassers' who take up 'privileged' (and political) positions which have not been reserved for them as they are not the 'somatic norm' (Puwar, 2004). Subsequently, they face sexism and Islamophobia (racial and religious prejudices and discrimination) as well as infantilisation, a burden of doubt, and suspicion in activist and political spaces (community groups, local and national networks, campaigning organisations, political parties and social media platforms). Finally, I show that participants overcome these barriers through support from male and female family and community members, solidarity and allyship from other women's and community campaign groups, and wider organisations and movements such as Women100 who provide leadership training to women.

In summary, the analysis suggests an alternative picture of Muslim women who are well-integrated political subjects participating in micro, meso and macro activism as motivated by their faith in British society. This research visibilises Muslim women's political activism and demonstrates the significance of religion in shaping their political activities and the positive effects of being a space invader in activist and political spaces.

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This thesis is dedicated to my late father who inspired me to think and reflect and to my boys ... you are the British Muslim men of the future. May you and your friends educate, inspire and positively impact the next generation of British Muslim women.

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviations	Word
APPG	All-Party Parliamentary Group
BAME	Black Asian Minority Ethnic
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BCU	Birmingham City University
BLM	Black Lives Matter
BME	Black Minority Ethnic
BSA	British Sociological Association
FGM/C	Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting
FM	Forced Marriages
GLA	Greater London Authority
LMC	London Muslim Centre
MCB	Muslim Council of Britain
MEND	Muslim Engagement and Development
MP	Member of Parliament
MS Teams	Microsoft Teams
MWC	Muslim Women's Council (Bradford)
MWNUK	Muslim Women's Network UK (Birmingham)
MYH	Muslim Youth Helpline
NHS	National Health Service
NMWAG	National Muslim Women's Advisory Group
NSM	New Social Movement
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
SBS	Southall Black Sisters
SMWA	Southwark Muslim Women's Association
Socrel	Sociology of Religion (BSA)
STWC	Stop the War Coalition
Tell MAMA	(Tell) Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks
WIT	Women Inclusive Team

Glossary of terms

Terms	Meaning
Allah	God in Arabic.
Biraderi	Refers to family, clan-like and connections.
Burkini	A woman's swimsuit covering the entire body, leaving only the hands, feet and face exposed.
Burqa	A long, loose garment covering the whole body from head to toe, worn by some Muslim women.
Eid	Muslims have two annual days of celebration: Eid ul-Fitr celebrates the end of the month of fasting (Ramadan) and Eid ul-Adha celebrates the festival of sacrifice which honours the Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) act of worship to God, his willingness to sacrifice his son and celebrates the end of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. Eid is a special occasion and a festival to celebrate with family, friends and the community.
Hadith	Traditions – the sayings and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).
Hijab	This is often referred to the headscarf worn by Muslim women. It is a head covering (the style, size and material worn by individuals can vary). It also refers to a Muslim woman's modest dress. A hijabi is a woman who wears a headscarf.
Ijtihad	This is an Islamic term meaning independent reasoning, usually referring to the re-interpretation of the Quran and hadith to meet the current needs of Muslims.
In'shaa Allah	A common phrase used by Muslims, meaning God-willing.
Jilbab	This refers to any long and loose-fitting coat or full-length garment worn by some Muslim women in public.
Musawah	A global movement that advocates for justice and equality in Muslim family laws and the Muslim family. The name Musawah comes from an Arabic word that means "equality".

Niqab	The face covering worn by some Muslim women. Used interchangeably with veil. It is distinct from the headscarf or hijab. When niqab is worn, often the eyes are only shown.
Quran	The holy book of the Muslims, often referred to as the Word of God, revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).
Ramadan	This is the 9 th month in the Islamic lunar month in which Muslims fast from dawn to dusk.
Sunnah	The recorded traditions (examples) of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as followed and practiced by Muslims. Along with the Quran, the sunnah is a primary source of Islamic teaching.
Veil	The veil is often used generically in public and political discourses to refer to various forms of Islamic dress.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

My main contribution is that through this research I have demonstrated that participants are space invaders due to their raced, gendered and religious identity. They participate in British society through three types of activism (micro, meso and macro) inspired by their faith, and overcome their space invader barriers through support, solidarity and allyship.

This chapter outlines my research focus, my main contributions, the research questions and rationale, the methodology and significance of the research study. It provides a background to the research and ends with a summary and an outline of each chapter.

In this thesis I use the concept of ‘Space Invaders’ by Nirmal Puwar (2004: 1) to argue that Muslim women activists are ‘Space Invaders’ who take up ‘privileged’ (and political) positions which have not been ‘reserved’ for them as they are not the ‘somatic norm’ within activist spaces. I contend that Muslim women’s political activism takes place in activist and political spaces, such as community groups, local and national networks, campaigning organisations, political parties and social media platforms, where they are seen as ‘Space Invaders’ and ‘trespassers’ who do not belong in these spaces (Puwar, 2001, 2004).

I define political activism as the activities that people engage with to voice their concerns, support activities and initiatives that aid those in need or challenge structures and practices that marginalises or discriminates against people. This definition includes both conventional and unconventional modes of participation including the politics of everyday life, civic engagement and voluntary activities (Joly and Wadia, 2017: 125) and the diverse ways in which minority women assert themselves as political agents (Bassel and Emejulu, 2018: 8). I further expand on Joly and Wadia’s (2017) typology of politics by exploring the different types of political activism these women carry out by dividing their political activities into three types of activism: micro (individual, local), meso (national), and macro (international) activism (these are discussed in chapters two and four).

I argue that Muslim women participate in faith-inspired activism, motivated by their religion (Islamic principles, values and ethics) to uphold justice and contest the negative stereotypes and representations of Muslim women. Their faith (religion) is a powerful motivator as they see their religion and politics interlinked like the Egyptian women in Mahmood's (2005) study of *Politics of Piety*. However, I call my participants' activism faith-inspired activism, rooted in a variety of political activities (grassroots campaigning, volunteering, charity work, community organising, leadership roles and political office) as discussed in chapter four. The term, faith-inspired activism comes directly from one of the women in the study, referring to Islamic principles, values and ethics of upholding justice and caring for the needy.

Furthermore, I make the argument that Muslim women face various barriers to their faith-inspired activism (marginalisation and stereotyping) due to being female, Muslim and from an ethnic minority (non-white) background. As space invaders they face additional barriers (infantilisation, a burden of doubt, suspicion etc) resulting in sexist, racist and Islamophobic abuse in activist and political spaces (community, local, national and international campaigns, networks, groups and organisations, political parties and social media platforms). Gendered Islamophobia and being a space invader impact how these women are seen in activist and political spaces however, they work to challenge the othering of Muslim women through their activism: they defy negative stereotypes about Muslim women by overcoming these barriers through support, solidarity and allyship from others (family, friends, supporters, Muslim women and other women, secular and Muslim organisations and new social movements). This sisterhood, bonding and allyship particularly with other Muslim women and women of other faith is a strategic way of overcoming their barriers to political activism. These barriers and strategies are discussed in chapters five and six of this thesis.

The research focus, questions and methodology

Funded by Birmingham City University (BCU) with Dr Nazia Hussein, this research is an exploration of Muslim women's political activism in Britain: how they are motivated to engage with political activism in British society despite negative stereotypes and representations of Muslim women as oppressed and dangerous (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Ahmad, 2010; Afshar et al, 2005; Awan and Zempi, 2017; Allen, 2010, 2014; Bullock, 2010;

Mahmood, 2005; Razack, 2004). The research seeks to answer the questions, how do Muslim women engage in political activism and what type of political activism do they participate in? What are the key motivations behind their political activism and why do they 'do politics'? I address these questions through an examination of Muslim women's roles, within the domain of grassroots, community, and formal institutional politics. In addition, I consider the issues and barriers impacting their activism in the context of the 2020 global social and racial unrest (Covid-19 pandemic and Black Lives Matter movement) and ask: what are the barriers and enablers to their political activism? How do they deal with these issues and what strategies do they use to navigate and overcome these issues? These are the research questions of this study.

Due to Covid-19 pandemic and BCU's ethics committee guidance, all research fieldwork took place online via Microsoft Teams (MS Teams). The research employed intersectional qualitative research methods and approach to gain a deeper understanding of the nature and type of political activism carried out by participants pre and during Covid time. Using this approach and methodology, I conducted one-to-one interviews and a discussion to bring out the individual's multiple, complex, and shifting identities, motivations, and experience of political activism, to generate data for analysis. Chapter three on methodology details the methodology, data collection tools and data analysis process of the research study.

This research focuses on political activism as the most common type of political and civic participation by Muslim women by exploring the diverse ways in which British Muslim women (participants) do political activism at a time of crisis, during Covid-19 pandemic and global social and racial unrest. Theoretically, this thesis draws upon several studies on Muslim women and political participation (Ali and Hopkins, 2012; Bassel and Emejulu, 2018; Easat-Daas, 2020; Finlay and Hopkins, 2019; Joly and Wadia, 2017; Lewicki and O'Toole, 2017) and the theory of intersectionality and intersectional qualitative research (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Esposito and Evan-Winters, 2022) and the concept of space invaders (Puar, 2004).

The motivation for this research came from a desire to demonstrate how Muslim women participate socially and politically in British society as much of the literature focuses on the negative media stereotypes and representations of Muslim women, the common Orientalist and Islamophobic tropes and questions of the triad of oppression (as discussed in chapter two). The Muslim women I knew were political, highly educated (had a degree qualification) and involved in their communities. By political, I mean they were interested and aware of gendered, racial and religious issues affecting them and other citizens, discussing and debating about government decisions and taking part in various activities like voting, public consultations and everyday activism. Thus, I questioned why the Orientalist and Islamophobic perceptions of Muslim women remained popular despite Muslim women's social, civic and political activities. Given the centrality of negative stereotypes of Muslim women in political and media discourses, this thesis explores these stereotypes and the triad of oppression of Muslim women in chapter two on literature review.

As a British Muslim woman growing up in one of the most deprived areas in London and having been exposed to various gender inequalities throughout my life as a woman, I wanted to see Muslim women break the glass-ceiling and reach the top echelons of society, challenging negative perceptions of Muslim women as submissive, subjugated, apathetic and uninformed (Joly and Wadia, 2017: 2) and oppressed and dangerous (Ahmad, 2010; Afshar et al, 2005; Awan and Zempi, 2017; Allen, 2010, 2014; Razack, 2004). I've met some fantastic women who defy the negative stereotypes as portrayed by the media and popular discourses however, I often wondered why they remained invisible in media and political representations of Muslim women: why is the media and popular discourses still obsessed about Muslim women's ability and capacity for change? The motivation for this doctoral research is two-fold – 1) to challenge negative stereotypes about Muslim women; 2) to demonstrate how Muslim women are politically active in British society.

I wanted to research Muslim women in politics, to uncover their stories and motivations and give them a voice to share the different types of political activism they participate in, however, I was mindful being a Muslim woman and studying other Muslim women. I wanted my study to expand existing literature that gives a voice to Muslim women's empowerment, identities, and the different roles they play in British society, including

political participation (Bullock, 2010; Burney, 2021; Contractor, 2012; Easat-Daas, 2020; Hussein, 2023; Joly and Wadia, 2017). I use 'Muslim women' as one category whilst acknowledging that Muslim women are not a homogenous group (they have different ethnic group, class, education level, occupation etc). Chapters two and three discuss the sample of Muslim women in more detail.

Background to the research

Muslim women are a religious minority in Britain, and they are situated at an intersection of religious, racial, ethnic, cultural, and political identities and they face Orientalist discourses (Said, 1978) and a revival of negative stereotypes ('backward' and 'oppressed') in the context of the war on terror, 9/11 and 7/7 and public debate about the integration and emancipation of Muslim minority women (Abbas, 2005; Abu-Lughod, 2013; Afshar et al, 2005; Ahmad, 2010, 2017; Hussain and Bagguley, 2012, 2013; Jarvis and Lister, 2017; Lewicki, 2014; Peace, 2015a; Rashid, 2014; Yaqoob, 2008). Muslim women also face a climate of Islamophobia, increased hostility and prejudice due to the conflation of Islam and terrorism and their Islamic dress/hijab publicly affirming their faith (Awan and Zempi, 2017; Allen, 2010, 2014; Joly and Wadia, 2017). These discourses on Muslim women can silence and obscure Muslim women's agency and difference, leading to two types of women readily accepted as 'authentic' within the public sphere: the oppressed victim or the rebel (Ahmad, 2010: 13). Paradoxically, the focus on Muslim women in the 9/11 era compelled them to become more visible and politically more active in British society (Joly and Wadia, 2017: Anwar, 2015; Birt, 2005, 2009; Finlay and Hopkins, 2019; Joly and Wadia, 2017; Lewicki and O'Toole, 2017; Massoumi, 2015; Peace, 2015a; Rashid, 2014; Yaqoob, 2008). At the same time, they were "not been seen as political subjects in their own right. Their diverse, sometimes particular modes of activism have therefore gone largely unreported" (Joly and Wadia, 2017: 7). Earlier, I defined political activism broadly to capture what counts as politics and political behaviour and to capture the diverse ways in which Muslim women undertake political actions/activities in Britain, to make their discussions and actions 'visible'. This research aims to highlight Muslim women's agency and does not follow the oppressed victim or rebel image of Muslim women as described above. Chapter four

discusses the diverse ways in which Muslim women carry out political activism in British society.

The analysis of Muslim women's political activism needs to consider how Muslim women are already involved in British society and how they resist the negative stereotypes of Muslim women as oppressed, dangerous, submissive, subjugated and uninformed. For example, Muslim women have a long history of community organisation and mobilization to support local communities, previously as South Asian women and more recently recognised by their religious identity (Gilliat-Ray, 2010; Joly and Wadia, 2017; Takhar, 2013) and they have participated in local politics since the 1970s, in grassroots, unstructured politics (Wadia, 2015). Muslim women have become increasingly visible and vocal about women's rights, Islamic feminism and mosque spaces (Maslaha, 2014; MWC, 2023; MWNUK, 2022) and they have engaged with the anti-war movement, Stop the War Coalition (STWC), government initiatives and political parties including the Respect party, branded as the party for Muslims which represented a new era in the participation of Muslims in British politics with Salma Yaqoob becoming the first hijab wearing councillor in Birmingham (Birt, 2009; Peace, 2015a, 2015b; Yaqoob, 2008).

Muslim women are interested in politics, becoming Members of Parliament (MPs) whose role is to examine and challenge the work of the government through questioning ministers, debating and committee work (UK Parliament, 2024). For example, Baroness Warsi became the first Muslim woman (Minister without portfolio) to serve in the Conservative Party Cabinet in 2010. The first three female Muslim MPs (Shabana Mahmood, Rushanara Ali and Yasmin Qureshi - all Labour) were elected to Parliament in the 2010 general election (UK Parliament, 2024; Hirsch, 2010). A new record of 10 female Muslim MPs including Zarah Sultana and Apsana Begum (newly elected) were elected to Parliament, the supreme legal authority in the UK (UK Parliament 2024). Apsana Begum became the first hijab-wearing MP in Britain (Muslim News, 2019). More recently, Zara Mohamed became the first female, youngest and first Scottish elected Secretary-General of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) in January 2021, providing strategic direction and leadership for the largest and most diverse Muslim umbrella organisation in the UK (MCB, 2021).

This research demonstrates how Muslim women use their religion (Islam) as a powerful motivator to 'do politics' and carry out political activities such as campaigning, volunteering and everyday politics in British society. However, their religious identity and affiliation are not the problem to empowerment as seen by the government's Prevent programme (Rashid, 2014; Wadia, 2015). Rather, their religion, Islam gives them the motivation to get involved in British society through micro, meso and macro activism. Religion is not seen as a problem instead it gives them the drive to become well-integrated political subjects in British society. Previous studies have also shown how Islam gives Muslim women interpretative tools and discourses to establish a confident sense of self (Scandone, 2016), informs their political perspectives and activities (Mustafa, 2015) and becomes an empowering force to navigate through life (Afshar et al, 2005; Ahmad, 2010, 2017; Dwyer, 1999). Furthermore, Joly and Wadia (2017: 3) found that the overwhelming majority of the women in their study "identified strongly as Muslim and saw Islam as one of the drivers behind their politics." Voting and activism were the most common types of participation for these women from Muslim communities (Joly and Wadia, 2017). This provides another impetus for a research study on Muslim women's political activism.

The research rationale and significance

This study focuses on British Muslim women's political activism, within the domain of grassroots, community, and formal institutional politics – where Muslim women carry out micro, meso and macro activism, as motivated by their faith (religion). It is based on several considerations: 1) Political activism is one of the most common forms of political participation for Muslim women (Joly and Wadia, 2017) therefore, ignoring this area of participation may perpetuate the negative stereotypes of Muslim women as passive, uninterested, uninformed, and apolitical. 2) Stereotypical and reductionist representations of 'Muslim women' have been challenged by academic scholars who have emphasised their active participation and agency in their communities, social and political life (Abu-Lughod, 2004; Brown, 2006; Burney, 2021; Easat-Daas, 2020; Finlay and Hopkins, 2019; Joly and Wadia 2017). However, Islam seen to be the cause of Muslim women's oppression suggests that Muslim women are passive receptors and not active participants in British society. The negative stereotypical representation of Muslim women is being contested in this research. 3) As marginalised, otherized and stereotyped Muslim women (and often visible in their

hijab), they are more likely to face the brunt of Islamophobic hatred and abuse (Awan and Zempi, 2017; Elahi and Khan, 2017) and the Muslim/ethnic penalty in employment (Khattab, 2012; Khattab and Hussein, 2018; Sweida-Metwally, 2022). Thus, a focus on political activism is important to show an alternative picture of Muslim women who contribute to British society through their activism and politics. Thus, this research shows how Muslim women are well-integrated British political subjects who participate in a range of political activism, from grassroots community work, volunteering to national political parties, campaigning and international politics.

Chapter two discusses how the dominant Western culture often views Muslim women through an Orientalist and Islamophobic lens, speaks for Muslim women and seeks to liberate them from their religion and community despite an incredible amount of evidence to the contrary (Burney, 2020; Easat-Daas, 2020; Joly and Wadia, 2017; Mahmood, 2005). They (the media, politicians, and others) fail to understand that Muslim women neither need saving nor demonizing. For example, the issue of hijab often seen as symbolizing female submission, is also interpreted as a form of female resistance to post-colonialism, Western cultural dominance, and Islamophobia as well as a political statement (Afshar, 2008; Afshar et al, 2005; Bullock, 2010; Dwyer, 1999; Ahmad, 2010, 2017; Haw, 2010; Khokhar, 2022; Macdonald, 2006; Wadia, 2015).

This research seeks to show how Muslim women are politically active before and during Covid-19 pandemic, at a time when ethnic minorities (including the Muslim community) were disproportionately affected by the pandemic: they were hard-hit by mortality risks and economic impacts (Platt, 2021). Because of the high mortality rate within the Muslim community, the MCB continuously updated their latest Covid advice for British Muslim communities since February 2020 (MCB, 2023). However, Muslim women as minority women are still “simultaneously hypervisible in media yet silenced within important public-policy debates that shape their lives” (Collins quoted in Bassel and Emejulu, 2018: xi). For example, the Muslim women in this study took up additional volunteering opportunities during the Covid-19 pandemic, to run and manage food banks and mutual aid (see chapter four about their micro, meso and macro activism). They were also seen as space invaders because of their gender, ethnic and religious background thus experiencing religion in a

gendered way (see discussion on sexism and Islamophobia in chapter five). This research focuses on Muslim women's voices instead of privileging Muslim organisations, the mosques and/or political institutions to provide a voice to Muslim women who are often side-lined or ignored by the state with their experiences often erased or devalued (Bassel and Emejulu, 2018). Therefore, it was necessary to hear from Muslim women with intersectional identities: Muslim, British, female, racialised, ethnic minority background (and other categories of difference) to address concerns around institutional racism, Islamophobia and sexism in activism and politics, a valuable resource for politicians, policymakers and other stakeholders interested in addressing these concerns. However, Muslim women's intersectional identity can also change depending on the spaces they occupy. For example, Muslim women are 'Space Invaders' who are seen as 'bodies' and 'matter out of place' in activist and political spaces (Puwar, 2004: 144). This is described in chapters two and five.

This study addresses the need for such research on Muslim women's political activism by focusing on 31 British Muslim women based in different cities in the UK. These women are from different backgrounds in terms of their race, ethnicity, age, and geographical locations. Chapter three on methodology provides a summary of participants, in terms of their background and political activism (see appendix 6 for additional information on participants). Research criteria meant all participants were Muslim women (self-defined (they identified strongly as a Muslim woman) and 18+) and involved in some type of political activism. The study is based on online semi-structured interviews and a discussion with Muslim women aged between 23 to 75 years old, who engaged in a variety of political activities, from grassroots campaigning, volunteering and charity work, community organising and leadership to formal institutional politics including holding political office. Hence, I define political activism broadly (see above) to capture the range of activism Muslim women participate in, to contribute to the existing literature on Muslim women and political participation as mentioned above. In addition, by focusing on micro, meso and macro activism, I expand on the typology of Muslim women's political participation and civic engagement by Joly and Wadia (2017). My definition of political activism captures women who identified as 'political activists' (including the six women involved in politics) and those who felt more comfortable framing their action in a more social and civic type of activism,

therefore a more inclusive definition of political activism is provided. Chapter four discusses the different types of activism Muslim women participate in. This research also explored the barriers to their political activism (sexism and Islamophobia, both racial and religious prejudices, resulting in gendered Islamophobia) and how they used strategies of support, solidarity and allyship to overcome their barriers. Hence, gendered Islamophobia and being a space invader affected how they were seen and treated in activist and political spaces. These barriers are discussed in chapter five and the strategies are discussed in chapter six of this thesis.

The above provides the rationale for the study based on the current literature and explains the sample and methodology of the research. The objective of the research is to explore Muslim women's political activism and to answer the research questions about their engagement in political activism, their motivations, the barriers and strategies they used to overcome their barriers (these are captured in the empirical chapters four to six). The research study explores these questions through interviews and a discussion with 31 British Muslim women activists, including how they developed and used their activism to shape and inspire everyday political life, through discussions and political actions. Participants discussed issues, barriers, and facilitators of 'political activism,' offering insight into their activists' life and how intersectionality plays a key part in their faith-inspired activism. These stories of everyday politics of British Muslim women (participants) demonstrate how being female and Muslim plays a key part in their political activism as well as other intersecting factors such as age, class, being brown or black and coming from an ethnic minority (being non-white). As such, these intersecting factors demonstrate the impact on Muslim women, how they face multiple barriers and challenges including sexism and Islamophobia (racial and religious prejudices, abuse and discrimination) and space invader barriers (these topics are discussed in the empirical chapters, four to six).

I approached this research from the vantage point of the women's own motivations, experiences and perspectives which presents an opportunity to hear from politically active Muslim women (participants) who are in a better situation to tell their story, subsequently the spotlight is on how Muslim women participate in political activism in British society through their engagement in micro, meso and macro activism. These three types of activism

focus on issues and causes that impacts them (Muslim women) directly, or indirectly through the groups and organisations they work with, party politics or campaigns (as explained in chapter two and four of this thesis). It demonstrates how participants are space invaders and involved in faith-inspired activism which includes networking, volunteering, campaigning and participating in political structures and processes hence my broad and inclusive definition of political activism. This research extends the literature on Muslim women and political participation as it focuses on Muslim women's political activism during Covid-19 and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement (global social and racial unrest), contributing to challenging dominant, stereotypical and Islamophobic representations of Muslim women in activist and political spaces. This I believe is a unique contribution to the existing literature on Muslim women and political participation.

Summary of research

This research demonstrates how British Muslim women (participants) are motivated and inspired by their faith (Islamic principles, values and ethics) and its promotion of justice and care for all. Muslim women in this study participate in a range of informal, grassroots and community-based projects, networks and organisations, political parties and national and international groups and movements to carry out a range of activities including online activism, campaigning, volunteering, community work, community organising and holding political roles and office. Through their interviews and discussions, their narrative of an activists' life is explored: their motivations and barriers and how they navigated those barriers, using different strategies (support, allyship and solidarity) to overcome the sexism and Islamophobia (racial and religious prejudices) in their journey as political activists. In addition, they are space invaders with additional barriers in activist and political spaces (Puwar, 2004). Their political activism is partly shaped by the media, public and political discussions and takes place offline and online. These are discussed in more detail in the empirical chapters, four to six of this thesis.

This research makes a distinct contribution to knowledge by focusing on political activism (one of the most common forms of political participation for Muslim women) at a time of crisis, during the Covid-19 pandemic and global social and racial unrest. This research expands on Joly and Wadia's (2017) typology of political participation and civic engagement by exploring different political activism Muslim women (participants) carry out within micro,

meso and macro activism, therefore it re-defines 'what counts' as politics and political behaviour by providing empirical evidence about Muslim women's faith-inspired activism.

Faith-inspired activism enables participants to pursue justice and challenge the othering of Muslim women through their activism however, they recognise that they experience barriers (marginalisation, stereotyping and intersecting inequalities) which affects how they are seen as political activists i.e. space invaders. As mentioned above, participants overcome these barriers through the strategies of support, solidarity and allyship. These are discussed in more detail in chapter six of this thesis. This provides an important insight into Muslim women's activism by providing empirical evidence of their faith-inspired activism and the barriers they encounter, thus contributing to existing studies on Muslim women and political participation in the areas of gender, citizenship, religion and politics.

Using an intersectional and qualitative approach allowed me to demonstrate the importance of religion (faith) in politics along with gender, race and ethnicity, which contributes to a body of empirical evidence about Muslim women's lived experience of religion and politics and the nuances involved in Muslim women's political activism.

I used my own positionality, as a British, female Muslim (and observing the hijab), coming from an ethnic minority to help with the process of data collection: I secured interviews and a discussion through my extended personal and professional networks (and snowballing technique) and made the process easy and enjoyable for both interviewer and interviewee by having a more conversational interview. The approach and methodology I selected and used for the research study proved to be a success despite using online interviews and a discussion during a pandemic (see chapter three on the ethical and practical considerations of carrying out a research study during Covid-19 pandemic).

Overall, the research contributes to the existing literature on Muslim women's political participation and civic engagement in Britain by demonstrating how their faith plays an instrumental role in the different types of political activism they participate in (micro, meso and macro activism). The study find support in Mahmood's (2005) study of Muslim women in the Islamic piety movement in Egypt who saw religion and politics as inextricably linked however, the women of this study focus on politics and civic life by participating in various

political activities, from grassroots community campaigns to political parties and global politics. These participants are interested and knowledgeable about politics and civic life as they are politicised and politically active in British society thus providing an alternative framing of Muslim women (Easat-Daas, 2020; Finlay and Hopkins, 2019; Joly and Wadia, 2017; Leweck and O'Toole, 2017) as well-integrated political subjects. This research aims to visibilise Muslim women's faith-inspired activism.

Outline of thesis

Below I outline the research chapters in this thesis.

In chapter one (this chapter), I discuss the research focus, my motivations, the rationale for the study, the methodology and the contribution to knowledge and the distinctiveness of my research study.

Chapter two provides a literature review on the historical review of migration and activism of Muslim women in Britain and how they become politically active citizens of Britain post 9/11 and 7/7. I discuss relevant research and public discussions focused on Muslim women in Britain including their involvement in politics and voluntary work from the 1970s to the era of the 9/11 and 7/7 when more women became increasingly involved in local and national politics, charitable work and holding public office. I discuss the negative stereotypes and representations of Muslim women including the Orientalist and Islamophobic tropes framing Muslim women as victims and oppressed by highlighting discourses around Muslim women in Britain: honour killings, forced marriages, female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) and the Islamic dress. I set out the theoretical framing for the research and define political activism and faith-inspired activism and provide an overview of how I use the concept of space invaders and intersectionality in the research.

Chapter three sets out the research methodology, including the recruitment process and sampling frame, methods of data collection and analysis, ethical and practical considerations for the research given the fieldwork took place during the Covid-19 pandemic. I explain the research design and my choice to use a qualitative approach and methodology, online interviews and discussion and the strengths and limitation of these tools during the pandemic. I explain how I use my extended networks and snowball

techniques to obtain my sample of politically active Muslim participants and my own positionality as a female, Muslim woman in hijab carrying out the research. I provide a summary of participants and their activism in this chapter.

Chapter four through six present the empirical data chapters, presenting the data analysis from the interviews and discussion on political activism, motivations, barriers to political activism and strategies used to overcome barriers. Chapter four addresses the first research question, how do Muslim women (participants) engage in political activism and what type of political activism do they participate in. I explain political activism and the three types of political activism based on the issues they address: micro (individual, local), meso (national) and macro (international) activism. Through the analysis of data, I demonstrate how Muslim women participate in all three types of activism, giving empirical examples.

Chapter five focuses on Muslim women's (participants) motivations and the barriers to their political activism. Here I answer the second research question, what are the key motivations behind their political activism? and what are the barriers to their political activism? In this chapter I explain how faith is the primary motivator for political activism for these participants, calling it faith-inspired activism as described by one of the participants. I explore the barriers they encounter in micro, meso and macro activism and conclude that participants are motivated by their faith to participate in political activism, to uphold justice, fight against oppressions (including oppressive stereotypes) and care for their community, but they face intersectional barriers (sexism and Islamophobia) due to their religion, gender and ethnic/race background. In addition, participants are space invaders in activist and political spaces which causes additional barriers to their political activism.

Chapter six is the final empirical chapter which addresses the research questions, what issues impact their political activism and how do they deal with these issues? This includes the final research question, what strategies do they use to navigate and overcome these issues? In this chapter I focus on empirical examples to demonstrate the support, solidarity and allyship they use to overcome their barriers to political activism. I provide clarification on these terms before I provide examples of participants getting support from a wide range of individuals, groups, organisations and movements including solidarity and allyship on a

wider scale. This chapter highlights the issues, protests, demonstrations and marches attended by participants focused on a variety of local, national and international (global) causes and campaigns that provides participants the support, solidarity and allyship needed to continue with their activism and politics.

Chapter seven is the final chapter which summarises the contributions of my thesis and reflects on my journey and findings of the research. It reiterates the research questions and the answers I provide in the empirical chapters. It identifies scope for further research and policy work around Muslim women's participation in British society. In conclusion, I make three arguments based on my research: 1) Muslim women are motivated by their faith and its promotion of social justice to carry out faith-inspired activism. They participate within micro (individual, local), meso (national) and macro (international) activism; 2) Muslim women are space invaders in activist and political spaces and face intersectional barriers and space invaders barriers to their political activism; 3) Muslim women overcome barriers to their political activism through the support, solidarity and allyship from a wide range of people, groups, organisations and movements. Without this support and sisterhood (main support from other females) they would not be able to continue in their activism or politics in British society.

Through this study, this research has contributed to the existing literature on Muslim women's political participation and civic engagement in Britain by demonstrating how their faith plays an instrumental role in the different types of political activism they participate in pre and during Covid-19 pandemic, despite facing barriers as female, Muslim, non-white space invaders in activist and political spaces.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter sets out the context for a study of Muslim women's political activism in Britain focusing on theoretical concerns and insights on this topic. The thesis attempts to move beyond the stereotypical, mainstream media and political representation of Muslim women as 'oppressed', 'dangerous' and 'passive' by rejecting the 'victim' versus 'dangerous' (threat) representations of Muslim women. Using Nirmal Puwar's (2004) concept of *Space Invaders* and Saba Mahmood's (2005) concept of *Politics of Piety* I show that Muslim women's faith-inspired political activism is shaped by the women's (participants) multiple identities overlapping and intersecting with each other, organised within micro (local), meso (national) and macro (international) types of activism.

This literature review is divided into two main sections. The first section focuses on Muslim women in Britain providing a historical review of their migration and activism and the effects of 9/11 and 7/7: how they become politically active citizens of Britain. It includes literature on Muslim women's political participation and recent discourses on honour crimes, forced marriages, female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) and the Islamic dress. The second section focuses on the theoretical framing of the thesis, discussing what political activism means to Muslim women, the different types of activism they engage in and why faith-inspired activism is important to them. I discuss why I use space invaders and intersectionality as my theoretical and conceptual framework to understand how and why Muslim women do political activism.

Muslim women in Britain

Newly released Census data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) shows there are 3.9 million people who describe themselves as 'Muslims' in England and Wales, which equates to 6.5 per cent of the population of England and Wales (ONS, 2022). London has the highest concentration of Muslims (15%) meaning that 1.5 million Muslims live in London alone. However, the voluntary question on religion (introduced in 2001) refers to a person's religious affiliation, the religion with which they connect or identify with rather than their

beliefs of active religious practice (ibid). The Muslim women of this study strongly identified with their religion (faith) and welcomed the opportunity to share their faith-inspired activism.

In the section below, I provide the historical review of migration for Muslim women and their activism and how Muslim women become politically active citizens, particularly in the aftermath of 9/11 and 7/7.

[A historical review of migration and activism](#)

Although there has been a Muslim presence in Britain since the beginning of the nineteenth century when a small number of Muslim seamen and traders from the Middle East settled around major British ports, it was not until the post-war, that immigrant of Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Indians came to Britain, settled in industrial cities of London, the Midlands and Yorkshire and Lancashire (Anwar, 2015; Ansari, 2018; Gilliat-Ray, 2010; Peach, 2005). Muslims according to Ansari are not a homogeneous group as they differ in terms of 'countries of origin, generation, ideological tendencies and attitudes towards 'Muslim' demands' (2018: 255), however, they "have engaged politically with British society in various ways and perhaps more actively than other ethnic or faith groups" including inside the political systems and beyond it (ibid, 261).

Muslim women began to constitute a significant population in Britain only after the mid-1970s, when they joined their husbands and families in Britain and self-identified in terms of their country of origin and pursued activities largely through secular aims, by getting involved in mixed campaigns and organisations (Anwar, 2015; Joly and Wadia, 2017; Wadia, 2015). However, the 'timing of migration, economic change, immigration control and racism all had an impact on patterns of employment among Muslim women' with Muslim women suffering the most from unemployment (Ansari, 2018: 278-280). Based on shared experiences and political objectives, Muslim women actively participated with men from their own ethnic Muslim community or with women from other ethnic groups or with men and women across all ethnic groups and majority society (Joly and Wadia, 2017). For example, a Black political identity was formed among people of Asian, Afro-and Indo-Caribbean and African descent to confront myriad forms of racism and sexism in many fields

as Black feminists in Britain were at the forefront of resistance to racist violence in the 1960s and '70s, "both at the hands of the Far Right... the private and public sectors (in relation to unemployment and racist working conditions) and state racism (in relation to education, health services and social welfare policy)" (Bhandar and Ziadah, 2020: 8).

The 1980s and 1990s saw Muslim women pushed into the 'more informal sectors of the labour market, working for entrepreneurs from their own communities' however, research has shown the low participation of Muslim women in paid work was due to a range of factors including culture, gender, race, and class biases as well as a lack of proficiency in English and individual circumstances (Ansari 2018: 281). Racist assumptions, everyday and institutional forms of racism produced much of Muslim women's disadvantage, with the most overt form of religious discrimination being the penalising of Muslim women for wearing the hijab (Ansari, 2018). These issues led to several political activities and campaigns. For example, Takhar (2013) found South Asian Muslim women organised with other South Asian women (and men) in their fight against racism, sexism, poverty, and other oppressive systems that impacted their living conditions. Industrial action and solidarity strikes took place during these decades and continued well into the 2000s with the Gate Gourmet strike of 2005 (Bhandar and Ziadah, 2020: 8-9) and forming alliances which became an important feature of Black feminism and South Asian women political activities (Takhar, 2013).

Initially, secular organisations such as Southall Black Sisters (SBS) and other projects like the Newham Asian Women's Project (NAWP) raised the public profile of South Asian women (which included Muslim women) through community organising and coalition with other women's organisations (Takhar, 2007; 2013). However, young women from Muslim communities participated in community organisations in greater numbers in the 1980s, developing relations with local government, involved in consultations to provide culturally sensitive services such as women resource centres and refuges for abused women for women from Black Minority Ethnic (BME) communities. Self-identifying Muslim organisations such as An-Nisa societies and Southwark Muslim Women's Association (SMWA) developed to fight for Muslim women's housing and health needs at the local level (Joly and Wadia, 2017).

Muslim women joined wider movement against women's inequality, including organisations like SBS who focused on the complex reality of the lived experience of class oppression and gendered racism within and beyond the workplace, among many others which laid the foundation for feminist resistance to austerity and discriminatory immigration policies that continue today (Bhandar and Ziadah, 2020). For example, Asian and Black women's collectives were at the forefront of long industrial struggles and organised against "racist anti-immigration campaigns such as the infamous virginity tests, while at the same time tackling issues of domestic violence and actively organising against fascist violence targeting their communities" (Bhandar and Ziadah, 2020: 23).

By the late 1990s, Islam as a form of self-identification took on increased social importance with globalisation (Modood et al in Joly and Wadia, 2017; Elshayyal, 2020). But it was migration that gave rise to transnational Muslim communities and a diversification of women's organisations along ethno-national lines as larger numbers of women arrived from Muslim-majority countries as dependents of forced migration or as primary asylum seekers and refugees (Joly and Wadia, 2017). These women remained outside mainstream political and civic structures and processes but were active in informal networks, organisations and campaigns organised around their country of origin thus bringing a transnational dimension to women's participation in political and civic life.

Muslim women became increasingly involved in local politics and voluntary work and holding public office, for example, Pola Manzil Uddin 'rose rapidly in local politics and became the leader of the Tower Hamlets Council; a professional social worker, she remains passionately concerned about the contribution women can make to political life and has been made a member of the House of Lords' (Ansari, 2018: 306). Muslim women became elected mayors in London and begun to contribute to Justices of the Peace magistrates (ibid). Previously, Muslim political engagement and community organisations were largely concerned with setting up community institutions such as mosques and other community services for recently arrived immigrants (Elshayyal, 2020). However, the 1990s saw the emergence of organisations like Apna Haq and Amina Muslim Women's Resource Centre in Glasgow tackling long-standing issues of discrimination against women, using Islam as a

guide. Muslim women participated as organisers, members and users of migrant, BME groups and Islam-inspired organisations with many campaigns relevant to Muslim women however, most campaigns addressed a wider female base (Joly and Wadia, 2017).

[The effects of 9/11 and 7/7 on Muslim women's political participation](#)

The lives of Muslim women were transformed by the events of 9/11 and 7/7 which saw Muslim women specifically targeted through government strategy of funding organisations seeking to increase Muslim women's active role in economic, education, civic participation, and cultural activities, including supporting women in prevent violent extremism (PVE) (Joly and Wadia, 2017; Rashid, 2014; Wadia, 2015). For example, the National Muslim Women's Advisory Group (NMWAG) and the Young Muslim Advisory Group were created to develop counter-terrorist narratives (Rashid, 2014). After 9/11 several Muslim groups entered into partnership with left wing organisations to voice their opposition to international events such as the first Gulf War (Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the US invasion of Iraq), the conflict in Yugoslavia and the tragic events in Bosnia (Elshayyal, 2015, 2020). These events served to rally together a sense of communal or 'associational' identity especially among Muslim youth including young Muslim women (Modood, 1997 mentioned in Elshayyal, 2015: 178), broadening the political experience of many Muslims (men and women). Black and ethnic minority feminists including Muslim women activists also challenged 'the racial subtext of British majority and minority identities' (Mirza, 2012: 132), however, little space has been given to 'gendered acts of citizenship' (ibid).

The period 2001-2005 proved to be a "watershed for the development of British Muslim identity politics" characterised by an increase in Muslim political agency and community organising and a growth in second and third generation Muslim involvement within broad-based social and political coalitions (Elshayyal, 2015: 174-175). Similarly, the development of the Respect Party represented an era in the participation of Muslims in British politics as it was branded as the party for Muslims where second-generation British Muslim women played a key role in mobilising Muslim support for the party with some Muslim anti-war personalities standing as candidates for the party (Birt, 2005; Yaqoob, 2008). Some Muslim women provided political leadership in the West Midlands (Joly and Wadia, 2017) with some becoming the centre of a new political movement which then opened new political

space for themselves (Birt, 2009; Yaqoob, 2008). For example, Salma Yaqoob led the Birmingham Stop the War Coalition (STWC) and was elected in 2006 as Respect councillor in Birmingham and became the leader of the Respect Party, making her the only Muslim female leader of a Parliamentary political party in British history and ‘the most prominent Muslim woman in British public life’ in 2010 (Bunting, 2010).

The Prevent programme, it is argued also bought a significant number of Muslim women into civic and political life through the creation of new state-funded women’s organisations and projects, where women were encouraged to get involved in community organisations and government initiatives to prevent radicalisation (Joly and Wadia, 2017; Peace, 2015a; Rashid, 2014). Initially these new groups and projects were welcomed but then viewed negatively as the women were asked to monitor male relatives (Joly and Wadia, 2017: 155). These organisations were sensitive to Islamic beliefs and practice with a few organisations like the Muslim Women’s Network UK (MWNUK) holding a feminist agenda, raising awareness of gender and sexual politics and many others using Islamic feminism as a tool to show gender equality and social justice based on Quranic values (ibid). For example, MWNUK is a national organisation established in 2003 in Birmingham working to support Muslim women, raising awareness, and advising government departments on policies that affect Muslim women, thus providing a voice to Muslim women. The Muslim Women’s Council (MWC) in Bradford also marked a new chapter in the activism of British Muslim women as they addressed the lack of leadership and facilities for Muslim women in mosques (Lewis and Hamid, 2018). Young Somali women in Britain “emerge as key agents of change, articulating and transforming what it means to be Muslim, black, female, educated and British” (Liberatore, 2017: 17-18). Due to their visible Muslimness and their gender, Muslim women find themselves resisting negative stereotypes, misconceptions and misrepresentations, leading to ‘infrapolitics’ where Muslims develop skills, knowledge and know-how to deal with discrimination and build forms of protests, a feeling of responsibility to defend and/or valorise their religious/Muslim identity (Balazard, and Peace, 2022). Muslim women were also involved in the ‘politics of survival’ (anti-austerity activism) during the 2008 economic crisis and austerity measures in Britain participating in formalised third sector organisations, informal self-help groups, grassroots community organisations, trade unions and social movements (Bassel and Emejulu, 2018: 9).

From women and organisations resisting simplistic narratives of Muslim women (Rashid, 2017) to women using *ijtihad* (personal, independent reasoning) to recreate their life opportunities (Afshar et al, 2005; Joly and Wadia, 2017), Muslim women took up informal and conventional forms of political participation by increasing their capacity to take decisions and engage as autonomous subjects in the public and private spheres, challenging prevalent images and prejudices positing them as passive and home orientated (Joly, 2017; Joly and Wadia, 2017, Wadia, 2015, 2017). Thus, the history of Muslim women in Britain shows the internal diversity in their experiences of being Muslim and how they participate in doing politics, contributing to race relations between majority and minority communities in the UK (Joly and Wadia, 2017).

The effects of 9/11 and 7/7 London bombing also meant more women from Muslim communities participated in civic and political activism than at any other time previously (Wadia, 2015). Muslim women activists involved in grassroots coalitions sought justice and support for the Grenfell community in West London after the fire atrocity which killed 72 and displaced hundreds in June 2017 (Elshayyal, 2020). Muslim women became more visible in public and political spaces mobilising around a range of political issues. For example, Muslim women in Scotland respond to negative portrayals of Muslim women in the media by getting involved in everyday making and civic engagement through community-based organisations and support networks (Ali and Hopkins, 2012). They participate in acts of resistance and dialogue about Islamophobia and securitization in British universities (Saeed, 2016); resist discrimination and marginalisation in Scotland through their political activism (Finlay and Hopkins, 2019); contest and resist gendered Islamophobia through social justice activism and collective activism in the UK and USA (Alimahomed-Wilson, 2020). Muslim women were part of the New Labour's Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) government initiative to empower Muslim women (Rashid 2014) and participated in anti-FGM/C campaigns (more details below) and more inclusive mosques in Bristol through acts and practices of citizenship (Lewecki and O'Toole, 2017). Muslim women resist various discriminations (gender inequality, ethnic/racial discrimination and Islamophobia etc) to achieve autonomisation through political participation and civic activism in Britain and France (Joly and Wadia, 2017). They participate in grassroots anti-austerity activism in

Scotland, England and France through a 'politics of survival' (Bassel and Emejulu, 2018: 1) and do politics everyday in different arenas of social life such as shopping, when going to work, in the streets and in their children's schools (Hussein, 2023). Some of these studies are discussed in more detail below.

To understand the increased entry of Muslim women into community spaces and the creation and expansion of organisations to enable political participation and civic activism, Joly and Wadia (2017) provide three reasons: 1) the increased negative attention of Muslim women after 9/11 led Muslim women to speak out and counter increasingly Islamophobic discourses and action through third sector organisations and arts and sports-based projects; 2) Muslim women began to question male-dominated voices that ignored women's views and desired to speak up collectively and individually; 3) Muslim women's organisations emerged and became visible in the 9/11 era as Muslim women participated in government initiatives such as PVE as mentioned above. In addition to these three reasons, I argue that the involvement of Muslims (and Muslim women) in the anti-war movement (and demonstrations) also helped Muslim women to participate in community organisations and take up public roles. For example, Salma Yaqoob played a key role in Stop the War Coalition (STWC) and mobilised Muslim women's support for the Respect party as mentioned earlier (Birt, 2009; Elshayyal, 2015, 2020; Peace, 2015a, 2015b; Yaqoob, 2008).

More recently, there is a growing body of literature advancing a more nuanced picture of Muslim women's political and religious agency. For example, Lewicki and O'Toole (2017) found Muslim women activists exercise their political and religious agency to act and practice citizenship, mobilise against gender violence (i.e. FGM/C) and work towards more gender inclusive mosques in Bristol. Similarly, Easat-Daas (2020) comparative study of Muslim women in France and Belgium demonstrates how they use faith-related motivations (a combination of Islamic and European values such as justice, equality, human and women's rights) to pursue diverse political engagements from European Parliamentarians, Senators, councilwomen, trade-union activists to grass-roots political movements. Likewise, Finlay and Hopkins (2019) discover young Muslim women in Scotland participating in politics and civic life to counter stereotypes of Muslim women and the multiple discriminations (gendered Islamophobia) they face whilst Massoumi (2015) demonstrates evidence of

Muslim women's agency and participation in the British anti-war movement, challenging the trope of oppressed Muslim women.

Tartari and Mencutek (2015) found female Muslim councillors in London serving on committees related to health-care, family and children (not just licensing and planning) due to their intersected identities providing a strategic advantage. These women lead cross-group coalitions more easily than their male colleagues however, they are still disadvantaged, stereotyped and treated differently by Muslim and non-Muslim male councillors as well as male constituents (see the discussion on biraderi, space invaders and intersectionality below). Other recent studies focus on the resistance by Muslim women social justice activists in the UK and USA (Alimahomed-Wilson, 2020), the everyday changemaking efforts of South Asian Muslim women to gain value in British society (Hussein, 2023) and the unsung heroes undertaking community work and campaigning against FGM/C (Carver et al, 2023).

Discourses around Muslim women in Britain

This section provides an overview of literature on recent discourses around Muslim women in Britain, namely ethnicised forms of gender-based violence: honour crimes, forced marriages, female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) and the Islamic dress. It demonstrates how Muslim women in Britain and globally, have resisted, rebelled against and counteracted these ethnicised forms of gender-based violence and the Islamic dress through their activism and politics. But first, a definition of stereotype is important to demonstrate how discourses around Muslim women in Britain have an impact on Muslim women's activism and politics.

A stereotype is defined as an "essentialist representation of a certain group or category of people that is widely shared in society in the form of text and/or images" (Pickering, 2001 in van Es, 2019) and often constructed within unequal power relations and they can be a cause and effect of marginalisation (van Es, 2019: 377). I use the term 'oppressed Muslim woman' as used by van Es (2019) who sees this as an encompassing term for stereotypical representations of Muslim women as 'backward' and 'oppressed'. Although the 'oppressed Muslim woman' stereotype has existed for years as part of Orientalist discourses (Said,

1978; Abu-Lughod, 2013), more recently it refers to negative stereotypes and representation of Muslim women as 'victims', 'dangerous', 'threat', and 'terrorist' in the context of the 'War on Terror' and discussions around integration and emancipation of the 'imperilled Muslim woman' who must be saved from the dangerous Muslim man (Razack, 2004: 131) and uncivilized practices such as veiling, forced marriages, female genital cutting, sexual enslavement, and honour crimes (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Ahmad, 2010, 2017). Stereotypes, argues Mirza are "powerful forms of knowledge that construct a repertoire of possible identities and hence subjectivities which, through powerful systems of representation, shape the lived experience of the ethnicised Muslim women" (2012: 130). Hence, Muslim women fight against these negative stereotypes.

In the following section, the negative stereotypes of gender-based violence in Muslim communities, e.g., honour killings/crimes, FGM/C and forced marriages, and debates around the Islamic dress including the headscarf (hijab) will be discussed as the dominant discourses around Muslim women in Britain.

[Honour killings, forced marriages and female genital mutilation/cutting](#)

Honour killing/crime is seen as a culturally specific form of violence distinct from domestic or intimate violence, but often regarded as 'acts of violence against women where 'honour' is invoked to justify male violence' (Mirza, 2012: 126). It is consistently associated with Islamic traditions, according to Abu-Lughod, even though honour crimes are not restricted to particular ethnic or religious communities and certainly not "condoned in Islamic law or by religious authorities" (2013: 114). However, honour crimes, veiling, forced marriages are popular discussions in the media and politics, and offer an opportunity for women in the West to feel superior by focusing on 'abuses' elsewhere and recruiting feminists and human rights activists to the 'mission of saving women globally' (Abu-Lughod, 2013: 105, 107), a narrative that also 'serviced the colonial enterprise' (Kumar, 2012: 44).

Similarly, the issue of forced marriage (FM) affects numerous communities in the UK (and a much wider range of ethnic communities including African, Middle Eastern and Latin American, Albanian, Chinese, Jewish, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and Greek Orthodox) however, the South Asian and Muslim communities in Britain (Pakistani and Bangladeshi

communities) are often held largely responsible for forced marriages (Chantler et al, 2009). Like honour killing, forced marriage is complex and multidimensional as it involves considerations around poverty, sexuality, gender inequalities, violence, child marriages, immigration and asylum issues (ibid).

Historically, South Asian feminist groups (which included Muslim women) have been very articulate and powerful in challenging honour crimes and forced marriages and other gender related issues (see below) within these communities (Chantler et al, 2009; see also Takhar, 2013 and Bhandar and Ziadah, 2020). Furthermore, Gill and Hamed studied forced marriage within recent UK legislation and personal laws established in several Muslim countries from an Islamic jurisprudence standpoint and concluded that forced marriage is ‘incompatible with the objectives of Islamic law and has no reliable basis in its sources’ (2016: 540). In addition, the Quran states in chapter 2, verse 256: “There is no compulsion in religion” meaning that Islam does not accept forcing a person to do anything against their will (Abdel-Haleem, 2008: 29). Organisations like Musawah, a global movement for equality and justice works to bridge theory and activism through integrating Islamic teachings, standards of human rights and the lived realities of men and women and provides a framework for action on their website along with other resources that Muslim activists can use to support equality for men and women in both the private and public spheres (Musawah, 2017).

Female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM/C) in the UK is another complex issue that is defined as all practices involving cutting, alteration or injury to the female genitalia for non-medical reasons (Dixon et al, 2018). FGM/C is condemned on broader human rights grounds however, the language of FGM/C reinforces the polarization between ‘us’ (women in the modern world who make choices) and ‘them’ (victims of an oppressive culture) with the double standard of attitudes and language used in describing FGM/C and various cosmetic surgeries carried out in the West (Dustin, 2010: 11-12). FGM/C has been discussed by various authors and activists (Dixon et al, 2018; Dustin, 2010; Dustin and Phillip, 2008; Glover et al, 2017; Macfarlane and Dorkenoo, 2015; Plugge et al, 2019) however, Carver et al’s recent study of FGM/C safeguarding in the UK, focusing on people of ethnic Somali

heritage living in Bristol demonstrates how the current British legislation and policies as well as their delivery 'are steeped in colonial Othering' (2023: 3).

FGM/C becomes the axiomatic example of the migrant's patriarchal and cultural practices as presented in British political debates and formalised in the FGM Act 2003 which refers to 'girls' throughout, in which migrant and migrant-heritage adult women are 'infantilised and constructed as not having mental capacity to make decisions about their own body' therefore, FGM/C is seen as the symbolic marker that designates un/belonging (Carver et al, 2023: 7). Victims of FGM become the subaltern silenced from telling their own stories, reinstating racialised and colonialist frameworks embedded in culturally essentialist framing. Bristol-based Muslim activists such as Fahma Mohamed mobilised against the practice of FGM via making a film and video clip circulated internationally and an online petition attaining a million signatures within a few weeks and appeared on the front page of *The Guardian* newspaper (Lewecki and O'Toole, 2017).

The Islamic dress

In Britain, the Islamic dress from the hijab to the jilbab and more recently, the burkini has been the subject of virulent political, policy and media debate as 'symbols of Muslim women's lack of agency and more recently as a threat to national security' (Mirza and Meetoo, 2018: 228). The veil has often been presented as a unified and static practice in Western literature, however, the veil has been varied and subject to changing fashion throughout the past and present history (Hoodfar, 2001). This popular Western notion of the veil as oppressive is a constructed image as the hijab is seen as an 'empowering tool of resistance to the consumer capitalist culture's beauty game' (Bullock, 2010: 23-24). Women wear the hijab, says Bullock for seven main reasons including revolutionary protest, political protest, continued access to public sphere, expressions of personal identity, custom, state law requirement and religious reasons. For example, women from the Islamic piety movement live with Islamic principles and practices such as wearing the veil not because they give in to men demand rather, they do it to embody Islamic moral attitudes and behaviours such as modesty, making them virtuous Muslims in their own right, engaging in ethical self-fashioning (Mahmood, 2005). These women from the piety movement in Egypt do not aspire to the feminist goals of freedom and equality, rather they choose to wear the

hijab to be closer to God, becoming active in organisations that encourages them to aspire to Islamic principles and morals. Worn tactically, it became 'the tool' used by women activists and fervent feminists like Huda Sharawi and Nabawiya Musa in Egypt as a symbol of national identity and a form of resistance against Western powers: it was worn by women protesters in Egypt during the Arab Spring (Bernadi, 2019: 37-38).

Similarly, increasing numbers of Muslim women took up wearing the Islamic dress (mainly the hijab/headscarf) as an assertion and banner of their religion in the face of rising hostility post 9/11 and 7/7 in Britain. Muslim women wearing the hijab (head scarf) preoccupied the British media and they received funny looks and became securitised citizens (Hussain and Bagguley, 2012, 2013) and seen as potential extremists failing to integrate into British society (Rashid, 2014). However, their 'Islamic identity' usually went hand in hand with increased political awareness and agency where they are comfortable to define themselves in terms of their faith and nationality as British Muslim women with a multiplicity of identities (Afshar et al, 2005; Tarlo, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c; Wadia, 2015; Warren, 2018, 2019).

Hijab activism (participating in hijab campaigns and protests) is a movement by women for other women across the world "taking responsibility of leading demonstrations against actions identified as threatening their religious independence and freedom of religious expressions" (Tarlo, cited in Ali and Hopkins, 2012: 145). For example, France passed a law banning face veiling in public, citing alleged oppression of Muslim women and fear of Islamic radicalisation to which women in Britain and elsewhere took to the streets and social media, objecting to the hijab ban, invoking human rights and the right to religious expression and personal freedom. This includes some of the Muslim women activists in this study. The practice of veiling is seen as a patriarchal tool however, as Abu-Lughod points out, 'veiling must not be confused with, or made to stand for, lack of agency' (2013: 39) or 'reduce the diverse situations and attitudes of millions of Muslim women to a single item of clothing (ibid, 40). According to Bullock (2010: 22), there remains "a deep-seated conviction that women are coerced or subtly brainwashed into 'choosing' to cover" however, young Muslim women in Britain participate as active agents of change as they use *ijtihad* (independent

reasoning) to shape, develop and recreate the different cultures and histories they find themselves in (Afshar et al, 2005).

Globally Muslim women have participated in 'revolutions and resistance movements' (Manea, 2014) including the Arab Spring uprisings and defied traditional norms and structures (Moghadam, 2014) and took up various volunteering, formal employment, leadership and public roles, debates and discussions in different countries including Lebanon, Pakistan and Malaysia (Deeb, 2005, 2006; Rinaldo, 2008, 2014; Sakai and Fauzia, 2018; Sakai and Yasmeen, 2018; Yasmeen, 2018) and worked to counter-act negative stereotypes of Muslim women concerning their veiling, bodily practices and religious practices (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Ahmed, 1992, 2011; Mahmood, 2005). Similarly, in the West, Dutch Muslim women have been active in organisations as 'ambassadors' of Islam in their everyday encounters with non-Muslims at work, university and supermarkets (van Es, 2017: 380) and young Muslim women in Canada created alternative spaces to engage in personal and collective action (Eidoo, 2018). Historically, Muslim women in Britain have also participated in activism to challenge negative media stereotypes and representations of Muslim women, from campaigning against racism and sexism and the triad of oppression of Muslim women (as discussed above), to tackling issues of Islamophobia, securitisation, citizenship, discrimination and marginalisation (Alimahomed-Wilson, 2020; Finlay and Hopkins, 2019; Hussein, 2023; Joly and Wadia, 2017; Leweck and O'Toole, 2017; Rashid, 2014; Saeed, 2016). The status of Muslim women in British society motivated me to study political activism to add to the growing body of literature which provides a voice to Muslim women's empowerment, identities and their different roles in British society including their political participation (Alimahomed-Wilson, 2020; Birt, 2009; Bullock, 2010; Burney, 2021; Contractor, 2012; Easat-Daas, 2020; Finlay and Hopkins, 2019; Hussein, 2023; Joly, 2017; Joly and Wadia, 2017; Jouili, 2011; Leweck and O'Toole, 2017; Massoumi, 2015; Rashid, 2014; Wadia, 2015).

Theoretical framing for the research

I have shown above that Muslim women have been subjected to challenging negative stereotypes yet through their activism, motivated by their religion and/or religious beliefs,

e.g., Islamic principles, values, virtues, piety etc (as described above), they have contested these stereotypes. Contributing to the growing body of academic literature on a more nuanced picture of Muslim women's position in society and their agency (Ali and Hopkins, 2012; Burney, 2021; Easat-Daas, 2020; Finlay and Hopkins, 2019; Hussein, 2023, Joly and Wadia, 2017; Leweck and O'Toole, 2017; Massoumi, 2015; Rashid, 2014; Tatari and Mencutek, 2015; Yaqoob, 2008), this thesis focuses on political activism by British Muslim women who are motivated by their religion (faith – Islam) to promote and uphold justice and counteract negative stereotypes of Muslim women.

In the next section, I focus on the theoretical framing of this thesis where I define political activism as understood and carried out by Muslim women activists (participants) of this research. I then explain the importance of faith-inspired activism and the concepts of space invaders and intersectionality that frames my research.

Political activism and faith-inspired activism

Political activism can include everything from formal, institutional politics to informal, grassroots, unstructured politics to community and street politics. Using a broad and inclusive definition of political activism (formal, institutional politics to informal, grassroots, unstructured politics and community and street politics), I define political activism as the activities that people engage with to voice their concerns, support activities and initiatives that aid those in need or challenge structures and practices that marginalises or discriminates against people. This definition includes a broad range of activities and political expressions leading to a much fluid, and looser definition of political activism towards 'consumer' and 'life-style politics' seen as alternative channels of political engagement, mobilizations and expressions (Norris, 2009) and working for social or political causes and encouraging other people to support those causes (Curtin and McGarty, 2016: 228). It includes modern, mainstream repertoires including campaigning, community organising and protest politics (Nolas et al, 2017). These forms of political activism are often directed to change or improve social, economic or political situation of people. Finlay and Hopkins (2019: 1) point out that 'new' participations (online activism, protest marching, blogging, volunteering and community work) are "not necessarily 'new' but rather they were not previously recognised in more narrow analytical framings of the political", therefore this

study focuses on Muslim women's political activities. For my participants, their religion (faith) plays an important role in their activism which will be explained through the concept of *Politics of Piety* later in the section (Mahmood, 2005).

My definition of political activism therefore includes both citizen-oriented actions (elections and parties) and cause-oriented repertoires (specific issues and policy concerns) leading to consumer politics, petitioning, demonstrations, protests etc (Norris, 2004, 2009) as well as everyday politics, public service and community politics (informal community groups, voluntary organisations), community events and internet (online, digital) politics (Joly and Wadia, 2017). Therefore, it includes a variety of activities in which women are involved, for example, women are active in informal networks, self-help groups, grassroots community organisations, social movements and campaigns, resisting austerity and discriminatory policies that impacts them as well as taking part in formal institutional politics e.g., party politics (Bassel and Emejulu, 2018; Bhandar and Ziadah, 2020; Joly and Wadia, 2017; Takhar, 2007, 2013), thus I expand the definition of politics to include formal and informal types of activism including the above and coalitions, volunteering and community work (Elshayyal, 2020).

In this thesis, I argue that Muslim women activists (participants) are politically aware and participate in what I call faith-inspired activism, primarily motivated by their religion, Islam and its promotion of social justice and ethics (discussed in chapter five) to challenge stereotypes about Muslim women and advance social justice and care in Britain (reinstate gendered, raced, and classed social and political justice). These women are inspired by their faith and Islamic principles and values (equality, fairness and justice) like the women in the Islamic piety movement in Egypt whose religion (faith) and politics is interlinked in their *Politics of Piety* (Mahmood, 2005). It is also reminiscent of other studies including the pious Muslim women in Lebanon who move into public roles and spaces to represent and facilitate their community's progress (Deeb, 2005, 2006) and Muslim women in Indonesia, Pakistan and Malaysia who create an 'alternative Islamic womanhood' to participate in public life, linking personal piety as social jihad and taking up leadership positions in organisations (Sakai and Fauzia, 2018; Sakai and Yasmeen, 2018; Rinaldo, 2008, 2014; Yasmeen, 2018). Similarly, young Spanish Muslim women in Madrid, Paris and London

engage in 'broader and inclusive activism, inspired by religious affiliations' (Eseverri-Mayer and Khir-Allah, 2022: 2). Motivated by their faith, these participants choose to be politically active in British society to uphold justice, help their community and improve the lives of everyone (including the most vulnerable) through micro, meso and macro activism (more details about these types of activism in chapter four and below).

Participants carry out faith-inspired activism through volunteering in their communities and participating in local, national and global campaigns and politics to challenge, resist, and counteract negative stereotypes and misrepresentation of Muslim women as 'the oppressed Muslim woman' (van Es, 2017). Their gendered and racialised struggle as a minority with their intersectional identities (female, Muslim, non-white) expose them to gendered Islamophobia and other intersectional barriers (including sexism, racism, socio-ethnic, cultural and religious barriers) and various hindrances as 'space invaders' (Puwar, 2004). They can be described as 'civic activists' and 'intense political activists' as they participate in a range of voluntary activities, counter negative stereotypes about Muslim women and hold political roles and/or leadership roles in their community but they also carry out online activities like 'stay-home political activists' (Wadia, 2015: 94).

Mirza argues that 'British Muslim women's activism across all communities has been local, grassroots and in response to immediate concerns such as their own and their children's education and health, as well as public and communal violence against women' (2012: 131) however, the type of politics Muslim women have taken up has varied over time as discussed above. Muslim women in this study are involved in grassroots campaigns and projects, but they also participate in national and international campaigns and politics including social media awareness building and community action which can be seen as a moral or ethical agency (Mahmood, 2005). In pursuit of justice and a commitment to counter negative stereotypes of Muslim women, they are involved with various groups and organisations to support, challenge and voice their concerns about a range of issues that impacts their communities (these are discussed in the empirical chapters, four to six of this thesis). For example, they challenge the othering of Muslim women through their activism however, they recognise that they experience marginalisation, stigmatisation, stereotyping and multiple forms of oppressions due to their intersecting identities and inequalities which

affects how they are seen as political activists (discussed below). Thus, my definition of political activism captures the actions and intentions of Muslim women in making their voices heard and persuading people of the justice of their causes.

The Muslim women in this study champion various causes in their political activism and work within different settings, dealing with a range of issues like human rights/value, women's rights, discriminations and gendered Islamophobia, social inequalities and poverty in British society. Based on the issues and causes they address, I identify three types of political activism: 1) Micro activism is activism at the local, grassroots and community level, focusing on issues that directly affects participants and their immediate communities e.g., Covid-19 pandemic, foodbanks, local charities; 2) Meso activism is engaging with national issues such as challenging discrimination of Muslim women (sexism and gendered Islamophobia) through national groups, organisations and party politics; 3) Macro activism focuses on solidarity and allyship on global issues such as climate change and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. Examples of these types of activism are discussed in chapter four.

I argue that Muslim women's political activism is shaped by the women's (participants) multiple identities overlapping and intersecting with each other, creating intersectional barriers: being female, from an ethnic minority (or non-white) and Muslim adversely impacts their political activism. For example, Alimahomed-Wilson points out that Muslim women are still cast as victims of a fundamentalist patriarchy but not seen as victims of Western racism, therefore, she argues that gendered Islamophobia operates in Western secular societies such as the UK and USA where Muslim women engaged in social-justice activism resist (oppose and contest) multiple domains of interrelated power (structural, hegemonic, interpersonal and disciplinary) which work to sustain and reproduce gendered Islamophobia, which can limit Muslim women's agency (2020: 650-652). Similarly, Awan and Zempi found that Muslim women have emerged as a sign of gender subjugation, and that 'visible' Muslim women experienced Islamophobic hate crime (online and offline) because they are viewed as 'culturally dangerous' and threatening the 'British/Western way of life': they are perceived to resist integration by wearing a headscarf or face veil (2020: 2).

When it comes to politics, the issue of biraderi (kinship) network and biraderi politicking amongst the Pakistani community in Britain is used as a mechanism for political control by middle-class and middle-aged Muslim men (Akhtar, 2015). However, this issue did not directly impact the participants in this study in the way the literature discusses the topic possibly as only six women are directly involved in formal institutional politics. However, other issues such as gender-based violence, veiling (hijab), racism, sexism and Islamophobia have greatly impacted Muslim women's political activism as discussed in this chapter and elsewhere in the thesis.

The Muslim women in this study face barriers to their political activism as a consequent of their intersecting identities and inequalities (as mentioned above). They face sexism and Islamophobia (racial and religious prejudices and abuses) in activist and political spaces. In addition, they are 'space invaders' and bear a burden of doubt, infantilisation, a burden of representation, and super-surveillance (these are discussed in chapter five and below). They navigate through these issues using the strategies of support, solidarity and allyship to overcome these barriers (this is discussed in chapter six). Consequently, they feel exhausted like the women in Alimahomed-Wilson (2020) and Hussein (2023) studies, also referred to as the 'politics of exhaustion' (Emejulu and Bassel, 2020: 2). This exhaustion is acutely felt by the Muslim women (participants) in this study, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic when they volunteered for food banks, mutual aid and other charities, however, it is through their activism and politics they try to reframe assumptions and misrecognitions about Muslim women and 'battle against Islamophobia, racism and sexism' (Hussain, 2023: 1).

The following section discusses why the concept of space invaders and intersectionality is important for this study.

Space invaders and intersectionality

I argue that Muslim women in this study are 'space invaders' as they participate in micro, meso and macro activism, taking up 'privileged' positions in local and national groups and organisations, as politicians, Board members, Council and Steering Group members (Puwar, 2004). As detailed further in chapter three, I use a qualitative approach and employ

intersectionality as an analytical and methodological tool with the concept of 'space invaders' to explore the multiple axes of discrimination based on Muslim women's gender, race, ethnicity and religion which combine or 'intersect' to produce complex forms of social inequality that impact Muslim women's political activism (Collins, 1999, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989; Esposito and Evan-Winters, 2022, Mirza, 2013; Yuval-Davis, 2006; Zempi, 2016, 2020). As such the concept of intersectionality and space invaders are key concepts in this research, providing a tool to challenge dominant, stereotypical and Islamophobic perceptions of Muslim women which renders them as invisible and at the same time hypervisible in activist and political spaces.

The critical sociologist, Nirmal Puwar (2004) argues that women and racialised minorities do not belong in British institutions such as the parliament (House of Commons and Lords), judiciary, civil service and academia as these spaces have historically been reserved for the white male, seen as the somatic norm. Thus, women and racialised minorities are 'space invaders' as they do not belong in these spaces: they are outsiders who 'now exist on the inside' but their bodies are marked as 'trespassers' (2004: 8). I argue that this framework along with intersectionality are useful concepts to explain the experiences of Muslim women activists (participants), as gender, race and I argue, religion can lead to a "complicated and enmeshed layering of 'othering', whereby different bodies are 'othered' according to one criterion or another" in relation to the white male (Puwar, 2004: 143). Whiteness and masculinity occupy privileged positions therefore, participants are 'space invaders' and rendered 'out of place' as their gendered, racialised and I add 'religious' bodies and spaces create a 'state of ontological anxiety' as they are not the ideal or natural occupants of activist and political spaces (ibid, 11).

Imagine the entry of a Muslim woman in hijab who is also a racialised minority, or a black, Muslim woman, in a privileged position of authority in an activist or political space e.g., the Vice-Chair of a national campaigning organisation or a Cabinet Officer in the local Council. How are they seen in these activist and political spaces? What are their experiences in micro, meso and macro activism? The Muslim women in this study like the women in Egypt in Mahmood's study and elsewhere are motivated by their religion and/or religious beliefs (Islamic principles, values, promotion of justice etc) to carry out their activism and politics

(Mahmood, 2005). They are also 'space invaders' who encounter various disadvantages and discriminations like the women and racialised minorities in Puwar's (2004) study, therefore I concur with the concept of 'space invaders' in activist and political spaces (as detailed in the empirical chapters, four to six). These participants are not just women from a racialised minority, but they are women who are seen negatively through the lens of Islamophobic and Orientalist lens as well. For example, participants are made to feel like 'outsiders' and seen to be 'suspiciously out of place' in local community and political decision-making spaces (Puwar, 2004: 145) such as chairing a meeting at the GLA building, turning up for a Cabinet meeting and not called inside to the meeting as the organisers expected someone different (not a Muslim woman in hijab) or needing to show your ID every time you enter your Council office (even though other employees walk straight through without showing their ID). They are primarily seen as Muslim women, racialised and minoritised (from an ethnic minority) and linked to their religion and Muslimness. It is not just their gender and race that impacts them negatively but their gender, race/ethnicity *and* religion that intersect and overlap, creating disadvantages and discrimination in activist and political spaces. Therefore, gender, race/ethnicity, religion and space are important factors to consider in Muslim women's political activism.

Muslim women's gender, race/ethnicity and religion expose them to specific barriers to participating in activism and politics as discussed in chapter five on barriers to political activism. For example, participants are seen as inferior, passive and foreign due to their intersectional identities and subsequently, receive sexist, racist and Islamophobic hatred and abuse in activist and political spaces. Hence, alongside the concept of space invaders, I utilise intersectionality, a sociological theory which asserts that people have multiple social identities that are not independent or additive, rather they converge to create unique experiences of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989; Hill Collins, 1990). Consequently, I use the theory of intersectionality to understand how various social categories and identities such as race, gender, ethnicity, religion, culture and other factors can intersect or overlap to result in a combination of discrimination and privilege (how certain groups of people can be disadvantaged against) for Muslim women.

Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) used intersectionality to denote how categories of race, gender and class and other systems intersect to shape the experiences of individuals drawing attention to the multiple discriminations faced by Black women in America. Accordingly, a single-axis framework does not capture the combined effects of racism and sexism, the 'multidimensionality of Black women's experience' (Crenshaw, 1989: 139). Intersectionality seen as a metaphor of an intersection or crossroads recognises disadvantages and discrimination do not exist independently, but rather they intersect and overlap. For example, gender and ethnicity, or gender and class in different spaces. In the case of Muslim women, it is often the intersection of gender, race/ethnicity *and* religion that affects their experiences in activist and political spaces thus intersectionality is emphasised by Muslim women participants and discussed further in the empirical chapters four to six of this thesis.

Patricia Hill Collins (1999, 2000) further developed the concept of intersectionality to consider how all identity markers can combine to form a 'matrix of domination' and how multiple discriminations and power must be explored to recognise and reflect on the extent and impact of discriminations on individual's lives. As a theory and an analytical framework, intersectionality is something that needs to be contemplated as it values the multiple and at times, simultaneous disadvantages and discriminations (barriers) faced by British Muslim women (participants) in this study. It allows for an exploration of how oppression, power and privilege operate in intersecting and co-constitutive ways and thus links in with the idea of space invaders (as discussed above). However, this study focuses on religion which is often missing as a category in intersectional analyses. Along with gender and race, religion is a core aspect of a Muslim woman's identity, and a powerful motivator for Muslim women's political activism (Mahmood, 2005). The Muslim women in this study see Islam as a moral code and guide for their activism and politics, linking politics with religious ethics (ibid). Alimahomed-Wilson (2020) focuses on gendered Islamophobia, addressing the importance of religion and how Muslim women resist the structural, hegemonic, interpersonal and disciplinary domains of interrelated power. Gendered Islamophobia, argues Zempi (2020: 97) can be understood through the lens of intersectionality as veiled Muslim women are more likely to suffer hate crime (online and in 'real' life) and targeted "due to their intersections between their 'visible' Muslim identity and gender performance, coupled with other aspects of their perceived identity such as race, disability and age." Furthermore,

these Muslim women are often ignored in the criminal justice system and less likely to report their Islamophobic hate crime experiences to the police (Awan and Zempi, 2020). Thus, intersectionality became an important and relevant part of my research inquiry and informed the processes of the research as well (see chapter three on methodology and chapter five on barriers to political activism).

Much of the gendered racism that participants experience in activist and political spaces has been a result of Islamophobia, or anti-Muslim racism. Muslim women are more likely to bear the brunt of Islamophobia as the wearing of the hijab (or niqab) is seen as a 'threat' to notions of integration as well as a visual embodiment of gender oppression and gender inequality as mentioned above, making Islamophobia highly gendered (Allen, 2010, 2014; Awan and Zempi, 2016, 2020; Tell MAMA, 2016, 2017, 2019; Zempi, 2016, 2020; Zempi and Easat-Daas, 2022). However, Islamophobia is a heavily contested term (see below) but is often understood as a form of 'anti-Muslim racism' (Runnymede Trust, 2017) and 'a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness' (APPG, 2018: 11). Subsequently, the Muslim women in this study see Islamophobia as racial and religious prejudice and discrimination due to their intersectional identities as described in chapter five on barriers to political activism.

As previously documented evidence suggests, some Muslim women experience double oppression from the culture of their community as well as the culture of their religion (Jawad, 2002) and the 'double penalty' (racial discrimination and Islamophobia) faced in entering the labour market (MCB, 2015) or 'triple penalty' and/or 'Muslim penalty' impacting their employment in the labour market (Khattab and Johnston, 2013, 2015; Malik and Wykes, 2018; Miaari et al, 2019; Mustafa and Heath, 2016; Sweida-Metwally, 2022). For example, using a very large data sample set from the 2011 British census, Miaari et al conclude that 'Muslim women experienced the severest penalties ... notably Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black-African Muslim women' lending support to the 'Muslim penalty' with religion having a greater impact on labour market outcomes than race/ethnicity (2019: 42). However, the extent of their disadvantage varies according to their ethnicity and their human capital and household-family situations, for example, White-British Muslim women experience lower penalties than most of the other Muslim groups. They argue that minority

women's labour market experience is primarily shaped by the parallel intersections of ethnicity/race, religion and their migration history, sustaining the theory of intersectionality and the importance of both colour and cultural racism (Miaari et al 2019). Similarly, Black Muslim women in this study said they faced additional barriers as they were female, Black and Muslim (and wearing the hijab).

The British media has normalised and intensified Islamophobia with anti-Muslim sentiments prevalent and accepted in British society (Warsi, 2011) however, as a concept, it is complex, multifaceted and not agreed upon even though it is increasingly prominent in British political and media discourses generating wide-ranging public discussions (Skenderovic and Späti, 2019). In 1997, the term reached 'public policy prominence' with the Runnymede's Trust report, which became a defining moment in the history of the concept in Britain, with Islamophobia narratives reproduced and shared globally and amplified through social media (Awan, 2014). Islamophobia is now understood better as 'anti-Muslim racism' which includes racism, both overt and covert expressions of racial hostility, discriminatory attitudes and practices towards Muslims including microaggressions (Elahi and Khan, 2017; Meer and Modood, 2009). However, the term has 'phobia' which suggests that it is a problem of individual bias or individual fear however, the Muslim women in this study demonstrate how Islamophobia is a form of racism based on the negative conception of a racialised Muslim and an essentialised Islam (Meer and Modood, 2009).

The definition of Islamophobia is still debated and contested however, I use the definition proposed by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims who recommend the following definition after a widespread consultation: "Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness" (2018: 11) but I add to that definition, contrived fear and/or prejudice post 9/11 and 7/11 and the War on Terror as discussed by the participants in this study. Islamophobia understood as anti-Muslim racism, therefore, reflects the intersection of race and religion and relates to the legacy of racism connected to the history of race, racism and colonialism and the saving Muslim women paradigm, which is a reality for Muslim women in this study. Consequently, Muslim women face openly hostile reactions in a climate of state sanctioned gendered Islamophobic discrimination. For example, Muslim women wearing the hijab are

gendered 'securitised citizens' (Hussain and Bagguley, 2012, 2013), and experience vilification on the streets, in the media and from some politicians (Ahmad, 2010; Birt, 2009; Hussain and Bagguley, 2012, 2013; MCB, 2015; Mirza, 2015; Tarlo, 2007a; Tell Mama, 2018). Hence, Muslim women are more likely to become victims of Islamophobia in 'public street-level spaces' than anyone else (Allen, 2014) and veiled Muslim women 'victims' of gendered Islamophobia, making them more vulnerable (online and offline) due to their intersections between their 'visible' Muslim identity and gender performance (Zempi, 2020). There is a significant relationship between being visible as a Muslim woman and experiencing Islamophobia, consequently, Muslim women face "everyday experiences of both explicit and subtle manifestations of Islamophobic and misogynistic harassment" that produce amongst others "feelings of inferiority, loss of confidence and self-esteem, depression, guilt and self-blame" (Zempi, 2020: 97). Muslim women space invaders also face negative stereotypes, sexism, gendered Islamophobia/anti-Muslim racism which includes individual, institutional and systemic/structural racism (Gyima et al, 2022) and prejudice and racist attacks online and offline post 9/11 and 7/7 events (Awan 2016: 18).

"Social spaces are not blank and open for any body to occupy" especially not for a Muslim woman in hijab (Puwar, 2004: 8) as discussed in later chapters. Therefore, the concept of spaces as socially and politically constructed affects and impacts Muslim women occupying activist and political spaces (ibid), which is an area that needs further exploration, as a line of inquiry along with intersectionality in faith-inspired activism. Muslim women as 'marked bodies' and 'matter out of place' receive 'double-take' and 'create a collision' and their presence, as a Muslim woman (often in hijab), 'disrupts and disorients expectations' as they participate in micro, meso and macro activism (ibid, 144). As space invaders, they bear a burden of doubt (they have to prove themselves as competent), a burden of representation (seen to represent the capacities of the group for which they are marked), infantilisation (imagined to be more junior than they are) and viewed suspiciously and therefore under super-surveillance (Puwar, 2004). However, they navigate through these issues using the strategies of support from male and female family and community members, solidarity and allyship from other women's and community groups and wider organisations and movements such as Citizens UK to overcome barriers to their political activism (these are discussed in chapters five and six of this thesis).

Using space invaders and intersectionality as my theoretical framing for the research enabled me to explore, analyse and explain Muslim women's political activism. Using a combined application of space invaders and principles of intersectionality to inform the research process allowed an exploration of how Muslim women are motivated to carry out faith-inspired activism. Motivated by their religion (faith), these women (participants) participate in various types of activism (micro, meso and macro activism) and fight against negative stereotypes, racism, sexism and Islamophobic attitudes, behaviour and hate crimes in the community, local and national politics as well as on social media platforms. In these activist and political spaces, they are seen as space invaders with intersectional identities (female, Muslim, non-white, foreign etc) and they must navigate against gendered Islamophobia and challenge stereotypes that renders them passive, submissive and subordinated by demonstrating an alternative narrative of Muslim women as well-integrated political subjects involved in a range of activities and doing politics in their commitment to help their local communities and pursue justice for all in British society.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the context for this study, providing literature evidence on the stereotypes and dominant tropes about Muslim women, the social and political landscape of Britain and the post 9/11 and 7/7 impact on the Muslim community and Muslim women's political participation. It has provided a historical review of Muslim women's migration and activism from the 1970s to the 9/11 and 7/7 era, demonstrating how participants are well-integrated political subjects in British society. They are active citizens however, a discussion on recent discourses on gender-based violence e.g., honour crimes, forced marriages and FGM/C and the Islamic dress is discussed as these topics are still relevant in Britain and across the world, especially as Muslim women challenge these stereotypes through their activism and politics.

Using Nirmal Puwar's concept of *Space Invaders* and Saba Mahmood's concept of *Politics of Piety* I demonstrate Muslim women's (participants) faith-inspired activism as shaped by the women's multiple identities overlapping and intersecting with each other, enabling them to participate within micro (individual), meso (national) and macro (international) activism (as

discussed in chapter four). I explain why I use a theoretical framework that combines the concept of space invaders and intersectionality that also informs the research process, the data analysis and the findings of the research which has been productive as this contributes to the growing body of literature on Muslim women and political participation (Alimahomed-Wilson, 2020; Easat-Daas, 2020; Finlay and Hopkins, 2019; Hussein, 2023; Joly and Wadia, 2017; Leweck and O'Toole, 2017; Massoumi, 2015; Rashid, 2014; van Es, 2019) which advances a more nuanced picture of Muslim women's political and religious agency (Deeb, 2005, 2006; Mahmood, 2005).

I use the concept of intersectionality as a theoretical framework to explain the plural and intersectional identities of Muslim women who are space invaders in activist and political spaces despite facing gendered Islamophobia (sexism and racial/religious prejudices). The concept of space is often overlooked however, this chapter (and research) demonstrates how space is an important facet of participant's intersectionality as they face the combined effects of gender, race/ethnicity and I argue, religion which combine and intersect, to render them 'space invaders' in activist and political spaces. Therefore, I use the lens of intersectionality and space invaders as my theoretical and conceptual framework to explain their intersectional identities, being female, Muslim, and non-white, and being a space invader. Muslim women are often viewed as "the personification of gender oppression in Islam, especially if they are veiled" (Awan and Zempi, 2016: 2). However, this study indicates the role participants play in challenging prevalent images of Muslim women as passive, submissive and subordinated (Joly and Wadia, 2017) through their participation in activism and politics as motivated by their faith, which suggests an alternative narrative of Muslim women who are politically active and involved in micro, meso and macro activism during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed account of the research process from the development of the research questions to the methodological choices that I made to examine these research questions. The research study was initially designed by Sociologist, Dr Nazia Hussein at Birmingham City University (BCU) who wanted “to challenge Islamophobic perceptions of British Muslim women as being ‘oppressed’ and ‘dangerous’” (BCU News, 2019). Having successfully attained the PhD scholarship to pursue the funded project, I elaborate on the research design and discuss my own status and positionality as a female British Muslim researcher investigating British Muslim women’s political activism.

I discuss the methodology for the research, from choosing a qualitative research approach, discussing researcher’s status and positionality to data collection and analysis to the impact of Covid-19 on the research project. I explain my insider and outsider status as a researcher and why I use ‘space invaders’ (Puwar, 2004) and intersectionality (Esposito and Evan-Winters, 2022) to frame my research to investigate Muslim women’s political activism in Britain. Following the research design and a qualitative approach to the research and my positionality and reflexivity, I discuss the methodology and methods of my research in three sections. In the first section, I explain the planning for data collection stage which includes the recruitment process and the criteria for the sampling frame and a summary of participants. In the second section, I discuss my rationale for data collection tools and data analysis including the strengths and weaknesses of carrying out online fieldwork during Covid-19 pandemic. In the third and final section, I focus on the ethical and practical considerations of carrying out this research during Covid-19 pandemic. This chapter charts my journey in obtaining data from Muslim women about their political activism with the final sections outlining the methodological reflections that I have considered to ensure the research aims and questions are met.

The research design: a qualitative approach and intersectionality

The original aim of the research to challenge Islamophobic perceptions of British Muslim women became my motivation for the research: to challenge and contest the negative

stereotypes and representations of Muslim women in dominant and popular discourses and tropes (see the previous chapters). Within the original plan, I chose to explore why Muslim women take up political activism and what type of politics they engage with despite being seen as oppressed and dangerous. This is discussed in the first empirical chapter four. A qualitative approach and methodology were selected as it allows the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of a social phenomenon (e.g., political activism) and learn more about people's everyday behaviour, understandings and perceptions of others and explore how people structure and give meanings to their daily lives (Lune and Berg, 2017; Silverman, 2000).

Qualitative researchers often try to understand events and the social world through the eyes of the people they study, from the perspective of the people being studied (Bryman, 2016: 393) to find the “meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things” instead of a quantitative approach which refers to measuring things (Lune and Berg, 2017: 12). However, the two approaches are often debated as the reality suggests that they are not in stark opposite to each other, and they have similarities too. For example, both are concerned with data reduction and answering research questions and argue for transparency in the research process (Bryman, 2016). Often in practice, researchers are clear about their research aim, process and procedures and use both descriptive and numerical data. In this thesis, I provide a more descriptive account of Muslim women's political activism as it is more consistent with the wider political aims of this research, and it provides a better understanding of Muslim women's experiences of activism and politics in a male-dominated or white-male society. For example, it was imperative to investigate why Muslim women participated in political activism and understand their lived realities as political activists, and to see them ‘in context’ to improve the understanding of their situation (Denscombe, 2017: 6). As Contractor (2012:1) observes, “the Muslim woman's version of events – her story – is neither told nor heard.” Therefore, it was vital to hear directly from Muslim women themselves about their activism. The empirical chapters in this thesis (4-6) explore their understanding and experiences of political activism.

My initial research plan changed because of Covid-19 pandemic which placed restrictions on movements during the lockdowns in 2020 and early 2021, consequently, the original plan to carry out face-to-face interviews, focus groups and social media analysis changed. I did not carry out social media analysis as planned (see details below). Instead, I used two online methods: semi-structured interviews and a discussion as 'tools for data collection' (Denscombe, 2017: 3) to examine Muslim women's political activism as it allows politically active women to speak and share their stories, experiences and personal encounters (Birt 2009; Joly 2017; Joly and Wadia 2017; Jouili 2011; Lewicki and O'Toole 2017; Massoumi 2015; Rashid, 2014). A qualitative approach is deemed to be the most suitable approach to studying Muslim women (see the above authors) and their political activism.

It is understood that qualitative research is more compatible with feminism's central tenets and feminist sensitivity to focus on women's experiences and voices which can lead to the emancipatory goals of feminism: to 'alleviate the conditions of oppression' (Skeggs, 2001 in Bryman, 2016: 403). However, there are many forms of feminism rooted in the experiences of European and European-American women (mainly white women) and as a result, Muslim women have been portrayed and mis-understood through the lens of Western feminism as described in the literature review chapter. Consequently, other types of feminism (e.g., Black feminism, postmodern feminism, intersectional feminism, Islamic feminism and ecofeminism etc) developed as a response to Eurocentric feminism focusing solely on the experiences of women in Western cultures. For example, postcolonial feminism account for the way that racism and the long-lasting political, economic and cultural effects of colonialism affect non-white, non-Western women in the postcolonial world (Mohanty, 2003). Similarly, Abu-Lughod (2013: 16) explains how "Muslim women activists have been addressing gender issues in their communities for more than a century in places like Egypt, Syria, and present-day Bangladesh."

Western feminist scholarship is criticised as essentialising and homogenising the experiences of women in non-Western cultures, reducing them to a monolithic and victimised group, thus ignoring the diversity and agency of 'Third World women' and/or Muslim women informed by a colonial discourse (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Ahmed, 1992, 2011; Mahmood, 2005; Mohanty, 2003; Spivak, 1989; van Es, 2017; Zine, 2006a). Comparably,

mainstream feminism (also known as ‘liberal feminism’ or Eurocentric feminism) often portrays Muslim women as a single, homogenous group as ‘victims’, ‘threat’ and in need of saving/protecting thus ignoring their agency and resistance as described in the literature review chapter (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Ahmed, 1992, 2011; Mahmood, 2005; van Es, 2017). Thus, the Eurocentric feminist narratives (stereotypical and reductionist representations of Muslim women) is challenged by academic scholars underscoring their active participation and agency in their communities, social and political life (Abu-Lughod, 2004; Brown, 2006; Burney, 2021; Easat-Daas, 2020; Finlay and Hopkins, 2019; Hussein, 2023; Joly and Wadia 2017; Leweck and O’ Toole, 2017; Mahmood, 2005; Massoumi, 2015; MEND, 2019; Scandone, 2016; Warren, 2018, 2019) and it is contested in this research through the narratives of the Muslim women (participants) who oppose the essentialist and dominant stereotypes, tropes and discourses about Muslim women and Islam. These women demonstrate through their micro, meso and macro activism that they are diverse, politically active and resilient, addressing issues like racism, Islamophobia, colonialism and other inequalities that significantly impact them, a criticism of Eurocentric feminism which overlooks the diverse realities of women, universalising the experiences of all women and failing to adequately address these inequalities that significantly impact women across the globe.

Initially I explored the feminist standpoint epistemology which at the time seemed to be the most suitable approach to take for this research. However, after reading much about this topic and realising that critics of feminist theories argue that mainstream white feminism did not capture the experiences of all women’s experience including Black, Asian and Muslim women, I felt there was a need to use an approach that expressed the intersectional identities of Muslim women (see the critique of intersectionality below). The Muslim women in this study face barriers to their political activism due to the intersections of their gender, race/ethnicity and religion (see chapter five). They are space invaders who experience gendered Islamophobia amongst other barriers but navigate through these barriers using support, solidarity and allyship from other people, organisations and movements (see chapter six).

I draw upon a range of theoretical and empirical literatures to explore the socio-political and religious aspects of Muslim women's experiences in political activism; thus, I develop and build upon the works of Nirmal Puwar (2004) who focuses on women and racialised minorities as space invaders, and Easat-Daas (2020), Finlay and Hopkins (2019), Joly and Wadia (2017), Leweck and O'Toole (2017) work on Muslim women and political participation. Furthermore, I go beyond European studies on Muslim women and explore other studies that capture the experiences of Muslim women in various international political contexts, situated within a variety of political traditions including Black feminism, post-colonial feminism and 'third world' feminism focused on experience and difference (see Mirza, 2009; Mohanty, 2003; Razack, 2004) and those using anti-imperialist and anti-racist frameworks of analysis which includes Muslim feminists and Islamic feminists who have their own understanding of Muslim women (see Abu-Lughod, 2013; Ahmed, 2002, 2011; Alimahomed-Wilson, 2020; Mir-Hosseini, 2011; Zine, 2004). Additionally, the work of Saba Mahmood's *Politics of Piety* (2005) has inspired this research as she argues for a broader conception of Muslim women's political agency, where the ethical (religious) and the political are inextricably linked as discussed in the empirical chapters.

At the heart of this project is intersectionality which explores the simultaneous and interacting effects of gender, race, class and other categories of difference by acknowledging their differing experiences and identities (Bassel and Emejulu, 2018; Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 1999, 2000; McCall, 2005). It acknowledges that people's social identities are interconnected and that these intersections can lead to distinct experiences of marginalisation or advantage (ibid). For example, Muslim women are often seen as minority women who are "audible only as victims but never equal citizens" (Bassel and Emejulu, 2018: 2). The neglect of 'religion' in classical intersectionality as a core identity component must be recognised to allow a real analytical understanding of Muslim women's political activism as participants argue it is one of their core identities that intersects with other core identities such as gender and race/ethnicity. For example, dominant and popular discourses and tropes about Muslim women often presents Muslim women as victims of patriarchy, silent and oppressed but at the same time, dangerous and a threat (see chapter two). However, these stereotypes do not provide an authentic picture of Muslim women, according to the Muslim women in this research, who challenge the dominant, stereotypical

representation and binary thinking of Muslim women through their faith-inspired activism. Participants offer an alternative understanding of Muslim women who are politically active in their communities, on social media and in local and national politics, hence their participation in the research. Religion is a source of inspiration for participants who are politically active in what I call faith-inspired activism (further detailed in chapters four and five). As discussed in the literature review, religion (faith) has been explored in more recent work on Muslim women (Alimahomed-Wilson, 2020; Easat-Daas, 2020; Finlay and Hopkins, 2019; Hussein, 2023; Joly and Wadia, 2017).

Using intersectionality as an analytical and methodological tool which looks at the multiple perspective of marginalised and oppressed groups unique viewpoints of the social world (e.g., Muslim women), allowed me to explore the ‘multiple axes’ of discrimination based on their core identities such as gender, race/ethnicity, religion and space invaders (Puwar, 2004) as they worked together to combine and ‘intersect’ to produce a complex understanding of how Muslim women do activism and politics (Collins, 1999, 2000; Esposito and Evan-Winters, 2022). Space is often overlooked as an important facet of these women’s intersectionality; therefore, I use the lens of intersectionality and the work of critical race theorist, Nirmal Puwar (2004) to discuss Muslim women’s political activism in activist and political spaces (including charities and organisations, local, national and global politics). Using space invaders and intersectionality as my theoretical and conceptual framework enabled me to capture the plural and intersectional identities and experiences of Muslim women activists who face the combined effects of gender, race/ethnicity and I argue, religion as well as other intersecting identities and gendered Islamophobia which renders them ‘space invaders’ in activist and political spaces. These are discussed in the empirical chapters (4-6) of this thesis. Below I describe my own positionality and reflexivity before I discuss the planning and data collection and analysis stages of the research.

A Muslim woman’s positioning and reflexivity

Being a female Muslim researcher, having previously worked with Muslim girls and women in various settings for over 20 years (youthwork, community development, action research and women’s projects) and now researching Muslim women enabled me to explore the multiple facets of my own identity and adopt reflexivity, a continual reflection process that

is important in intersectionality (see below). I am a visible British Muslim woman from an ethnic minority background who grew up in London with a large Muslim community, who studied and worked in London observing the many opportunities and discrimination faced by Muslim women. I was involved in student politics during my college years however, I did not continue with politics beyond my college years but, I maintained a keen interest in Muslim women's activism. I was simultaneously an insider and outsider to the researched community of female Muslim political activists, and I was conscious of and understood my positionality and status from the outset of the research process.

The role of the researcher is important in qualitative research as the researcher's identity, values and beliefs cannot be entirely divorced from the research process as "no research is ever free from the influence of the researcher(s)" (Denscombe, 2017: 329). However, this should not be seen as a limitation as a researcher may have 'privileged insight' into social issues and may be able to grasp the significance of different factors, for example, gender or race inequalities (Denscombe, 2017; Harding, 1997, 2012). What is imperative in qualitative research is the acknowledgement of the role of the researcher's self in the production and analysis of qualitative data which means the researcher needs to take a reflexive and open-minded approach to demonstrate how their personal experiences and values might influence the research (positively or negatively) and how they have addressed the issue of objectivity (Bryman, 2016; Denscombe, 2017). But what does reflexivity mean? A reflexive characteristic implies that the researcher understands that they are part of the social world that they are investigating, therefore, how they understand data and their collection is important as "to be reflexive is to have an ongoing conversation with yourself" (Lune and Berg, 2017: 131). This "continual reflection process is known as reflexivity" (Esposito and Evan-Winters, 2022: 84), something I did throughout the research process. However, one can have a conversation with oneself and not be reflexive, therefore, it was important for me to learn from the process and implement any changes (as and when necessary).

As a self-reflective researcher, I thought about my own situated and embodied knowledge and how I needed to pay close attention to the data collection process and the power dynamics involved in the research process: how I gain access, engender trust, and develop rapport with my participants. In a previous community research study that I was involved in,

the community researchers realised that sharing a similar gender, racial and religious identity did not automatically guarantee access and entry to research participants as they felt information will be shared with other community members and/or the authorities. Hence, transparency was an important part of my research process. Ahmad (2020) speaks about writing about Muslim South Asian women from a position of ‘outsider’ (working in academia even with the acknowledgment of the marginalised position) and writing as an ‘insider’. Ahmad argues that the ‘insider’ status of being a researcher presents “more complex methodological, ethical and political tensions” (2020: 44). This is something I was acutely aware of, being a British Muslim woman in London. Several participants attest that it is always the same women who get requests to participate in research. Hence, I tried to get a broad spectrum of British Muslim women activists for this study, from those involved in informal and community activism and politics (charities and voluntary organisations) to those involved in party politics and international campaigns. As Esposito and Evan-Winters (2022) suggest in their book, the initial contact is important. I found that I had to rely on my own personal and professional connections to make the initial contact with Muslim women activists and the snowball technique to gain access to a wider group of women (discussed below). I had to introduce myself as a British Muslim woman to the participants and explain the research aims, confidentiality and ethics via email and then again at the start of each interview and discussion to gain trust.

To understand the issues of researching your own community as an insider and an outsider, I relied on my previous knowledge and experience and re-read Ahmad’s (2020) article. This developed my interest in the history of Muslim women as I delved into learning more about the topic. However, I was reassured and put at ease when participants said they wanted to be part of the study because they wanted to give an alternative story to ‘what was out there’ and provide an ‘authentic’ picture of Muslim women doing political activism despite the barriers and negative stereotypes and mis-representation of Muslim women in the media and the wider community. The research process has been influenced by my own positionality in relation to my gender, religion, age, and ethnic minority status – these provided access to and recruitment of Muslim women activists as I shared important identity aspects with interviewees. My connection to the local communities in London and knowledge of Muslim women’s work and networks supported the snowballing recruitment

technique. I was treated like an insider because of our shared gender, religion (faith) and ethnic minority status but at the same time, I was the researcher and an outsider as I didn't know any of the women on a personal level and I wasn't involved in doing politics. Thus, being an insider (having the same marginalised standpoint as the participants) facilitated access and recruitment of Muslim women as well as providing a more relaxed, conversational interview where the women felt comfortable in sharing examples of discriminations they faced in their journey as political activists. However, I was also seen as an outsider as I did not share the same ethnic minority status with all of the participants e.g., Black Muslim, White English converts.

I strongly believe my 'insider' knowledge and status were beneficial to the research process, as I was able to understand the significance and intricacies of Islam and the different axes of differences/discriminations as it impacts Muslim women. Participants felt at ease to share their issues and concerns around barriers and enablers to political activism as they felt heard and understood. But I was also an 'outsider', as I was not 'politically active' or involved in these 'activist and political' spaces as occupied by these women, and this also proved to be advantageous. My role and approach as a qualitative researcher were made clear from the beginning of my initial contact, at the start, during and at the end of the data collection process. As a British Muslim woman, my positionality and status on the surface seemed to be the same as these women however, British Muslim women are not a homogeneous group: they are diverse in many ways including ethnic, education and professional backgrounds as well as diverse in the way they carry out their political activism.

The following sections of this chapter outline the methodological considerations that I have contemplated in the different stages of the research data process, from networking, recruitment of participants to data collection and data analysis.

Figure 3.1 below shows the qualitative data process that I undertook for this research which I will now explain in subsequent sections.

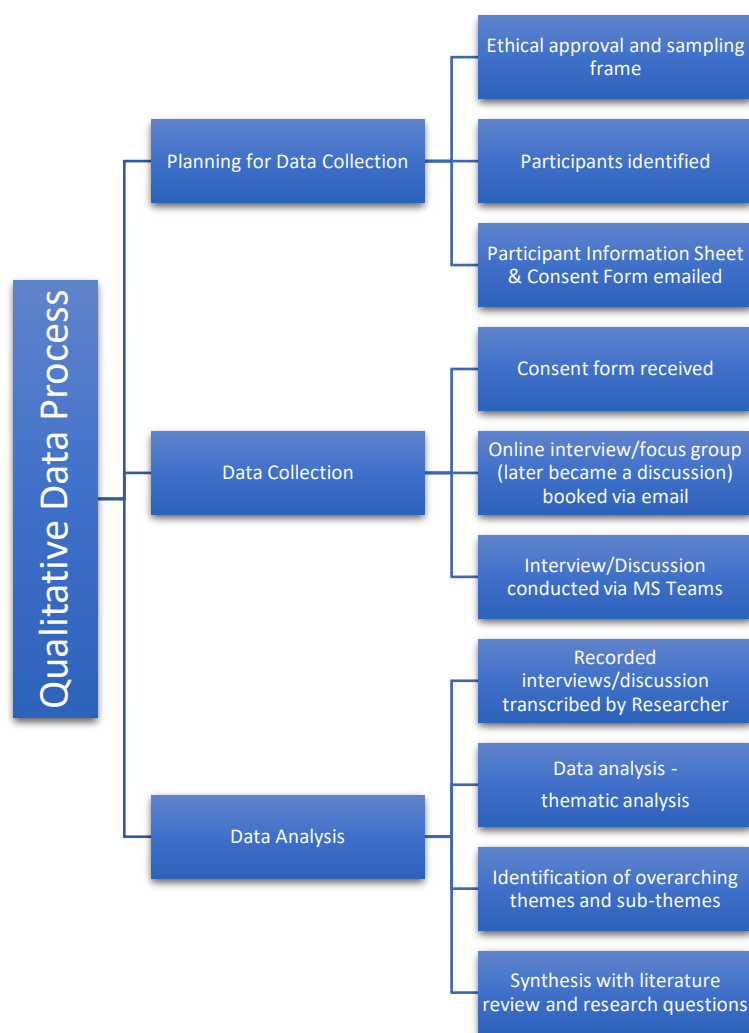


Figure 3.1: The Qualitative Data Process

Planning for Data Collection

My initial research plan changed because of Covid-19 pandemic which placed restrictions on movements during the lockdowns in 2020 and early 2021. Birmingham City University (BCU) in line with the government also placed restrictions on carrying out face-to face research fieldwork. Consequently, I changed and updated my research plan for the ethics committee to include online interviews and focus groups. Due to a number of factors, the focus groups did not take place however, a discussion between two participants took place instead. (discussed below).

The recruitment process and sampling frame

As I started to think about my research aims and questions, I started asking myself who I should interview. In my head, I was thinking of speaking to women who were politically active in their local communities and politics (as described above), but at the same time I was thinking about all the different cities in Britain that I would need to visit to interview them. This was at the very beginning of my research journey when I started listing down Muslim women that I heard about, women that were mentioned to me in meetings, networks, and gatherings. I attended a London event celebrating International Women's Day and I made a mental note to attend more Muslim women's activities and events in the coming year as these events would be key to identifying politically active women and gatekeepers. Then we had the first Covid-19 pandemic lockdown and I had to make amendments to my original plan (face-to-face interviews, focus groups and social media analysis). However, I was very optimistic that things would change so I delayed applying for ethical approval but eventually applied for ethical approval to carry out a mix of face-to-face and online interviews and focus groups. All BCU students must apply for ethical approval from BCU's Research Ethics Committee prior to commencing data collection. However, my initial application had to be updated to be in line with the university's policy at the time of the application as all BCU research fieldwork were restricted to online methods as a consequent of Covid-19 pandemic. My data collection methods had to be amended to online interviewing and focus groups via Microsoft Teams (MS Teams), a collaboration and video conferencing platform available to all BCU students. As I had abandoned the idea of observation after the first lockdown, this did not even feature in the application for ethical approval, instead I attended online activities and events organised by Muslim women for Muslim women which took place during International Women's Week (March), during Ramadan and election time in 2021 (April-May) and Islamophobia Awareness Month, also referred to as Islam Awareness Month (November).

The planned focus groups did not happen due to a number of factors including a lack of time (this is explained later). In practical terms, the intended and planned focus groups became a discussion between two women with the interviewer asking questions about their political activism. The discussion could have been called a joint interview however, there were some differences between the two data collection recruitment process. The joint interview was

carried out with the intention that it would be an interview: the two women were co-founders of a newly formed women's network and wanted to share their experiences of setting up their network together rather than separately: they chose to be interviewed together in a joint interview. On the other hand, the discussion was intended to be a focus group discussion however, as it was being planned and organised, it changed from a four-women discussion group to a two women discussion at the last minute. The final two women did not work together but they were briefly aware of each other's work.

I used purposive sampling in a strategic way to create a sample (not a random selection) from an initial list of active Muslim women (sourced from friends, professional contacts, internet) that I revisited and then using my personal and professional network, I contacted several Muslims (men and women) and sought their advice and nomination for participants for the study. Thus, I used both purposive and snowball sampling (discussed in detail below) to build up a reasonable-sized sample (Denscombe, 2016). I emailed them with details about my research including the Participant Information Sheet and Participant Consent Form (see appendix 4 and 5) and requested them to provide contact details including email addresses of other Muslim women activists that I could contact for the research. My list had 95 Muslim women (collected over a period of time), then revised to 72 Muslim women activists as I checked their name and contact details, work/role status, whether they were on social media platforms like Twitter and whether they were involved in activism and/or politics. I emailed these women with information about the research. Figure 3.2 below describes the sampling frame.

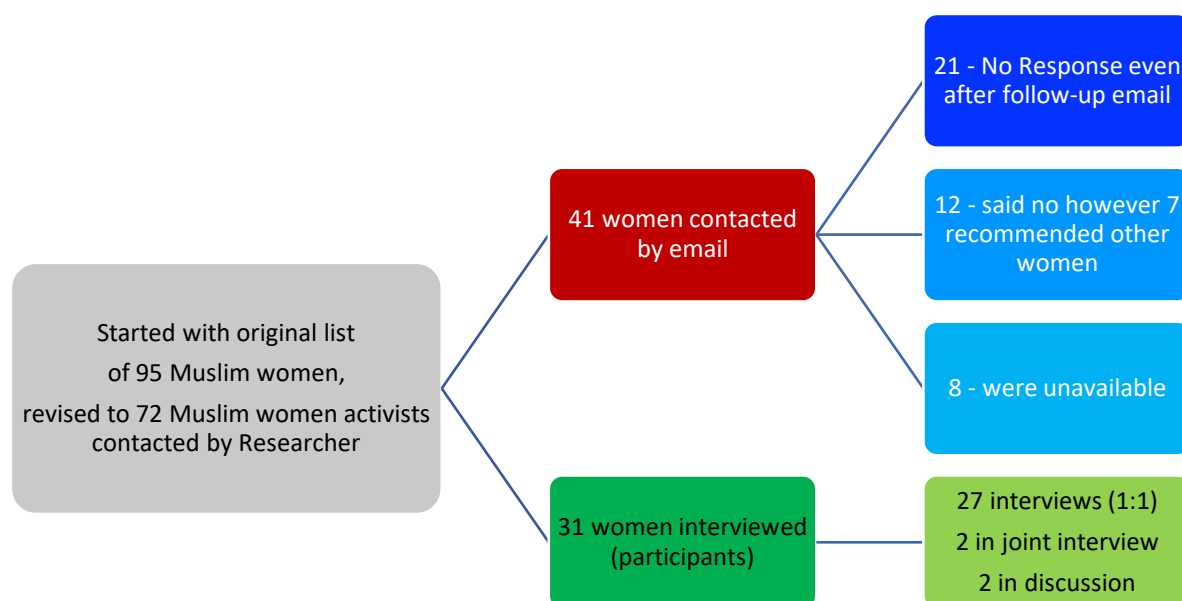


Figure 3.2: The Sampling Frame

Participants were found through my personal and professional network with some located through a quick internet search and recommendations made by my contacts (networks) and other Muslim women and interviewees through the snowball method (thus names were added to the list over a period of time). Recommendations included Muslim women in the public realm, councillors/MPs, community leaders and other known activists in the community or well-known organisations. All participants were emailed a Participant Information Sheet and a Participant Consent Form (see appendix 4 and 5) to read, sign and email back to me and they were asked for referrals to other potential interviewees at the initial stage of contact (via email) and again at the interview stage. Once I received the written consent form, we communicated via email to arrange a suitable date and time for the online interview. The research was explained again at the start of the interviews and discussion and a verbal consent provided before researcher proceeded with the interviews and discussion.

As an insider, I was able to use my own personal and professional networks which proved to be invaluable as they were well connected with the Muslim community through their work in Muslim organisations, mosques, national campaigning groups and women's groups and networks. Additionally, I was able to ask each interviewee for further recommendations.

The idea behind snowballing is that with each individual or gatekeeper or interviewee recommendation, “the sample thus snowballs in size as each of the nominee is asked, in turn, to nominate further persons who might be included in the sample” (Denscombe, 2017: 43; see Giddens and Suttons, 2017). Using my own personal and professional connections and the snowball method as part of the recruitment strategy was key to obtaining access and trust as it gave me access to a specific network of women activists that I might not otherwise have had access to. The lack of response to those I emailed without a recommendation/nominee suggests that the personal connections and snowballing technique worked well.

Purposive and snowball techniques are valid methods of recruiting participants for this type of research as I was interested in speaking to Muslim women who participated in ‘politics’ in the broadest sense of the word, both conventional and unconventional politics. However, I recognise the limitations in using such techniques. Although this approach worked well for my research, I am aware that it is skewed towards more South Asian Muslim women (Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian) even though these groups are also in greater numbers in the UK (see appendix 6 for a breakdown of ethnic groups). However, the research did not seek to be representative as the purpose of the research is to learn more about the topic and allow Muslim women to speak and share their story hence, I chose a qualitative approach and methods for the research. I made a conscious decision to contact women that other women saw as activists rather than using a top-down approach of consulting with political parties and national organisations, I was able to access Muslim women activists who were involved in everyday politics, doing micro, meso and macro activism, which explains the type of activism and politics described in the empirical chapters.

I used purposive which allows a sample to be “hand-picked for the research” based on relevance (issue being studied e.g., political activism/activists in this case) and knowledge (e.g., experience/involvement in activism/politics), thus, I was able to select politicians, community leaders and grassroots campaigners as recommended by my contacts (Denscombe, 2017: 41). I used the snowball technique to get additional nominations from the participants (interviewees). A few participants disclosed how they would not have participated in my research had it not been for the recommendation by my key contacts

and/or interviewees and the research goal of challenging negative stereotypes of Muslim women. Thus, I argue that the research aims of exploring Muslim women's political activism through obtaining access and trust via purposive and snowball methods worked well for this research.

Summary of participants

I interviewed thirty-one Muslim women aged between 23 and 75 years old who self-identified as a British Muslim woman and participated in some form of political activism (described as participating in a range of informal, community and political activism which included online activism, campaigning, blogging, volunteering, community work/organising, and political roles and office). They came from different cities in the UK including London, Birmingham, Manchester, Glasgow as well as smaller ones like Kent, Surrey and Luton (see appendix 6 for a breakdown of geographical locations). The participants were a heterogeneous group of Muslim women varied in terms of their age, educational and professional background, ethnicity, and family settings. Some of the Muslim women in this research can be considered as formal leaders (those with a named position within a group) and informal leaders (those without a position but are important influencers and connectors) as identified by Emejulu and Bassel in their work on the politics of exhaustion (2020: 2). Almost all participants have been educated in Britain (at least secondary education) and majority are educated to degree level (a few have completed their masters; one has completed her PhD, and another is currently doing her PhD, and one is doing her bar). One participant is currently studying for her degree via Open University, two others are considering starting their degree in the next academic year.

All participants work, either full time or part-time in addition to doing voluntary work that includes their activism. Some are studying whilst working. Occupation ranges from being a politician, working in education, health, and campaigning organisations as well as local charities and volunteer-led organisations. They are also involved in their local communities, through local mosques, women's networks, inter-faith and various campaigns. Eighteen participants mentioned setting up their own project, network, or organisation with most of these working with and for Muslim women. Sixteen participants are involved in organisations at the board level as Board members or Trustee or steering group members,

this excludes the politicians (in total 22 with politicians). All participants have been involved in voluntary work and cultural politics such as activities, events and seminars organised by their mosques, local charities and organisations (Joly and Wadia, 2017). All participants said they have a social media account (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram), some use it more regularly than others. Twenty participants have delivered a speech/talk online (on various topics) to an audience (mainly during Covid-19). At least twelve participants have written for an online audience (they are a writer, academic, researcher, blogger or presenter). Some participants were vocal and visible (in public life) like the politicians and community leaders, others were only vocal in their own networks or work circles (professional and private networks). Some were widely known for their activism and politics, but others were only known for their activism in their local community and not known to people outside their community and networks.

Table 3A (presented below) provides a summary of research participants who were selected according to two main criteria: their self-identification as a Muslim woman (18+ adult) and involvement in political activism. The names used are pseudonyms to respect the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants interviewed as some participants did not give permission to use their names as they are well-known in their local communities and politics. After careful consideration, all participants were given pseudonyms to protect the identities of those who did not want to be identified due to their public and political roles. This had a knock-on impact on the social media analysis that I had originally planned but could not carry out (discussed below).

Table 3A (see below) also identifies the women's main type of activism, whether it is micro (local grassroots and individual), meso (national groups and organisations) or macro (international) activism (Jolly et al, 2021). However, it should be noted that participants can be involved at one, two or all three types of activism as they are involved in one or more type of organisations (charities, grassroots and volunteer-led organisations, campaigning groups and networks, public bodies/organisations including the NHS and local authorities). The six politicians were also members of a political party and participated in various networks, groups and organisations.

Table 3A: Summary of Research Participants

Interviewee (n=31)

No.	Pseudonym	MAIN TYPE OF POLITICAL ACTIVISM - micro, meso or macro type of activism?	Age Group	Description of political activism Focus: Issues, Causes and Organisations involved in
1.	Adila	All three types of activism	Early 50's	Researcher and Human Rights Activist Involved in research, writing and advocacy on human rights and Islamophobia including global issues such as Palestine. Sits on various boards. Co-founded own organisation.
2.	Aiza	All three types of activism	Late 30's	Politician and Campaigner Works at the local and national level (and vocal online) on women's rights, Islamophobia, child poverty and food security (e.g., set up food bank and mutual aid during Covid-19). Set up own project.
3.	Bilqis	Micro	Late 40's	Politician and Campaigner Works at a local level (and vocal online). Campaigns and writes on various issues including women's rights, environment and housing.
4.	Bina	Micro and Meso	Early 40's	Social Media Activist Works as a manager. Involved in social justice, women and children rights. Sits on various boards. Set up own network.
5.	Fabiha	Micro and Meso	Early 30's	Researcher and Social Media Activist Involved in research and writing on ethnic minorities, leads on grassroots campaigns on social justice and vocal online. Set up grassroots organisation.
6.	Fahima	Micro and Meso	Mid-20's	Community Activist (and Social Media Activist) Involved in community organising, training and various community campaigns (e.g., living wage and housing).
7.	Farah	Micro	Mid-20's	Grassroots Activist Works for a public body. Campaigns on Muslim women's rights. Set up grassroots project.
8.	Fozia	All three types of activism	Late 40's	Women's Rights Activist (also seen as a Community Leader) Works with groups and organisations on women's rights, inter-faith, hate crimes (including Islamophobia and misogyny). Involved with mosques and women's networks and sits on various boards.

				Set up own organisation.
9.	Hafsa	Micro	Late 20's	Grassroots Activist Involved at the local level (and vocal online) with grassroots organisations and campaigns on housing, policing and minority rights. Involved in setting up a grassroots organisation.
10.	Hana	Macro	Mid-70's	Environmental Activist Involved in environmental and climate change issues and women's rights. Sits on various boards.
11.	Jabeen	Micro	Late 40's	Grassroots Activist Involved at the local level (and vocal online). Works for a local charity and organises campaigning. Sits on various boards.
12.	Karima	All three types of activism	Mid-40's	Politician and Campaigner Involved at a local level (and vocal online) on various issues including women's rights, environment and climate change, structural racism and Islamophobia.
13.	Leena	Micro and Meso	Late 40's	Women's Rights Activist (and Public Speaker) Involved with women's groups, inter-faith projects, local charities and campaigns on women's rights and social justice issues. Vocal online and sits on various boards. Set up several campaigns, projects, and organisations.
14.	Leyla	Micro	Mid-30's	Politician and Campaigner Works at a local level (and vocal online) on housing, education and child poverty and food security (e.g., set up mutual aid during Covid-19). Set up project.
15.	Madiha	Micro and Macro	Late 30's	Social Media Activist (and Women's Rights Activist) Works for public body and vocal on social media on women's rights, racism and feminism. Set up own project.
16.	Maryam	All three types of activism	Early 20's	Women's Rights Activist and Climate Change Activist Involved in women's rights, climate change and other social justice issues.
17.	Papia	All three types of activism	Early 30's	Politician and Campaigner Works at the local and national level (and vocal online) on women's rights, Islamophobia, housing, child poverty and education.
18.	Rabia	Micro and Meso	Early 40's	Women's Rights Activist Works at a local level on women's rights, education and training and inter-faith issues with local mosques. Sits on various boards.

19.	Rahma	Meso	Mid-40's	Community Activist Involved with charities, mosques and Muslim organisations. Campaigns on various issues affecting Muslims (e.g., racism, Islamophobia and women's rights). Sits on various boards. Set up own project
20.	Ruby	Micro and Meso	Late 30's	Grassroots Activist (and Campaigner) Works for a charity. Involved with a national campaigning organisation and works with local schools and charities to campaign on education, housing, and health issues. Sits on various boards.
21.	Ruksana	Micro	Mid-40's	Grassroots Campaigner, Community Activist Works for a public body. Involved at the local level (and vocal online) on various campaigns including housing, health and poverty. Sits on various (local) boards.
22.	Sadaf	Micro	Early 50's	Community Activist Involved at a local level, works with local Muslim organisations, mosques and charities on women's rights, inter-faith, and cultural events.
23.	Sadia	Micro and Meso	Mid-40's	Politician and Campaigner Works at a local and national level (and vocal online) on women's rights, housing, education and poverty.
24.	Safura	Micro and Meso	Early 40's	Community Activist (also seen as a Community Leader) Works for a charity. Involved with women's rights, housing, education and child poverty and food security issues (e.g., organised and run a food bank during Covid-19). Sits on various boards. Set up own organisation.
25.	Sana	Meso	Early 40's	Women Right's Activist Works for a public body. Involved with groups and organisations on women's rights, health and employment issues. Set up a network for professional Muslim women.
26.	Shakira	Micro and Meso	Early 40's	Women's Rights Activist Works at the local level (and vocal online) and involved with mosques, organisations and charities on various campaigns including women's rights and health issues. Sits on various boards. Set up own project.
27.	Shazia	Meso	*	Women Right's Activist Works for a public body. Involved with groups and organisations on women's rights, health and employment issues. Set up a network for professional Muslim women.

28.	Sophia	Meso and Macro	Early 30's	Human Rights Activist Involved with Muslim organisations and campaigns on human rights and social justice issues.
29.	Tahira	Micro and Macro	Mid-20's	Grassroots Activist (involved in humanitarian aid) Works with grassroots organisations and international humanitarian aid charities. Involved with environment, social justice and human rights issues. Sits on various boards. Set up own grassroots organisation.
30.	Tauhida	Micro	Late 20's	Community Activist Works in a charity. Involved at the local level (and vocal online) in women's rights, child poverty and food security (e.g., organised care packages for vulnerable women and children during Covid-19). Set up own organisation.
31.	Zahra	Micro and Meso	Early 40's	Community Activist Works in the private sector. Involved with a local Muslim women's organisation (Chair) and sits on various boards. Set up own organisation.

*Did not want to give her age.

In the next section, I discuss the data collection and analysis tools used in the research and the merits and limitations of each tool.

Data collection and analysis

I selected semi-structured interviews and focus groups (online) as my primary data collection methods however, the focus group became a discussion between two women as explained above. The tools were selected for the following purposes:

- To provide first-hand accounts of politically active British Muslim women's experiences and personal encounters (to share and amplify their voices)
- To explore how Muslim women engage and participate in political activism, whether it is micro, meso or macro type of activism and/or politics
- To provide a space to engage and connect with other like-minded women through discussions (the focus groups did not materialise due to a number of factors as mentioned above and described below).

The research planned to use social media analysis of Twitter and Facebook to explore Muslim women's (participants) engagement with social media platforms, particularly how they carry out political activism online and what campaigns they participate in and how they galvanise support for their campaigns. However, this did not go ahead when some participants did not give permission to use their names. This meant I could not use their social media platforms to collect further information about their activism and politics. I took a conscious decision to use pseudonyms for all participants in order to protect the few who did not give their permission to use their names as they did not want to be identified. Consequently, I excluded the social media aspect of my research and focused on obtaining information through interviews and a discussion. However, through exploring participants' activism in these interviews and discussion, I was able to explore how they used social media for their activism and politics without revealing their identity. Additionally, I managed to carry out data and methodological triangulation by attending online activities and events that participants invited me to which included online activities and events they organised or delivered a talk or presentation at (Esposito and Evans-Winter, 2022: 154). In hindsight, I could have carried out social media analysis of other Muslim women who did not participate in the interviews or discussion, however, time and resources did not allow for this at the time.

Figure 3.3 shows a breakdown of the qualitative methods used to collect data from Muslim women during the period March to September 2021.

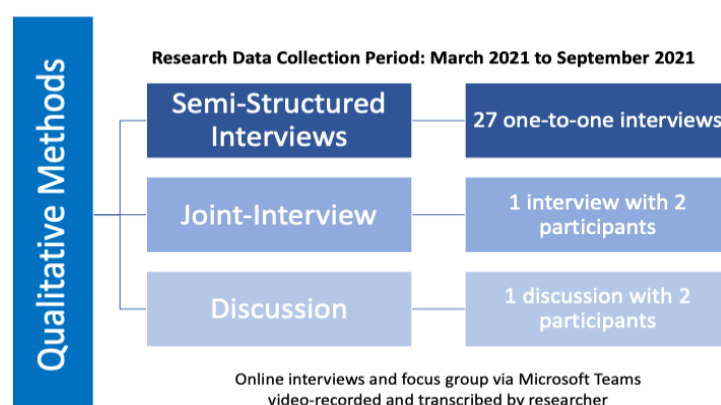


Figure 3.3: A breakdown of qualitative methods

Interviews

Qualitative researchers use interviews (structured, semi-structured and unstructured) “to better understand how the participant thinks or feels” about a particular phenomenon through asking “a set of questions to come to an understanding about how a person’s shared experiences have shaped their opinion and beliefs” (Esposito and Evan-Winters, 2022: 88). Thus, I prepared a list of open-ended questions as an interview guide (see appendix 2 for the interview schedule) which became a ‘loose guide’ offering flexibility for me (the researcher) to observe, probe and ask additional questions if and when needed (Esposito and Evan-Winters, 2022:89) and enabling interviewees to develop ideas and speak more widely on the topic and allowing me to develop and change through the course of the interview (Descombe, 2017). Thus, semi-structured interviewing can help the researcher keep an open mind as it offers flexibility (Bryman, 2016). One-to-one interviews is a common form of interview as it is relatively easy to arrange two people’s diaries rather than a group of participants (this was undeniably the case with my interviewees). It is much easier to transcribe a recorded one-to one interview than a discussion between two people (as I found at the transcribing stage).

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the lack of time and availability for the online interviews as most of the participants were politically active, working and volunteering and doing extra hours during the lockdowns (e.g., getting involved in food banks, mutual aids and campaigning for various causes). Others were involved in politics and were busy running campaigns for election and re-election in 2021 (e.g., one of the women interviewed was later elected as a Councillor in the 2021 election). For example, a female MP could not participate in the research as she was busy campaigning/canvassing. She responded months after the initial contact and apologised that she could not do the interview. Similarly, another activist was busy delivering online discussions and seminars on women’s rights and Islamophobia and could not arrange a suitable time for an interview. Some participants also mentioned feeling exhausted during the pandemic as they were doing additional volunteering in food banks, mutual aid and campaigning work (as discussed in chapter four). This is similar to the exhaustion felt by minority women doing ‘meaningful work’ (Emejulu and Bassel, 2021: 1). Therefore, one of the challenges during Covid-19 pandemic was the lack of time and availability for the online interviews (and online discussion – see below).

One of the key benefits of using online interviews (and an online discussion) during the Covid-19 pandemic was the accessibility to online videos and conferencing tools as Muslim women (like other people and families) were already using online tools such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams to stay in touch with family, friends and colleagues (and schools) during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns as restrictions were placed on face-to-face meetings. This meant participants were already familiar with using Microsoft Teams and other apps for communication, hence it was easier to set up and use online interviews with the women (it would have been very different if they did not know how to use online tools). As discussed in the empirical chapters, Muslim women also turned to social media platforms including WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram online methods as communication and campaigning tools.

Another benefit for the women doing online interviews (and an online discussion) was the ease and comfort of being interviewed virtually from home. Women who may not have been able to do the interview due to their location, childcare responsibilities or other family issues meant they could be interviewed at a convenient time from the comfort of their home. Online interviews/discussion also saved time and money on logistics (planning, booking venues and transport) and travel to different geographical locations to interview women. However, online interviews/discussion also brought up additional issues around confidentiality as interviews were booked at times when the women were able to ensure they were alone in the house (when children were at school) or have a room to themselves, away from family members so that they had a safe space to talk openly and freely online. If the topic of discussion was of a more sensitive nature (i.e. violence against women or intimate relationships) than online interviews (or discussion) might not have been appropriate. However, participants found the topic of discussion (i.e. political activism) appropriate for an online interview/discussion (at the time of the pandemic) with a few commenting this was a better option than a face-to face interview/discussion. A few interviews took place where participants had their young children around. For example, one woman was keen to do the interview and breastfed her child during the interview, keeping them close to her meant less distractions. According to her, this was a benefit of doing online interviews.

One of the key challenges of using online methods is the reliance on technology. You can be well prepared to run your interview (or discussion) but on the day of the interview, before, during and after the interview, you can have technical issues. Fortunately, the majority of online interviews went well however, one interview had to be rescheduled due to internet issues (this interview could not even start). Another interview could not be completed due to internet issues however, the participant kindly offered to finish the interview the next day. Despite these issues, the online interviews went really well.

Discussion

Initially the plan was to carry out two focus groups, one at the start of the data collection and one at the end, however, this did not plan out as focus groups consists of small groups of people brought together by a moderator/researcher to explore attitudes, perceptions, feelings and ideas about a specific topic (e.g., political activism) (Denscombe, 2017). I found it difficult to organise a focus group (online) at the start of the data collection process as the women were extremely busy during Covid-19 pandemic (as mentioned above) even though it was a virtual meeting, and participants did not have to travel to a venue for the discussion. As explained earlier, the plan to set up a focus group and carry out a focused discussion with more than two women did not transpire. In its place, the data collection process which started as a focus group recruitment process resulted in a discussion with two women primarily involved with grassroots and community activism. The actual process of setting up this discussion was very similar to setting up the one-to-one interviews, as they were both carried out online: the difference between getting one person versus a group of women activists together for a virtual meeting. The online (virtual) 'discussion' saved money and time as I did not have the additional task of paying for room hire, refreshments, travel and childcare expenses. However, I managed to organise a discussion with four participants but only two participants at the end could make the final date and time, making it more of a dyadic interview, which worked well in practice (see appendix 3 for the discussion questions). Hence, the change from a focus group to a discussion between two women.

With only two participants in the discussion, it was easy to facilitate the discussion and build trust and rapport with both participants and get an insight into their activism as they both

felt comfortable with each other as they briefly knew each other's activism and made their decision based on this. Confidentiality is key in a discussion especially when discussing sensitive (personal) and political issues within a group setting, however, the participants said they enjoyed the opportunity to share their experiences as they do not often have the time or space to discuss their activism. Ideally it would have been better to have more participants in the discussion however, it might have proved to be more challenging to facilitate and transcribe a group discussion, nonetheless, it worked well with the two women who were able to discuss different grassroots campaigning and provide interesting examples of their activism. This also meant the questions were similar to the interview questions despite planning for fewer discussion questions for the intended focus group. Despite the change to a two women discussion, the questions facilitated the discussion and enabled further exploration of the concept of political activism in its different forms: micro, meso and macro activism and allowed extra time for the two women to share some interesting examples from their own activism.

Data Analysis

My chosen methods amassed a huge amount of data and this 'voluminous' amount of data made the transcribing process long and time-consuming, and at times 'overwhelming' (Patton, 1987 in Esposito and Evan-Winters, 2022). However, being organised and having them all stored electronically in a password protected BCU's system ensured that it was safe, and I had access to it when I needed it. I found it very beneficial to go back and forth to the transcriptions to clarify and remember the quotes and examples provided by the women and link them to the original research questions (see the chapter on introduction). It enabled me to get "close to the data" and "brings the talk to life again" which kept my interest and motivation going during times of PhD loneliness and became a constant reminder about one of my research's aims: to challenge mainstream media and political representation of British Muslim women by giving these women a voice and sharing their political activism stories with the research community (Denscombe, 2017: 307).

The interviews and discussion were transcribed with section numbering rather than 'line numbering' to make it easier to identify the section of the transcription as I found line numbering too distracting (Denscombe, 2017: 308). Data analysis was done using Microsoft

Word. Other IT packages were considered for data analysis including Nvivo, but it was decided and agreed by the supervision team that due to the small sample size, it would be easier to use the tried and tested Word or Excel for data analysis. During the analysis, I found it easier to work on Word therefore I did not use Excel for data analysis. In terms of the data analysis, I tried where possible to use quotations that answered the research questions (these are mentioned in the introduction chapter). This aided the data analysis process, as it also meant revising the way I structured the empirical chapters which guided the thematic data analysis process.

A thematic data analysis approach is a useful method to analyse qualitative data such as interview transcripts where the researcher closely examines the data to identify common themes – topics, ideas, and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly. It is a method for identifying, analysing, organising, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set. The data analysis stage included: preparing the data, cataloguing the text, transcribing the text, and carrying out initial exploration of texts before the analysis (coding, categorising, comparing) is carried out (Denscombe, 2017). Data is then interpreted and presented by illustrating points by quotes. By relating themes to my research focus and questions, I was able to identify themes (categories) within and across cases that provided understanding of Muslim women's political activism and related issues thus, I was able to compare data sources (cases) to draw out 'themes', and how and why certain themes were repeatedly mentioned. When searching for themes, I looked for repetitions, similarities and differences, expressions used by the women that related to research focus and questions as well as theory-related materials (Bryman, 2017; Esposito and Evan-Winters, 2022). For example, I was able to ask questions about the theory of 'space invaders' - did it build on the theory of Puwar's (2004) *Space Invaders*? Did it reflect the work of Joly and Wadia (2017) and Easat-Daas (2020) on political participation? Was it any different? Was the work of Mahmood's *Politics of Piety* relevant to these women? and so on.

The thematic analysis allowed me to take an intersectional approach to analyse the data. It looks how themes that emerged as relevant, similar, and different across cases, and how these linked into the research focus with respect to their gender, religion, ethnic minority status and other intersectional issues. This process ensured that I analysed the data in a

systematic and rigorous way as the data analysis is based on the actual data from the interviews and discussion transcripts and relates to the research focus, questions, and approach. For example, under each theme (e.g., barriers), I had sub-themes (sexism and Islamophobia) and within each sub-theme I had words and quotes by participants. Hence, this analytical approach provided a rich and detailed analysis, driven by the data and could not have been specified in advance. For example, I did not expect the number of times the participants spoke about gendered Islamophobia.

Esposito and Evan-Winters make a distinction between interpretation and analysis, that interpretation is when you develop ideas about findings and relate to the literature whereas analysis involved organising data and thus, I found that I was doing these activities in ‘sync with each other’ (2022: 113). As I conducted the online interviews and discussion, I took handwritten notes, jotting things down and used my handwritten notes to look at the preliminary findings and then looked at all the data once the transcriptions had been completed. The process of analysis felt like it was iterative (cyclical) and emerging like the data collection process.

Several authors describe ‘memos’ or ‘memoing’ which is “capturing your thoughts about the data as you press forward to develop larger arguments” (Esposito and Evan-Winters, 2022: 139; Bryman, 2017). I did this in the form of comments and notes in my diary and notebooks (some typed up as notes). However, these were my personal notes and reflections as a researcher, looking at the process of research including data collection and analysis. In the final section before my conclusion, I reflect on some of the ethical consideration and practical measures that I undertook for the research.

Ethical and practical considerations

Several ethical issues (including limitations of using interviews and discussion have already been identified and considered in the above sections however, doing research in a pandemic (Covid-19) also required considerable thought about ethics and practicalities. I strongly believe that ethical considerations should start with the research aim and questions. With the Covid-19 pandemic, it was important to think about ethical and practical considerations including the question, how can my research be done in a way that

doesn't impact negatively on British Muslim women who may have other important issues and worries to deal with during the pandemic including how Covid-19 disproportionately impacts people from BAME and migrant communities. For example, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) data shows that BAME people are nearly twice as likely to die of Covid-19 than white people (ONS, 2021). A great number of families lost their loved ones, and many people were worried about their health, income, housing and future security during this period of austerity. This meant that the research process had to continuously consider ethical issues and the impact of the pandemic (including the lockdown) on the whole research process (from research questions, recruitment, sampling to data collection tools and analysis) including the impact on Muslim women's political activism. Questions about Covid-19, Black Lives Matter (BLM) and other significant campaigns that affected the mood of the nation was explored in the interviews and discussion.

Ethical approval was sought and given by BCU's Ethics Committee before data collection commenced. I was aware of my ethical obligations having considered both BCU's Ethics Committee standards and the British Sociological Association (BSA) guidelines on research (see BSA, 2017a, BSA, 2017b, BSA, 2017c). The research process abided by the ethical principles of Maximised Benefit, Minimised Harm, Informed Consent, Fairness, and Safety Issues for the researcher. The researcher developed the Participant Information Sheet (see appendix 4) and Consent form (see appendix 5) in line with BCU's guidelines and ensured privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality throughout the research process (these are included in the appendices section of the thesis). The research ensured that 'opt-in' informed consent was sought at the beginning and through-out the research data collection process to allow voluntary participation in the research. The researcher ensured the University's guidelines were followed and ensured that privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality remained important throughout the research process.

By communicating with the women prior to the interview and discussion, I developed trust and rapport during the interviews and discussion. Participants were asked open-ended questions to capture participants' experiences which is a strength of semi-structured interviews where the interview can run like a conversation, but it still allows the researcher to manage the interview and capture key research factors as the interview is guided by key

questions based on the research interests and goals. Similarly, the open-ended questions facilitated the discussion enabling the two women to have a more conversational and personal discussion based on their own experiences of political activism. Hence, the interviews and the discussion resembled conversations with mutual discussion where I frequently found myself laughing with participants however, I was aware of my position as interviewer (and they were too) and was careful not to make leading comments. As mentioned earlier, all interviews and the discussion were video-recorded and then fully transcribed by the researcher to ensure valuable information was not lost or taken out of context. This demonstrates the strength of using online interviews and an online discussion.

The recorded videos allowed me to go back, check and transcribe the interviews and discussion however, this process is very time-consuming (and there is no template for video analysis) therefore I focused more on transcribing the words rather than the interaction on video (two of my participants did not have their video camera on). However, the recordings were available to check and confirm understanding, thus increasing the validity of statements made by the women. I was able to manage the data generated by the online interviews and discussion by abiding by BCU's data collection and storage facilities and electronically manage the wealth of data. It also meant that I could return to each full video-recording and associated transcriptions. As I interviewed participants, I made hand-written notes which proved helpful when I needed to check and clarify a particular point. It would have been easier to transcribe selected parts of the interview and/or discussion however, as I had started to transcribe as and when I did the interviews, I continued with the full transcriptions for each interview and discussion.

As a Muslim woman I had existing knowledge of local Muslim women's groups and organisations including spaces where Muslim women got together to chat, celebrate, and network which proved to be useful when I was trying to select women for the research. At the time, I thought it would have been ideal to capture these networks, campaigns, and politics through some observation (ethnographic approach) however, it soon became apparent that this approach would not have been suitable due to several factors including lack of time and resources, the pandemic restrictions and limited access to sensitive nature of political activism as well as other practical issues like travel costs. However, having prior

knowledge and understanding of local communities and women networks in London enabled me to access many online activities and events that went online due to Covid-19 pandemic. Given the ethical and practical considerations, qualitative online interviews and discussion were the most appropriate methods for this research.

Conclusion

Conducting this research during the Covid-19 pandemic was an experience that I will not forget as it has been an inspiring and reflective process to engage with and listen to the women who are inspired by their religion (faith) to participate in their local community, local, national and global politics at a time of a world crisis. It was a difficult and lengthy process but an opportunity to 'visibilise Muslim women and build up-to-date knowledge about them' (Joly and Wadia, 2017: 24) and to 'present a view of Muslim women by Muslim women' (Easat-Daas, 2020: 14) during the pandemic. The women's voices have been central to my research as one of the aims of the research is to allow Muslim women to speak as their voices and stories are often 'absent' from popular discourses (Easat-Daas, 2020: 14) and 'ignored where politics is concerned' (Joly and Wadia, 2017: 2). In this chapter, I have explained my research design, the process of recruitment (sampling) and the methodology and methods as well as some of the key ethical and practical considerations that I had to make in the process of collecting and analysing data from Muslim women who carry out faith-inspired activism.

I have explained why I chose a qualitative approach for my research and 'space invaders' (Puwar, 2004) and intersectionality (Esposito and Evan-Winters, 2022) to frame my research to provide an insight into the lived experiences, opinions, and activities of the researched group of Muslim women political activists. I described the research process including my insider and outsider status as a researcher (my positionality and reflexivity) and explained how I selected and recruited thirty-one participants using purposive and snowball sampling methods during Covid-19 pandemic. I provided a summary of the participants and highlighted some of the merits and limitations of each method (online interviews and discussion) and explained the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the research strategy, process, and methods by considering ethical and practical issues related to data collection, management and transcription. I conclude that qualitative online interviews and discussion

were the most appropriate methods of data collection given the ethical and practical considerations of this research during a pandemic.

Using a qualitative approach and drawing upon a range of theoretical and empirical literature to explore the socio-political and religious aspects of Muslim women's political activism proved to be a good choice for this research as it captured the experiences of Muslim women activists during Covid-19 pandemic and their understanding of faith-inspired activism (as explored in later chapters). In this research, the women have been given a pseudonym to ensure the privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of all participants, however, they are given a voice in this research rather than the usual religious institutions, the mosques or Muslim organisations thus fulfilling one of the research project aims to provide an alternative understanding of Muslim women and challenge the dominant stereotypical representation and binary thinking of Muslim women by using a research approach, methodology and methods that benefited the research purpose and answered the research questions. I conclude that my chosen approach to the research and the selected qualitative data collection and data analysis methods proved to be most appropriate for this research.

Chapter Four: Muslim women do micro, meso and macro activism

“I’ve found that I have become more vocal about my moral positions on things”

Madiha, Social Media Activist

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to answer the research question: how do Muslim women engage in political activism? To answer this question, the chapter offers examples from the empirical data that demonstrates the different types and forms of political activism as undertaken by Muslim women in this study.

As Muslim women are increasingly politicised and politically visible post 9/11 and 7/7 (Joly and Wadia, 2017) with the UK and Belgium having the highest numbers of Muslim parliamentarians in Europe (Easat-Daas, 2020), it is important to focus on Muslim women who are politically active in grassroot organisations, local and national politics and global politics. This study corroborates existing studies on Muslim women and political participation as discussed in the literature review chapter. It reminds the reader of the definition of political activism before exploring how Muslim women work individually and collectively, doing micro, meso and macro activism to find solutions to various local and global problems to bring about societal change.

What is political activism?

This research draws upon the broad and inclusive definition of political activism that incorporates both traditional (lobbying elected representatives) and alternative forms of participation (online networking, street protests and consumer boycotts). I define political activism as the activities that people engage with to voice their concerns, support activities and initiatives that aid those in need or challenge structures and practices that marginalises or discriminates against people. This definition captures the actions and intentions of Muslim women in making their voices heard and persuading people of the justice of their causes. I have briefly identified the three types of political activism (micro, meso and macro) in the first chapter, explaining how each type of activism is based on the issues and concerns (causes) that directly or indirectly impacts participants and their communities. For example,

participants do micro activism at the local, grassroots and community level, focusing on issues that directly affects them and their immediate communities for example, participants volunteered for food banks, mutual aid and charities during Covid-19 pandemic. Participants carrying out meso activism engage with national issues of concern (e.g., health, politics, sexism, Islamophobia) through active participation as women's rights campaigners and inter-faith leaders in national groups, organisations and party politics. Participants involved with macro activism show solidarity and allyship on global issues such as climate change and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement by participating in protests and social media awareness building.

In the empirical data chapters, starting with this chapter I focus on how Muslim women engage in political activism (chapter four), why they do political activism (their motivations) and the barriers to their political activism (chapter five) and how they overcome barriers to political activism (chapter six). Therefore, what becomes important in the research study is the focus on 'politicization of the everyday life of ordinary women' (Lee, 2007: 163), which includes broadening politics beyond formal and global institutions to incorporate the "everyday, embodied and informal practices that constitute part of the political" (Finlay and Hopkins, 2019: 1). I expand the definition of the political to include activities in which women are involved (Joly and Wadia, 2017) such as social media awareness raising and how their activism is often linked to community action which can be seen as a moral or ethical agency (Mahmood, 2005) which is explored in the next chapter on motivations.

In the following section, I demonstrate how Muslim women in this study participate in a range of political activism that is grouped under three types of activism: micro (local), meso (national) and macro (international) activism.

Micro activism

Micro activism is when participants get involved in issues that directly affects them or their immediate community, often at the local grassroots and community level. Participants get involved in politics where they meet and discuss local issues and regularly implement their own decisions. Micro activism is often characterised by direct participation and volunteering in the community and/or organisation where they carry out political activities, frequently

through the internet and social media or through everyday politics, trying to make a difference to people's lives or through other public work, organised by a collective of people or a campaign that directly affects them. Participation in micro activism can be a powerful way to gain confidence and deep knowledge of political issues that will enable them to participate in meso (national) and macro (international) activism. Individuals learn techniques and participate in activities that form their perceptions, desires and judgements about the world they inhabit therefore, it focuses on the ways in which power is relayed through everyday practices (everyday politics). Gender, religion, race/ethnicity and other markers of difference (identity) matter for individuals who participate in micro activism as well as the other two types of activism. Below I discuss how participants are involved in micro activism through everyday politics, volunteering, and social media awareness raising (see appendix 1 for the Socrel blog article I wrote on *Faith-inspired, ethically driven Muslim women during the Covid-19 pandemic*).

All participants are involved in everyday politics where they form their perceptions and judgements through their interaction with people, structures and institutions in British society. They are involved in grassroots, community-based organisations, often in response to the negative stereotypes and representations of Muslim women and the misrepresentation of their faith that directly affects them. For example, 26 participants are involved in women's rights campaigns or women's projects; 24 are involved with organisations that run campaigns that directly impacts them; 21 are involved in inter-faith work through their local mosques or involved in seminars and events organised by local grassroots organisations; 11 have helped with foodbanks and mutual aid during the Covid-19 pandemic; 9 are involved in their local mosques. All participants start with micro activism, then with the increased knowledge, confidence and networks they gain from micro activism, they progress to national (meso) and international (macro) activism, focusing on national and global issues that impacts them (discussed below) while at the same time, they remain dedicated to micro activism.

Ruksana, a Grassroots Activist and Jabeen, a Community Activist, describe how they do everyday politics and volunteering through participation in various local campaigns and petitions (health, housing, leisure) as well as community food banks, demonstrations and

social media awareness building. On the other hand, Safura, a Community Leader and Activist recognises the different hats she puts on representing the Muslim community, Muslim women and ethnic minorities in her volunteering roles. For example, she is involved in several forums and a board member of a large housing organisation and a key advisor for her local community. Similarly, Fozia, a local Community Leader and a strong advocate for women's right participates in different forums, working with the police, faith leaders, policy makers, mosques, women's groups and campaigning organisations to tackle issues like misogyny, hate crime, racism and Islamophobia in her local community as well as the wider, British society. She has successfully campaigned with others for changes in a local school, housing policies, living wage and air pollution affecting her local community. However, she states that "a lot of my activism has been around that, encouraging hate crime to be reported, how to keep (Muslim women) safe [and] where to be visible."

Like Fozia, participants challenge issues of inequities and injustices in British society including discrimination against Muslim women (see next chapter), through their work and volunteering roles in the community. However, they recognise that to voice their concerns, support activities and initiatives that aid those in need or challenge structures and practices that marginalises or discriminates against people, they must be active in the three types of activism. For example, Rahma, a Community Activist is involved in her local mosque and works to empower young people and women through information workshops and events (micro activism). However, Rahma also works for a national Muslim organisation which campaigns on various issues impacting the Muslim community in Britain (e.g., Islamophobia) and she is involved in the wider debates on racism and the Black Muslim community in Britain and elsewhere (meso and macro activism). On the other hand, Ruby, a Grassroots Campaigner works with local schools, groups and organisations dealing with youth violence and Islamophobia. However, she volunteers for a national campaigning organisation (not a charity) where she is the current Vice-Chair (and therefore a board member) of the organisation, thus playing a much wider role at the national level (meso activism). As Community Leaders, Politicians and Campaigners, participants are also involved with national or international causes or issues that affects their community, such as racism, Islamophobia and climate change, however, in their quest for equality, justice and fairness, they also participate in food banks, charities and social media awareness building.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, 11 participants volunteered in their local foodbanks, did fundraising and other charity work to help their local community. This included setting up food banks, running community kitchens, mutual aid and organising delivery of food and care packages during the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, Aiza and Leyla, (both politicians and campaigners) set up mutual aid and food banks during the pandemic. Aiza captures her role during the Covid-19 pandemic:

“I set up the mutual aid group, I ran that for like, seven months, full time, running hundreds of volunteers and food distribution and a phone line and getting people's medication and shopping and all of that kind of stuff. And I was the kind of the voice for that. And I was the one leading it. And I saw that other Muslim women across the country were also doing the same.”

Aiza became the spokesperson for her mutual aid group and food bank, and she continued to use her voice to speak out against other injustices (e.g., misogyny and Islamophobia). Other participants also helped out with their local food banks. For example, Safura, with her many hats, set up a community kitchen and managed a group of diverse volunteers to cook and deliver food to vulnerable families in her community. Managing the community kitchen and ensuring food was delivered was an additional volunteering role that she took up during the Covid-19 pandemic. Participants like Bina, a Social Media Activist and Tauhida, a Community Activist used social media to fundraise for Ramadan and Eid care packages and gifts. In addition, Tauhida collaborated with her local food bank and changed her Ramadan care packages to include hygiene essentials like sanitary pads for women who could not afford essential items during the pandemic crises. These participants worked as volunteers and participated in everyday change making (Hussein, 2023) by taking part in critical discussions about the government's lack of economic and welfare support during the Covid-19 pandemic and some were very vocal within their communities and on social media platforms.

Ruby, a Grassroots Activist also volunteered for her local food bank, but she confirms that Muslim women like herself, are very active in their communities, often spearheading charity work like food banks and charity runs in schools, fundraising and leading campaigns to help those in crisis and/or in need (Aiza and other participants alluded to this as well). Ruby cites the example of the Grenfell fire, which she claims is one of the few campaigns that showed a positive image of British Muslims, particularly visibly (hijabi) Muslim women who helped with the food, clothes and money in the aftermath of the tragic fire that killed many people. However, Ruby claims the media and British society at large often see Muslim women in need of saving and a threat (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Easat-Daas, 2020) and consequently, Muslim women participate in ‘grassroots level in social movements, protest politics, informal community groups, voluntary organisations and so on’ (Joly and Wadia, 2017: 125) to counter stereotypes of Muslim women and the multiple discriminations they face (Finlay and Hopkins, 2019).

This section demonstrates how political activism is about the ‘politics of everyday life... the terrain between state and family that is usually ignored in conventional investigations of politics’ (Chowdhury and Nelson in Joly and Wadia, 2017: 4). Participants are also involved in grassroots anti-austerity activism (Bassel and Emejulu, 2018), where they discuss and raise awareness about issues that directly affects them individually and collectively as Muslim women within their immediate community and they do this through local, grassroots and community activities and the internet including various social media platforms.

All participants use the internet and some form of social media (WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (now X), Zoom and other online social meeting platforms) to voice their concerns about local issues (housing, health, women’s safety) and show support to local projects and initiatives (food banks, mutual aid, women’s projects). For example, Adila, a Human Rights Activist and Madiha, a Social Media Activist use writing and micro-blogging to raise awareness of issues they have experienced such as sexism, racism and Islamophobia and show support to local projects and initiatives including their own organisations.

Papia, a Politician and Campaigner uses social media for her activism and politics, and she makes several observations of Muslim women activists: 1) they are using social media platforms more than ever before. She cites the expansion of Muslim Twitter, blogs, websites and online zines (including entrepreneurship, fashion, and other businesses) that were not there 10 years ago; 2) they are politically active on various online platforms including Muslim twitter to have “discussions and debates about politics within the community” and “make sense of our political realities”; 3) they connect with other people (including other Muslim women) who share the same political views and show solidarity and allyship on issues of social justice. Papia depicts a picture of Muslim women (like herself) who engage with the internet and social media to express their political views, discuss and connect with people including other Muslim women where they support each other through direct engagement with issues that matters to them as well as supporting their own political causes (Schuster, 2013). As discussed earlier, participants not only volunteer for food banks and care packages, but they also use the internet and social media platforms to fundraise for food banks, care packages and other charities and they are vocal about issues affecting them and their community.

All participants engaged with the internet and valued social media for its flexibility, accessibility and ability to reach large groups of people, finding online activism easy and cost effective (Schuster, 2013), however, chapter five discusses some of the barriers to their presence on social media platforms. Participants were already using social media platforms to voice their concerns about local issues however, they witnessed a higher level of internet usage due to the pandemic restrictions placed on meeting people face-to-face. The Covid-19 pandemic became a catalyst for connecting people online with family and friends, different communities and the wider world. Virtual meeting spaces became popular with participants as they carried out their activism online alongside their local, grassroots projects e.g., food banks and other charity work. For example, Leena, a Women’s Rights Activist organised and attended a range of virtual meetings during the pandemic and confirmed seeing other Muslim women do the same:

“I think on the activist side [during the pandemic], I think that it has actually been very positive. I think that I have seen lots of Muslim women organising and

connecting together, organising events, whether that be, you know, seminars and webinars or WhatsApp groups or book groups, online prayer groups...people are just using online spaces and its very, very empowering in that sense. I've attended, spoken at and sat in on many, many things over the last year, that would not have happened otherwise."

This description captures Joly and Wadia's 'cultural politics' which I define as a form of everyday politics which includes community art events, lectures and seminars, doubled up as socio-cultural events with food and other activities (2017: 132), albeit taking place online due to the pandemic. During the pandemic lockdowns, charities and organisations delivered online meetings, events and seminars that were often free and open to the public, covering a range of topics from International Women's Month (IWM) and Islam awareness events to religious and community events celebrating Ramadan and Eid.

All participants engaged with some form of online meetings and activities with a majority of women (20) attending online events (e.g., celebrating International Women's Day) and specific campaign awareness sessions (e.g., how to report hate crime). For example, Ruksana, a Grassroots Campaigner said the shielding was a 'blessing in disguise' as she was able to continue with her activism from the comfort of her 'home protected area' where she was able to advocate and campaign on debt and poverty, health and housing issues affecting her local community. The pandemic allowed activists like Ruksana, Leena and others (including the six politicians) to highlight an issue or concern and challenge something they did not agree with via WhatsApp, Facebook and other social media platforms, saving time, money, and energy on travelling to different meetings and events making it flexible and accessible (Schuster, 2013). This is an example of how an individual can engage in local level everyday politics using social media. Below I provide an example of how Jabeen advocated, campaigned and sought justice for her local community using social media.

Jabeen is a Community Activist who has been an advocate for local people in her area for many years. She provides an example of how she participated in politics at the local level to get some justice for local women living in a block of flats. Jabeen started a local campaign and a petition for these women firstly, to complain to their housing organisation about the

lack of bin chutes and lifts not working in the block of flats. Secondly, she wanted to highlight their plight as the housing organisation increased their service charge and rent for residents who she described as “struggling to pay, buy food, let alone pay the increase in service charge”. She got involved after hearing their stories. She describes her activism:

“My way of activism with them was to name and shame them [the housing organisation] ... we started with the basic email, then the letter and then we did a petition... [then] I made a collage of different photos ... targeted the [named housing organisation] on social media.”

Initially people were not interested in doing a petition, stated Jabeen, so she started thinking more creatively and came up with the idea of producing a collage of photos. She asked residents including the older children of non-English speaking residents to take photos and share them with her on WhatsApp. She then posted these photos as collages on Facebook to persuade people to sign the petition. She explains how she set up a WhatsApp group first to get the women’s children to respond, “I told them, take a picture, tag me and put it up [on social media]” and then she set up a Facebook page to share the photos with the community.

As a result of her social media posting about poor housing maintenance and rubbish not being collected, the housing organisation was quick to respond after the photos appeared on social media. Within days, she heard from the housing organisation even though the residents had previously written letters to them first. She explained how the campaign got big and “as soon as we started the social media campaign, other people wanted to join the bandwagon.” Subsequently, this campaign received a lot of attention, with local people mobilised to share and speak out against the local housing organisation. With the campaign receiving media attention, other unexpected outcomes took place including a few people resigning from their jobs.

Although this is not a new way of campaigning or doing politics by Muslim women as the impact of the spread of mobile technologies during the Arab Spring in 2011 came to the fore when Muslim women in the Arab MENA used social media platforms like Twitter and

Facebook (Moghadam, 2014). However, what is important in this example is how women were able to assert their power at the local grassroots level without direct access to social media (due to language and other barriers) but through their connection with local activists, who were able to make their voices heard and influence a local provider to improve their situation for the better and thus, bring about changes for themselves and their families. The Covid-19 pandemic brought opportunities for local Muslim women who may not have considered the internet or social media for highlighting discrimination and injustices affecting their local community. As activists, they are unintentionally (or intentionally) transforming how micro activism can bring about changes for their community.

This section demonstrates how Muslim women have used the internet and social media during the more recent, Covid-19 pandemic to make themselves heard and affect change at the local, grassroots level but they can also affect change through meso and macro activism. For example, Bina and Maryam use the internet for social media awareness building to voice their concerns and challenge gender inequalities and Islamophobia against Muslim women. The six politicians (1 MP, 4 elected Councillors and 1 individual involved in a political party) use social media to highlight their political causes, debates, and campaigns on gender inequality, Islamophobia and human rights and faith issues. These issues have been identified and explored by previous studies on Muslim women and political participation (Finlay and Hopkins, 2019; Joly and Wadia, 2017; Leweck and O'Toole, 2017). Participants affirmed that their involvement was geared towards making a difference to people's lives through active involvement in grassroots, community organisations and campaigns to advance social justice and care as advocated by their faith (religious beliefs).

Participants took part in 'street politics' such as local demonstrations and marches, political meetings including online meetings as discussed above, and participated in 'public service and community politics' such as volunteering, fundraising and donating to a charity or campaign (Joly and Wadia, 2017: 131-132). However, all participants used these activities and social media to challenge dominant stereotypes, tropes and discourses about Muslim women and Islam (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Mahmood, 2005; van Es, 2017) and build online connections with people and through use of hashtags and the diverse politics of everyday politics (Ahmad and Thorpe, 2020). However, it should be noted that the social media space,

activist or political spaces are not neutral or safe spaces for Muslim women as discussed in chapter five on motivations and barriers to political activism. Participants involved in micro activism also participate in meso activism, on national issues impacting their community and macro activism through showing solidarity and allyship on global issues.

Meso activism

Meso activism is when individuals participate in national causes or issues, often organised by a collective of people, a national campaign or charity or by participating in party politics at the national level. Consequently, participants organise, set up and run organisations, networks and campaigns on national issues of concern that affects them, the Muslim communities or Muslim women e.g., Islamophobia. Participants highlight how Muslims are portrayed and monitored through several overlapping issues and policies including the War on Terror, Prevent, suspect community and securitised citizens as discussed in the literature review. For example, participants work with national organisations, charities and campaigns to dispel stereotypes about Muslim women and contest gendered Islamophobia (Alimahomed-Wilson, 2020) through participation in various political campaigns and activities including women's rights and networks (26), interfaith work including seminars and events (21), setting up their own network or organisation (18) and party politics (6). Participants are involved in national organisations such as Citizens UK, a large national campaigning organisation; MEND, an organisation that engages and develops Muslims to participate in media and politics as well as sharing and raising awareness about Islamophobia; and the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), the largest and most diverse representative body for the Muslim community in the UK.

Participants (18) have set up their own network, organisation or charity working at the national level to work on human rights, women's rights, debt and poverty, housing, social justice and care, racism, Islamophobia and other discriminations, inter-faith work, sports, mosque projects, environmental and specific campaign-led projects. For example, Madiha, a Social Media Activist started her own voluntary organisation to provide an opportunity for Muslim women to have a Muslim-run platform to tackle Islamophobia and racism and interact with mainstream communities. Madiha is also vocal on social media platforms

about her moral position on racism, Islamophobia, feminism or “anything to do with any kinds of rights.”

Participants believe in making institutional and structural changes at the national level which means they are involved in long-term campaigns and decision-making forums to influence policy makers and politicians. For example, Zahra, a Community Activist set up her own organisation and commented on the difficulties in seeking funding and getting recognition for her organisation. However, she attended lots of networking events which led her to run local community forums to feedback into the strategies of national organisations. She confirms that she was part of the House of Lords Select Committee, providing expert advice which she hopes will form part of the government’s strategy to get more women into her industry. Through relationship building, influencing strategies and encouraging other Muslim women to “get more involved in committees [and] more involved in council meetings”, Zahra works to dispel stereotypes about Muslim women. Consequently, her organisation runs national campaigns and events during International Women’s week and Islam Awareness month in November to challenge negative stereotypes of Muslim women and counteract Islamophobia.

Six participants work with Citizens UK who according to their website are ‘the UK’s biggest, most diverse, and most effective people-powered alliance’, bringing together ‘everyday people and local organisations to build a better, fairer society’ (Citizens UK, 2021). These participants also work with Women100 (a project of Citizen UK, training a diverse network of women). For example, Fozia works with Citizens UK and Women100 because it has the power of a collective body:

“You’ve got a bigger voice for the common good, you’re more likely to be heard and a there’s a constructive way of then approaching people in power, policymakers and changing that with influence of people power.”

Fozia and Safura work in their local communities but they are often referred to as Community Leaders because they are leaders in their own organisations/institutions and are well-informed about issues affecting their community and therefore, lead on various

campaigns. They are well-known, well-networked and trusted across their community and often invited to represent their organisation on a local and national level, participating in networking and decision-making forums where they have a bigger voice in change-making and challenging the negative narratives about Muslim women.

Participants raise awareness of gendered Islamophobia and ‘collectively organised themselves to confront the gendered Islamophobia they often experience individually within public spaces and institutions’ (Alimahomed-Wilson, 2020: 666). Participants spoke about creating spaces for Muslim women to talk, share and collaborate on various projects, to make themselves heard and affect change at the national level. For example, Farah with help and advice from other Muslim women activists set up a Women’s Network for Muslim women during Covid-19 pandemic, to raise awareness, challenge stigma, marginalisation and discrimination of Muslim women in British society (Alimahomed-Wilson, 2020; Hussein, 2023) through online events and workshops. On the other hand, Sana and Shazia set up a Muslim Women’s Network to support female Muslim professionals in their sector through information, advice and networking. They were unhappy about the newly elected Prime Minister (Boris Johnson) and his views on Muslim women which they argue led to an increased gendered Islamophobia in British society including their work sector. These women participate in social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter (now X) to highlight issues and debates about gender inequalities, Islamophobia and faith issues. For example, they highlight the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on Muslim women at work.

Participants work on women and faith issues and deal with misconceptions and stereotypes through their work on inter-faith and women’s campaigns. For example, Safura got involved in the Women100 project to “make sure that our voices [get] heard ... and more mobilisation within ourselves (Muslim women)” which led to organised national petitions and campaigns and rallying their local communities to attend national protests and demonstrations (Bernadi, 2019). On the other hand, Leena, a Women’s Rights Activist is often invited as a Public Speaker to talk on faith and women’s issues as she engages with inter-faith leaders and projects in Britain, having set up several projects and initiatives of her own. She makes connections with diverse women from different organisations and politics to empower Muslim women through information-sharing and networking. For example, she

nominates and puts forward other Muslim women to deliver talks on a range of issues (health, education), which provides them with the opportunity to gain experience and exposure, which enables some women to set up their own projects and initiatives to help other Muslim women. In this way, Leena is able to express her own views about gender inequalities and dispel stereotypes of Muslim women as passive and without a voice.

This section demonstrates how Muslim women are engaged with national issues impacting Muslim women. It concurs with previous studies that show Muslim women in public spheres including the media and creative industries that have intervened on geopolitical debates on Muslims and womanhood and taken up various political opportunities to highlight issues of concerns (Warren, 2018, 2020). This involves getting involved in national groups and organisations and campaigning for change through leadership roles and party politics.

Participants are part of national bodies and organisations including housing, health and large campaigning organisations with sixteen participants (plus the six politicians) involved in strategic decision-making roles (e.g., steering group members, board members and/or trustees) where they participate in current political issues. For example, Ruby, a Grassroots Activist is currently the Vice-Chair of a large campaigning organisation (not a charity) where she contributes to national housing debates and campaigns. However, she explains how she progressed from being a steering group member to a board member and then Vice-Chair, acknowledging the time and effort it takes to get into a position of power (see chapter five on barriers to political activism). Ruby wanted to get into a position “where I am now commanding to be heard. I’m demanding to be heard and moving a policy, shifting policy, shifting strategies and taking that control”. Likewise, Sadia strongly believes that Muslim women must sit around decision-making tables otherwise, “we are not making those decisions” that has an impact on Muslims and Muslim women.

Participants said they had to negotiate patriarchy and sexism from within the wider British society and within localised Muslim and ethnic minority communities (Finlay and Hopkins, 2019; Joly and Wadia, 2017), through their activism (which includes party politics). For example, participants like Adila, Fozia and Leena along with the six politicians campaigned to get misogyny recognised in law. In addition, participants worked to amplify their ability to

speak out and talk back against sexism, racism and Islamophobia in activist and political spaces where they are seen as 'spaces invaders' (Puwar, 2004), which is discussed as a barrier to political activism in chapter five. Consequently, they are involved in multiple political activities where they make themselves heard, raise awareness, change policies and make a stand on various political issues. For example, Hafsa, a Grassroots Activist took part in the march against the policing bill whilst Fozia and Leena took part in the peace vigil for Sarah Everard, who was killed by a male police officer in 2021. They are active in national debates about injustices and inequalities, and they are vocal on social media platforms. They argue that it is important to raise awareness and participate in national protests, demonstrations and campaigns to hold those in power accountable. In addition, Leena works with national organisations to identify and support Muslim women to get into politics as she strongly believes there are women running local organisations, local school governors and those involved in 'civic kind of engagement' who should be in Parliament or in local politics.

Six participants are involved in party politics. This means they are an elected MP (1) or Councillor (4) or a member of a political party, selected to stand at the next local election (1). Post-interview, the selected candidate was elected as a Councillor at the next local election (2021). Three political parties are represented by these participants. Each participant has their own story about how they got involved in party politics. Three participants were encouraged to become Councillors by other politicians who thought they would make a good Councillor as they were passionate about political issues and able to articulate their views confidently. These participants started with micro activism, participating in local meetings and events and as politicians, they are involved in national political campaigns and debates, from anti-austerity measures to health and gender inequalities in British society. As politicians and campaigners, they are involved in all three types of activism: micro, meso and macro activism.

Macro activism

Macro activism is where women form allyship and solidarity on global issues to work together to bring about structural change. They protest, attend demonstrations and take part in campaigns, often as members of a network, group or organisation but to show

support for global issues including the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, #MeToo campaign, Walk for Palestine (Solidarity for Palestine), Justice for Rohingya Muslims and climate change as well as hijab activism. For example, participants spoke about their activism and experiences of wearing the hijab (25 participants wore the hijab) and their participation in the global hijab movement (by women for other women across the world). Participants like Adila, Fozia and Maryam campaigned and demonstrated against the hijab ban in France and other European countries and stood in solidarity with Muslim women in other countries. Adila for example, mentioned participating in human rights and international campaigns such as the Bosnian war, the Iraq war, and the apartheid in South Africa.

Participants participated in global social media activism which I describe as social media awareness building on global issues. Fozia and Leena spoke about #SayHerName (Brown, 2017; Williams, 2016) and the #MeToo campaign (Bouvier, 2022, Clark-Parsons, 2021: Loney-Howes, 2021). For example, Leena said she's been affected by the #MeToo issue, so she hosted several meetings including one on Muslim women and domestic violence. Leena wanted to "create a safe space so that women who otherwise don't speak to anybody about this stuff will feel that they can."

Ruby and Tauhida mentioned global protests and demonstrations for Palestine while Bina, Bilqis and Karima spoke about the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement (Ince et al, 2017). Bilqis, a Politician and Campaigner said the BLM movement had a profound impact on Muslim women giving them a sense of confidence and strength to "fight back as well." Bina, on the other hand, said the BLM movement made her think about her own minority ethnic identity and seek further knowledge and understanding about black people's experiences. This enabled Bina to use her learning from the BLM movement to share her own experiences of and responses to misogyny and Islamophobia to raise awareness and change people's perspective. She reflects from the BLM movement in 2020:

"Sometimes you need to hear the voices of others to validate and endorse your own experience as well as be heard, you need people who are not aware of an issue or a

topic and don't want to hear about that topic or issue, you're more likely to change their perspective when you give an alternative view in large numbers."

Similarly, the six politicians also discussed their experiences of sexism, racism and Islamophobia on social media platforms to connect their own situatedness to broader social movements (Jolly et al, 2021) such as hijab activism and BLM.

Global issues such as the BLM movement protests in 2020 and more recently, the issue of the refugee crisis and global humanitarian situation in Palestine have now become more visible, having been documented, recorded and commented upon via smartphones and other handheld devices (Bernadi, 2019). Twenty participants expressed their views on global issues such as BLM, the refugee crisis and Palestine as they link these issues to their faith and social justice and care.

Other global issues and international politics inspired some participants to participate in political activism as they recalled how the 'Stop the Iraq War' and anti-racism demonstrations politicised them at a young age. For example, Fozia said her activism started from 'going on demo, anti-racism demonstration with my dad'. She emphasised how it felt like she had a voice and continues to explain the anger and hurt she felt from her experience of racism and Islamophobia, which shaped her work and career. She went further to describe the importance of collective action, being part of Women100 and Citizens UK which allowed her to have the 'right platform to be able to share and shape those narratives as well', by connecting to wider, global issues of racism and Islamophobia and hence, she organised and participated in the BLM demonstrations and protests. Fozia took part in organising her local protest in recognition and solidarity with George Floyd and the BLM movement. More recently, the BLM movement inspired participants like Hafsa to get involved in activism and engage with issues of social justice.

Some participants (8) are active in humanitarian projects and work with international charities to save lives and alleviate suffering. For example, Tahira is involved in fundraising and supporting an international aid organisation working with Rohingya Muslims and other humanitarian crises in the world. Maryam, on the other hand, said she grew up proactively

speaking out against climate change and women's rights and took part in global campaigns, protests and demonstrations to show her support on the issues that she deems important to her faith and community, therefore she is vocal about these issues and other issues related to equality, justice and fairness.

This section demonstrates how participants focus on issues that they deem as important. They raise awareness, voice their concerns, show support and challenge structures and practices that marginalises or discriminates against people; hence they focus on global issues such as the BLM movement, the #MeToo and other global issues that concerns them as Muslims and Muslim women. Consequently, they focus on issues that they deem as important to their faith and social justice.

The three types of activism (micro, meso and macro) link together, allowing for some overlap, flexibility and manoeuvrability between the different types of activism. It should not be seen as a hierarchical structure as participants may start with one type of activism (e.g., micro activism) and expand or progress to another type of activism (meso or macro activism) or participate across all three types of activism (micro, meso and macro activism). All three types of activism are interrelated and have the potential to influence each other. However, broadly speaking, micro activism focuses on local, grassroots issues and causes that directly impacts them or their immediate community; meso activism concentrates on national causes, issues and concerns of Muslims and Muslim women and macro activism fosters solidarity and allyship on global issues. Figure 4.1 demonstrates how the three types of activism interrelate and overlap with each other.

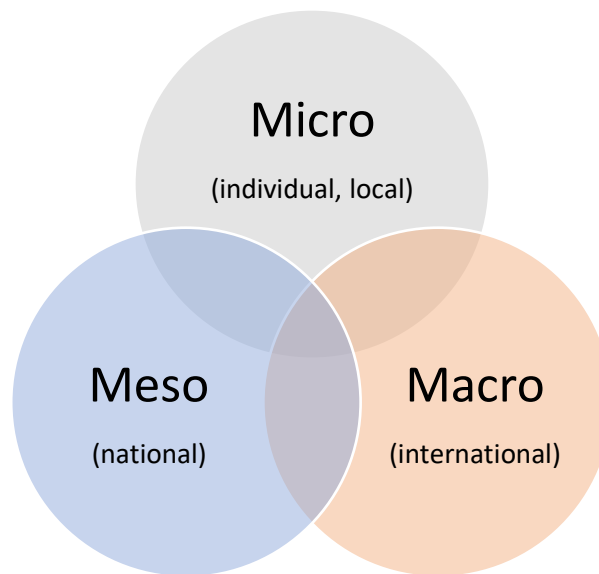


Figure 4.1: The three types of activism

Eleven participants are involved in all three types of activism whilst some focus on micro and meso activism or meso and macro activism or micro and macro activism, depending on the issues and causes they relate to. For example, Fozia participates in all three types of activism, from working with local, grassroots networks and organisations to representing her organisation in national forums and showing support to humanitarian causes (refugees) and BLM movement. She is involved in everyday politics and uses her Community Leader role to participate in national and global political issues. Consequently, the different types of activism influence each other and work like a cycle. For example, Leena describes her political activist journey as having gone through a “full circle”. She explains how she started working as an individual at the local, grassroots level on issues affecting Muslim women, built her networks and joined groups and organisations, did volunteering and then set up her own projects and organisations and sat in many consultative forums and boards and participated in global protests and demonstrations before she felt the need to go back to her local community and work with Muslim women at the grassroots level. As she says, she is back where she started from. Figure 4.2 illustrates how I organised the three types of political activism based on the issues Muslim women engage with to make their voices heard and persuade people of the justice of their cause through various political activities.

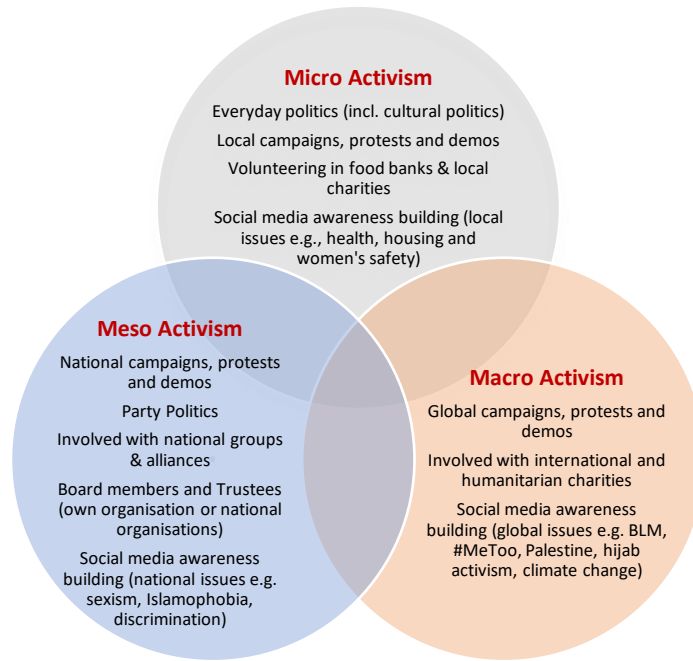


Figure 4.2: Activities in micro, meso and macro activism

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to answer the research question: how do Muslim women engage in political activism? To answer this question, using empirical examples, I developed three types of political activism based on the issues they engage with in their activism - micro, meso and macro activism. Participants accounts suggest that rather than being hierarchical or distinct, these types of activism are in fact interrelated. Participants often start at micro activism working on issues that affect them and/or their immediate community and go on to engage with national and international causes once they gain the confidence and skills to make their voice heard more widely. However, such transition does not mean abandonment of micro activism, rather it indicates multi-types and multi-level activism on many participants parts, e.g., Aiza and Leena are both passionate about women's rights and participate in all three types of activism to raise awareness about issues affecting Muslim women. Following Norris (2009), this further reinstates the more fluid nature, looser boundaries and openness of political activism by participants of this research.

A second finding of this chapter is how participants use online spaces and social media in meaningful ways to assert their opinion, propose change and create awareness. Participants

like Jabeen use WhatsApp and Facebook to seek justice for local residents whilst Leena connects women to help and support each other particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic.

This chapter contributes to the growing body of literature on Muslim women's political (and religious) agency that advances a more nuanced picture of how Muslim women participate in activism and politics as mentioned in chapter two on literature review (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Alimahomed-Wilson, 2020; Burney, 2021; Easat-Daas, 2020; Finlay and Hopkins, 2019; Hussein, 2023; Joly and Wadia, 2017; Leweck and O'Toole, 2017; Mahmood, 2005; Massoumi, 2015; Rashid, 2014; Tartari and Mencutek, 2015; van Es, 2017; Yaqoob, 2008).

This chapter also challenges the prevalent stereotypes in public and political discourses which portrays Muslim women as 'subjugated', 'passive', 'uninterested', 'uninformed'." (Joly and Wadia, 2017: 5). It concurs with previous studies on Muslim women and political participation (Joly and Wadia, 2017; Easat-Daas, 2020) that demonstrate how Muslim women are resilient and determined despite struggling with the intersectionality of race, Islamophobia and gendered struggles of Muslim womanhood (Easat-Daas, 2020). This study also concurs with the current literature (see chapter two) that Muslim women across the world have tried to resist, rebel against, and counteract the 'oppressed Muslim woman' and other negative stereotypes of Muslim women using several strategies to cope with the struggles of 'doing politics', including reframing, challenging and ambivalence (Hussein, 2023). It also demonstrates how Muslim women champion women's rights, humanitarian and social justice and care (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Burney, 2021; Mahmood, 2005; van Es, 2017).

In the next chapter I focus on why Muslim women participate in political activism, what motivates them and what barriers they face in micro, meso and macro activism and politics.

Chapter five: Faith-inspired motivations and barriers to political activism

“As time progressed and I started learning more about my faith, I realised that justice was an integral part of my religious identity... I think that’s why I involved myself through faith-inspired activism.”

Maryam, Women’s Rights and Climate Change Activist

Introduction

In the previous chapter I shared examples from the empirical data on how Muslim women engaged in micro (individual), meso (national) and macro (international) activism through their participation in grassroots and local campaigns that impact them directly (micro) to active involvement in national groups, campaigns and party politics (meso) to global issues and campaigns (macro) affecting Muslim women. In this chapter I focus on why they are motivated and inspired by their faith to participate in political activism and the barriers they faced as a result.

The aim of this chapter is to answer two research questions: 1) What are the key motivations behind Muslim women’s political activism? and 2) What are the barriers to their political activism? This chapter explores the motivating factors that shape and influence Muslim women (participants) to participate in political activism and the barriers they encounter when engaging in micro, meso and macro activism.

Faith-inspired activism

Faith is the primary motivation for participants’ activism. Political activism, as discussed by participants is about being an ethical Muslim and fighting injustices and standing up to oppression (such as gender, racial, religious and other socio-economic inequalities) and that ultimately, influences power relations within communities and brings about societal change. Following Mahmood (2005), I reckon that for participants their faith and politics are not separate, rather ethical action or faith-inspired activism enables them to take action against injustice, inequality, and unfairness in a variety of issues. This means fighting against injustices (negative stereotypes, inequalities and oppression), serving the community and

alleviating suffering by helping the poor and needy (around housing and food) and standing with the oppressed and being vocal about their rights (women, ethnic minorities, Muslims etc) and looking after the earth (environment, climate change) – all of which require these women (participants) to take an uncompromising and resolute stance against individuals, organisational structures and even state policies.

For these women, faith-inspired activism means participating in activism and/or politics as Muslim women, abiding by the Islamic principles and values of upholding justice, challenging oppression and oppressive structures and stereotypes and volunteering in the community to support vulnerable community members, an ethical and entirely positive project of personal cultivation as a good Muslim woman. These women have a moral and ethical agency of fulfilling their religious duties, ethics and obligations to God, working with grassroots groups and organisations including mosques and inter-faith projects, demonstrating that political agency can go beyond the usual forms and institutions of politics as faith and community action are seen as integral to each other. Politics and ethics are indelibly linked for these women who seek social justice for all members of their community and not just rights and freedom for themselves (Mahmood, 2005). Below are some examples of how participants motivated by their faith, use Islam as an ‘ethical guide’ for their activism (Joly and Wadia, 2017: 136).

Participants were fully aware of the negative religious and cultural representations of Muslim women as the ‘oppressed Muslim woman’ (van Es, 2019) and ‘victims of a fundamentalist patriarchy’ (Alimahomed-Wilson, 2020: 652) and in ‘need of saving and increasingly symbolic of threat’ (Easat-Daas, 2020: 1). The Muslim woman is ‘feared and reviled’ (Perry, 2014) and seen as ‘disengaged, submissive and apolitical’ (Finlay and Hopkins, 2019: 1). Participants often felt the need to explain Islam and correct or define misconceptions of Islam and challenge the negative stereotypes of Muslim women. For example, Leena, a Women’s Rights Activist states:

“I feel quite strongly that we as Muslims also have a role to play in helping take down some of those misconceptions and stereotypes.”

Leena is a Public Speaker working primarily with women and different faith communities to deal with misconceptions and stereotypes through her involvement in inter-faith and campaigning work. Similarly, other participants used their public and/or community roles to correct and define misconceptions about Muslim women through “shifting the narrative and changing people’s perspectives” (Aiza, Politician and Campaigner) and “being the voice for the voiceless [Muslim women and minority ethnic women]” (Fozia, Women’s Rights Activist) and “getting the voice or the needs of the community heard” through board level representation (Safura, Community Activist). On the other hand, Ruby, a Grassroots Activist and Campaigner, works to create a “large enough collective voice” to “challenge this terrible [Islamophobic] narrative that the government have got in place.” These women use their voices at the grassroots level, in politics and social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook to challenge negative stereotypes of Muslim women and explain misconceptions of Islam.

The data analysis revealed that all thirty-one interviewees (participants) had engaged in some form of activism which were underpinned by a strong sense of social justice, a duty of care towards others and charity. Consequently, participants focused on what they saw as injustice, discrimination and lack of equity and fairness in the wider society. For example, Fabiha, a Researcher and Social Media Activist stated that her religion encouraged justice, fairness and equality, which she claims as the Islamic principles, values and ethics of Muslims who want to create a fairer society. She acknowledged that her activism is faith-inspired and describes why Muslim women are motivated by their faith:

“So, the Muslim women I meet, you know, it really is this passion of seeking justice, and a lot of Muslim women I know, including myself, when we do this work [political activism], we don't separate our faith from the stuff that we do. Like, we recognise that this is literally what Allah has commanded of us, that we seek justice for people, we seek fairness and equality and to live in a society where people are all treated in fair ways, not equally, because you can't treat people equally, most people, different people have different needs. So, we want to create a fairer society where we acknowledge these things.”

Participants explained that their sense of justice came from their faith and that it is “our responsibility to recognise injustice and do something about it” (Shakira, Women’s Rights Activist) and it’s a “duty and responsibility” to stand up to injustice and stand with the oppressed (Papia, Politician and Campaigner). Maryam, a Women’s Rights and Climate Change Activist is involved in faith-inspired activism because she believed that justice is an integral part of her faith and religious identity:

“As time progressed and I started learning more about my faith, I realised that justice was an integral part of my religious identity... I think that’s why I involved myself through faith-inspired activism.”

The Islamic principle of justice prompted these women into activism, like the Egyptian women in Mahmood’s (2005) study. Women of this study also do not separate their faith from their actions and work. Rather their activism is part of their faith and a positive project of self-cultivation as Muslim women. For example, Shakira spearheaded a community campaign around women’s rights in Islam and later, during the pandemic, she used her knowledge to speak about health, Covid-19 inequalities and representation issues affecting Muslim communities in her city. Similarly, Papia campaigned on various issues (including housing and Islamophobia) and became a politician and Maryam said she grew up proactively speaking out against climate change and defending women’s rights as they were “very much in line with my religious beliefs.” Ruksana, a Grassroots Campaigner on the other hand, campaigned on education, health and poverty to ‘uphold justice’ as endorsed by the Quran, the Holy Book of Muslims and described as the Word of Allah (God) in chapter 4, verse 135 (Abdel-Haleem, 2008). Justice is a crucial and recurring theme and commandment in the Quran, e.g., ‘My Lord has commanded justice’ (Al-Quran, chapter 7, verse 29 in Abdel-Haleem, 2008) and in Muslim thought as it relates to the broader concepts of equity, honesty and equality (also advocated in the Quran). Thus, Fabiha, Maryam, Papia, Ruksana and Shakira (of different age, backgrounds and geographical locations) reinstate that their faith affects their lives continuously and has profound consequences for how they imagine and do their activism which ultimately contributes to their self-making and moral agency.

Participants referred to the duty of care towards others and the importance of having a supportive community and nurturing a sense of compassion, empathy and generosity through helping others and giving charity. For example, Aiza, a Politician and Campaigner explains that “to be able to serve and help people particularly when you’ve got the ability to do so, is a very basic Islamic concept.” Aiza learned this basic concept as she grew up watching her parents provide practical and emotional support to refugees and other community members struggling with financial and citizenship claims and this moral responsibility is something she claims, is from her faith which pushed her into activism and the work that she does. Similarly, Karima, a Politician and Campaigner said she came from “a long line of very strong [Muslim] women, my family” where she learned to have ‘strength’ to help other people (Karima does advocacy as part of her work). The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is seen as the standard of moral conduct, justice and piety (see Al-Quran, chapter 33, verse 21 in Abdel-Haleem, 2008). For example, Ruksana and Fozia understood and accepted the ‘enjoining what is right (good) and forbidding what is wrong (evil)’ as one of the basic principles of Islam (see Al-Quran, chapter 3, verse 110 in Abdel-Haleem, 2008) and made references to the well-known hadith (written records of the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad):

“Whosoever of you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand, and if he is not able to do so, then let him change it with his tongue, and if he is not able to do so, then with his heart ... and that is the weakest of faith”

(Sahih Muslim, 49 and in Hadith 34 in 40 Hadith an-Nawawi).

The ability to help the local community especially during the Covid-19 pandemic became a strong motivation for political activism stemming from their Islamic values. Eleven participants including Aiza, Ruby, Safura and Tauhida volunteered for food banks and mutual aid groups, delivering food, medicines and hygiene care packages to vulnerable community members, which required a humanitarian response during the pandemic. Participants also steered their activism highlighting health inequalities and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on ethnic minorities, raising awareness and funds for food banks and care packages, both online and offline. They felt that the government was not providing

appropriate resources and support for people who could not work due to shielding and other socio-economic factors.

Research later confirmed that the British Muslim communities were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and lockdowns, and they had the highest Covid-19 mortality rates among all religious groups (BCU, 2023; ITV News, 2020; Khan, 2020; MCB, 2020; Public Health England, 2020; UK Parliament Committees, 2020). Tauhida, a Community Activist fundraised online and offered support to vulnerable women and their children by providing basic care packages which included food and hygiene products while Aiza, a Politician and Campaigner became very vocal at the grassroots level and on social media platforms about the impact of the pandemic on local people, reporting that, “I was the kind of voice for that [local food bank and mutual aid group] and I was leading it.”

The British Muslims set up over 100 community support groups delivering food and medicines to those in need, embodying the Islamic principle of acting in service to others (MCB, 2020). People volunteering at food banks are highly critical and vocal about the government lack of economic and welfare support, which can influence public policy, thereby in this research, I identify these acts of change making (Hussein, 2023) as political acts. In addition to being critical of the government’s lack of support, participants also wanted to help the community as they strongly identified as a Muslim whose faith motivated them to be ethical: to abide by morals, Islamic principles and to stand up against injustice and oppression.

Muslim women in this study are motivated by their faith to carry out various types of activism as inspired by religious (Islamic) and ethical values mentioned in the Quran and Sunnah such as justice, equality and fairness. Consequently, participants fight injustices and stand against oppression as their faith commands them to stand for social justice, care for their community and provide charity. Their negative experiences as Muslims and religious values encouraged them to raise awareness, support and campaign for their local communities as well as the Rohingya and Uighur Muslims, Palestine, and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement (as discussed in chapter 4 and 6). Supporting and campaigning for

their communities gives them a sense of fulfilment and accomplishment of their religious duties of upholding justice.

What are the barriers to faith-inspired activism?

All participants mentioned various barriers to their faith-inspired activism with Islamophobia quoted as the main barrier for Muslim women activists. Participants spoke about sexism and racial and religious prejudices (Islamophobia) and discrimination that they personally faced as a Muslim woman, providing examples of their negative and differential treatment due to their gender and religion. This section focuses on the barriers to their faith-inspired activism, namely sexism and Islamophobia. They faced sexism because they are female and racial and religious prejudices because they are racialised as women of colour (non-white) and as Muslim women. Accordingly, this section captures the sexist, racist and Islamophobic abuses as described by the participants. This includes being seen as a 'space invader' in micro, meso and macro activism and politics (Puwar, 2004).

Sexism

The Muslim women in this study state that their gender and religion is often entwined and cannot be separated from each other as this is how they see themselves and how others perceived them. However, all participants spoke about the challenges of being a woman involved in activism and/or politics. The six politicians in the study described politics as an "extremely male-dominated" and "white, middle-class" space which acts as a barrier to their political activism. Furthermore, several participants including Hafsa, Sadia and Fozia narrate how Muslim women in power and/or authority are often judged as outspoken with their capabilities questioned. For example, Hafsa, a Grassroots Activist faced gender prejudice when she was involved in student politics when she was taken aside by a Muslim male and told off for being bossy. Hafsa said she had strong views, but she knew she wasn't being bossy. On the other hand, Sadia, a Politician and Campaigner was called "a stupid idiot" and various sexist names including the word "slut" for participating in leafleting for the mayoral election and canvassing during political campaigns. She feels "demonised" as men make comments about her character and remind her that "a decent woman does not get involved in politics." She is abused on the streets and receives online abuse on social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. Sadia states clearly that these verbal abuse, vilification and harassment is often targeted at her because she is a Muslim woman in

politics and how her political journey has been riddled with sexist abuse but also racial and religious prejudice and discrimination (which is discussed later). Similarly, Fozia, a Women's Rights Activist recognises that 'powerful' Muslim women activists including those involved in politics face misogynistic remarks like "loose woman." Fozia also experienced misogyny in the form of derogatory 'name calling' and 'being put down by men' hence she works with women to encourage them to report hate crimes.

Leyla, a Politician and Campaigner talks about the stereotype of Muslim women expected to stay at home as "her place is in the home, it's not in the public sphere" which is also related by other participants, including Aiza, Fozia and Hafsa. Leyla, for example, gives an example of her five-men political campaign team who "think it's okay to speak out at me rather than speak to me. It's very hard for me to make a suggestion or get my point across without them feeling offended or not taking this [campaign] seriously". Leyla feels frustrated that Muslim women have to "constantly prove ourselves and we have to work that much harder than our male counterparts." Likewise, participants (9) mentioned they had to prove themselves as a Muslim woman that they are capable of doing their job and often have to "go that extra mile" (Fozia) or "do extra to get credit for what we do" and "do additional amounts [of work] to be seen as equals" (Bina). For some participants, this meant working long hours (Fozia, Safura), doing extra and additional work (Adila, Leyla), including voluntary work on top of their normal job (Aiza, Tahira) and attending various meetings and networking events (Bilqis, Karima, Zahra) to counteract the negative stereotypes of Muslim women.

Bina, a Social Media Activist explains how she faced stigma from the Muslim community and how Muslim women are often seen differently and undervalued in majority society too:

"When [Muslim] women do achieve power or position, both within Muslim and non-Muslim mainstream society, there is a judgement of her ... that women who are in positions of power tend to be perceived as being too outspoken, too harsh, [and] as a woman, you can say exactly the same thing as a man [but] as a woman, you'd be considered to be too aggressive and too bossy ... people don't expect [Muslim] women to be forthright and clear and in control."

Although this can be argued as being true for all women, the Muslim women in this study (the aforementioned participants) mentioned how they felt this judgement and underlying tone is because they are Muslim women who do not fit into the prevalent stereotypes of Muslim women as weak, passive and oppressed which affects people's perception of what they are capable of. Similarly, Muslim women who take up privileged positions in activist and political spaces are seen as 'space invaders' (Puwar, 2004). They are not the somatic norm (white, male), and they are 'seen to be suspiciously out of place', threatening the status quo, meaning that they should not be in politics or activist spaces (Puwar, 2004: 42). Consequently, Muslim women face additional barriers as they take up political roles and positions such as Councillors (4), Public Speaker (1), Cabinet members (2), Board members (14) of large campaigning organisations, housing associations and various other national bodies, a Chair/Vice-chair leading a meeting (2), or a Community Expert or Representative being invited to House of Lords for their expertise (5). Although these women 'now exist on the inside', their bodies are marked as 'trespassers' and 'they still do not have an undisputed right to occupy the space' and subsequently, they are under surveillance by the state and media (Puwar, 2004: 8). This is discussed in more detail below.

Bina explains that Muslim women are undervalued for their work and that the recognition she gets for her work is not the same as her non-Muslim colleagues. Participants claim that these negative stereotypes stem from the widely held grand narratives of Muslim women as passive "victims of a sexist and patriarchal culture, marginalized by their partners and forced to commit themselves to a life of housework and family care" (Ali and Hopkins, 2012: 141), which affects their treatment in various activist and political spaces. Muslim women are also excluded due to what Saeed (2016) calls the 'Orientalist form of securitization' as their denied body 'erupts into invisibility' and they are received with a 'muted sense of terror and threat' as they enter predominantly 'white and masculine domains' (Puwar, 2004: 11). According to Bina, Muslim women are therefore, outsiders within majority society and in an 'exclusionary position within their own communities' because of their prescribed gender roles (Joly and Wadia, 2017: 25), therefore, they are judged, undermined and discriminated against.

Zahra, a Community Activist who chairs her own organisation and sits on various boards explains how negative stereotypes of Muslim women are oppressive for Muslim women activists. She mentions the impact of the triple penalty (being female, Muslim and from an ethnic minority) on her faith-inspired activism. Zahra wears the hijab in a male-dominated sector, and she explains how she was not taken seriously and that it took her three years working in her industry to persuade policymakers and funders to listen to her and take her ideas seriously. She argues that she “dispelled some of the stereotypes they [policy makers and funders] may have had for Muslim women”. Zahra set up her own organisation partly to dispel the negative stereotypes of Muslim women and to get more Muslim women into her industry. Her organisation provides various activities for Muslim women and runs campaigns and events during International Women’s Week and Islam Awareness Month (which often focuses on Islamophobia faced by Muslim women, which is discussed below).

Most participants including Aiza, Bina, Fozia, Hafsa, Leyla, Sadia, Tahira and Zahra felt undervalued, marginalised and judged as Muslim women in mainstream organisations, boardrooms and politics because they are not fully accepted and included in activist and political spaces. For example, Ruby, a Grassroots Campaigner highlights how people often have “preconceived notions that Muslim women are somehow oppressed, that we’re forced to wear [hijab and jilbab], we have no brains of our own, we have no agency, like somehow we are incapable of making a decision” which negatively impacted her own experience in a large campaigning organisation where she was made to feel like a ‘space invader’ (Puwar, 2004). Ruby is the Vice-Chair of a large campaigning organisation (not a charity), and she explains how she is made to feel like she does not belong in the organisation, that she should not have a privileged position, chairing meetings and leading campaigns. Ruby provides an example of a meeting she was chairing at City Hall where there was an element of surprise when people walked in and saw her chair the meeting. Ruby’s presence provoked stares and a ‘double-take’ (disorientation) before people eventually got on with the meeting (Puwar, 2004: 44). People were often surprised and sometimes shocked to see Muslim women in positions of authority/power (Jabeen, Ruby and Zahra plus the six politicians), leading campaigns and discussions (Fabiha, Fozia and Leena), chairing meetings and attending high profiled political meetings (Fozia, Ruby and Zahra and the six politicians). Participants are seen to be ‘highly visible bodies that by their mere presence invite suspicion

and surveillance' and lacking in competencies and constantly challenged by a look which abnormalizes their presence, as if they belong elsewhere (Puwar, 2004: 54).

Participants talked about the disorientation that happens when someone is shocked to find a female, non-white person in a senior position (particularly, a Muslim woman in hijab). For example, Bilqis, a Politician and Campaigner described how she was left in the waiting area when all other members were taken in. She waited patiently knowing what had happened: the administrator realising their mistake came out later to take her in. Being a Muslim woman in hijab, Bilqis did not fit the somatic norm, thus the assumption being made here, is that Bilqis must be in the wrong place as the meeting was for senior members of the local Council (mainly men). The Muslim women in this study (board members, elected Councillors, Chairs/Vice-Chair and Community Leaders) are both 'insiders and outsiders' (Puwar, 2004: 8) however, I argue, that Muslim women are outsiders inside as they still 'feel the weight of the water' even with their positions of authority/power (Puwar, 2004: 131). As Aiza and Leyla point out, Muslim women must work hard in activism and/or politics as they are viewed suspiciously with their capabilities questioned, especially if they are young. They are often seen as a mismatch, an oxymoron as they are stereotyped as passive and oppressed Muslim women yet active in positions of power/authority.

As discussed, gender is still seen as an inequality and a disadvantage in activism and politics as participants recognise "subtle means of inclusion/exclusion" which continue to operate for Muslim women who are seen as women and/or racialised minorities (Puwar, 2004: 33). Previously women and racialised minorities were excluded from formal politics and other positions in society as they were not considered the somatic norm, that is the white, male body. However, Muslim women are often "gate-kept by men", according to Hafsa, meaning they are the gatekeepers to politics, like the biraderi (kinship) network and biraderi politicking as mentioned by Akthar (2015) in the literature review. As discussed, this biraderi issue did not affect participants as there was only 6 politicians in the study. For example, Aiza commented that it took her years to be selected as a politician "because of the discomfort that people felt about visibly Muslim women." Aiza refers to her identity as a female Muslim with hijab that poses the discomfort.

Muslim women in this study also faced what Fanon (1986) called ‘infantilisation’ when they are imagined to be “much more junior, in rank terms, than they actually are” and that they have reduced capacities as discussed above (Fanon as mentioned in Puwar, 2004: 60). Consequently, they are “highly visible as ‘space invaders’ at the same time they are in many respects invisible” and this is one of the ways that racial and religious prejudices (Islamophobia) manifests for Muslim women in this study (ibid). This infantilisation and latent racism (also regarded as institutional or structural racism) and Islamophobia is now discussed in the next section.

Islamophobia

Muslim women in this study with their assumed cultural and language barriers, religious and Islamic dress code as well as their minority status (often seen as immigrants) experience Islamophobic abuse and violence in ways that are different from Muslim men and other women of colour (Abu-Raz and Suarez in Perry, 2014). As discussed in previous chapters, Islamophobia is a contested term however, it often refers to anti-Muslim racism or a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness (APPG, 2018: 11). Participants also recognised that Islamophobia is anti-Muslim discrimination and multidimensional as it relates to their religion, colour, culture and country of origin (Sweida-Metwally, 2022) and how Islamophobia can mean anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic prejudices (Jones and Unsworth, 2022). As the literature review chapter demonstrates, Islamophobia as reported in the UK, Europe and the US is a gendered phenomenon and it cannot be seen as a gender-neutral form of racism that impacts Muslim women (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Alimahomed-Wilson, 2020; Kumar, 2012, Perry, 2014; Razack, 2004; Zempi and Awan, 2016, 2017; Zempi, 2020). Thus, according to Skenderovic and Spati (2019), Orientalism and Islamophobia tropes are situated at the intersection of religion, gender and race.

The Muslim women in this research experienced both racial and religious prejudices and abuses (Islamophobia) but often in a gendered way due to the interplay of religion and gender in their lives. For example, Leyla explained how “race plays a huge part... the fact that I’m a hijabi plays a huge part as well.” Here, Leyla is alluding to the multidimensionality of Islamophobia (Sweida-Metwally, 2022) and Zine’s definition of gendered Islamophobia as “ethno-religious and racialised discrimination levelled at Muslim women that proceed from

historically negative stereotypes that inform individual and systemic forms of oppression such as gender, racial and religious oppression” (Zine, 2006, quoted in Alimahomed-Wilson, 2020: 652). Islamophobia and the securitisation of Muslims has impacted Muslim women who are the Muslim ‘Other’, and therefore seen as a potential threat placed within a security framework (Saeed, 2016) and seen as a ‘space invader’ (Puwar, 2004).

In terms of racist prejudice and slurs, participants are often called names, insulted and disgraced because they are non-white. Muslim women are “constructed as racialised, exotic Others who do not fit the Western ideal of womanhood” (Perry, 2014: 79) as they are seen as victims, oppressed, inferior and backward, and subjected to the triad of oppression: 1) hijab (Islamic clothing), 2) forced marriages and 3) honour killings, therefore without a voice and lacking agency (see previous chapters). Consequently, they are seen as foreign and not able to speak English. For example, Leyla, Rahma and Ruby were often asked, ‘where are you from?’ with the assumption that they must be foreign and not from Britain because of their skin colour and being Muslim i.e. wearing the hijab. On the other hand, Sadia who works in politics states clearly that the abuse she receives as a politician is based on being a “woman, and then being Muslim and then not being British ... when I say British, [I mean] not being white.” Similarly, Tahira, a Grassroots Activist, points out how a Muslim woman’s “Britishness” is often questioned even if you are British, see yourself as British and were born in Britain. The two white (English) converts to Islam in this study felt racialised, ethnicised and othered because of their hijab and Muslimness (Franks, 2000). Their religion is shaped by the process of racialisation similar to race and they are seen as ‘not-quite white’ or even ‘non-white’ because of a persistent conflation of Islam as a ‘non-white’ religion (Moosavi, 2015).

Adila, a Researcher and Human Rights Activist provides a recent example of racial prejudice where she was treated differently because the teacher assumed she could not speak English during her child’s school parent consultation, an experience that her own mother experienced when she was a young child (she explained that even her mother could speak English). According to Adila, the teacher assumed that she could not speak English based on her external, physical appearance (brown, female, Asian, hijab/Muslim) and the negative media stereotypes of Muslim women as the ‘Other’, foreign and oppressed Muslim woman

(see the literature review chapter on discussions of the ‘oppressed Muslim woman’). In the case of Fozia, a Women’s Rights Activist, health staff members assumed that she must be a migrant or refugee and therefore, not able to speak English. Fozia also explained how growing up in a small community, her family faced a lot of racial prejudice and slurs. Later in her work and career she experienced racist slurs and Islamophobic abuse which led to trauma (discussed later).

Bina, a Social Media Activist confidently stated that she had faced “systemic racial discrimination within [work sector] in many organisations” because she was seen as a confident woman from an ethnic minority. She provides an example of when she had been verbally attacked by a professional colleague without any justification and how it had been excused by other workers. The outcome, she explains, is that the persecutory person can sometimes end up getting sympathy because they are emotional and aggressive, and people can end up feeling sorry for them. Bina explains how unconscious bias is not understood by non-Muslim colleagues because they’re “never experienced it themselves and they can’t get their head around what’s going on.” Bina indicated that some ethnic minorities don’t even recognise being discriminated and bullied whereas Bina said she is able to spot “microaggressions and macroaggressions” having experienced this in her early career but she points out how the discrimination can also be “blatant and persecutory.” Bina points out that if racial discrimination [and she adds Islamophobia] can happen in her field of work where it is “all about equality and diversity” then it must happen in every single other sector” including activism and political spaces.

Participants understand that ‘the glass ceiling’ exists for women and racialised minorities in politics however, they expand Puwar’s (2004) understanding of the glass ceiling. Karima, a Politician and Campaigner was applauded by a white, middle-class privileged man for having gone through the ‘glass ceiling’ as she was one of the first women from her ethnic community to become a politician. As she narrates her story, she tells him that she has gone through the glass ceiling which she describes as “structural racism and discrimination” however, the glass ceiling is broken, and its edges are “really sharp” for Muslim women. Karima further explains that the [racist] language has changed as Muslim women now face “symbolic violence” in policies, universities, hospitals and the statutory sector. She suggests

the symbolic violence has even seeped into the voluntary sector which was previously deemed a safe environment for Muslim women. This symbolic violence refers to the subtle forms of oppression where racial slurs, insults, and non-verbal hostility is targeted at people based on their marginalised and/or minority group membership e.g., women and ethnic minorities who are often dominated in a patriarchal and racist social setting. Symbolic violence is often normalised and not recognised as harmful, however, the Muslim women in this study attest to the psychological hurt and trauma that this oppression (gender dominance and racism) can cause because it communicates hostile, derogatory or negative messages to oppressed groups (Zempi and Awan, 2016). Earlier, Bina referred to this as unconscious bias (microaggressions) however, participants also described this as institutional and/or structural racism and Islamophobia (Adila, Fabiha and Karima).

Madiha, a Social Media Activist recognised the challenges of being a racialised, ethnicised Muslim woman, like Hafsa and Zahra and states that the “the added layer of being a Muslim woman” makes it so much more “difficult to break those glass ceilings.” Fabiha, a Researcher and Social Media Activist is quite clear and candid that as a Muslim woman or any other non-white woman (she uses Priti Patel MP as an example), you will not be fully accepted in politics or be part of the dominant white identity. She argues that minority, or non-white women will never be accepted in British society because of racism (she gives the example of Shamima Begum). The glass ceiling might have cracked quite significantly for women who are non-white and chipped ever so slightly for racialised minorities (Puwar, 2004), however, for Muslim women, this glass ceiling has cracked for some women, but it remains largely broken and sharp, according to Karima. These activist and political spaces are not empty or open to any body to occupy especially not a female Muslim, thus, Karima feels the need to smooth the edges of the glass ceiling for other Muslim women by providing support and a “hand-up” so they too, can get through the broken glass ceiling (this type of support is discussed in the next chapter).

Aiza, a Politician and Campaigner describes herself as a “visibly Muslim woman” as she wears the hijab. During her political campaigning, Aiza said she often had “vile people [who] will shout and scream all sorts of crap, racist, Islamophobic rubbish at you and stuff like that” because she was a Muslim woman in hijab. Consequently, she prefers to campaign in

more ethnically diverse areas and refuses to go and campaign in certain areas “because they are not safe for Muslim women.” She confirms that she is “much more blunt about why I do things and why I don’t do things” at work and politics. On the other hand, Tahira, a Grassroots Activist faced anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic hatred (verbal abuse, vilification and harassment) in a mainstream campaigning organisation that did not understand why a Muslim woman would be interested in environmental issues. Based on her negative experience, Tahira left the organisation and joined Muslim grassroots and humanitarian organisations.

Shazia, a Women’s Network Campaigner and Papia, a Politician and Campaigner both highlight hijab as a bigger barrier than skin colour for Muslim women who experience intersectional barriers and/or discrimination due to being a Muslim woman. For example, Papia explains how “the more there is covering (e.g., hijab, jilbab and niqab), the more there [is] a higher level of discrimination” for Muslim women. Shakira, a Women’s Rights Activist concurs with Papia as she found that “the more Muslim you look, the bigger [and] harder it is to get to certain [activist and political] spaces.” Initially, Shakira did not wear the hijab, but she recognised that once she wore the hijab, it wasn’t her skin colour that was the barrier but “looking more Muslim” that became a problem. When Shakira put on the hijab, people were biased and discriminatory against her and immediately assumed she had a different nationality and could not speak English, justifying their mistreatment of her. Shakira was stereotyped and disrespected like Tahira in a mainstream campaigning organisation.

Participants faced racial and religious abuse in various local and grassroots groups as well as national campaigning groups and party politics, from prejudice and racial slurs to verbal abuse and physical assault (pulling off the hijab) because they were Muslim women. For example, Fozia experienced verbal racial and religious (anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic) abuse to having her hijab pulled, an experience, she claims that Muslim girls/women still face in Britain. Consequently, Fozia works in the community leading on various campaigns on women’s rights and getting hate crime reported.

Participants (8) expressed that their Muslimness/hijab is what conjures up all the negative stereotypes of Muslim women as weak, passive and oppressed, resulting in Islamophobia.

Aiza describes the difficulty in describing the ‘discomfort’ she feels when entering a space where “people don’t know how to react or talk to you”, making it an ‘uncomfortable encounter’ (Puwar, 2004: 46). Consequently, she “had to change how I behave in many spaces where I feel this discomfort just to break it.” Aiza attributes this to gendered Islamophobia which is a “really big issue ... for visibly Muslim women”. However, Aiza is optimistic about the future as “we’ve got generations now, of Muslim women who are unprepared to be apologetic about who they are, and about their knowledge, and about their experience and about what they are capable of in these spaces [work, activist and political spaces].” Aiza describes herself as an unapologetic Muslim. On the other hand, Karima, another Politician and Campaigner, argues that the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement “needs to recognise that in terms of intersectionality, the Muslim community [and Muslim women] has both the colour and religion” that impacts their lives. Karima declares that “structural racism and Islamophobia” keeps Muslim women away from the media and other platforms including politics (see symbolic violence above).

Karima and other participants like Papia, Sadaf and Tahira cite online Islamophobic abuse that affects their political activism. For example, Sadaf, a Community Activist said, “I hate posting on Facebook” because of the “subtle Islamophobia”, the aggressive and hateful comments she receives on Facebook. Fozia, on the other hand, said she had to be “careful with every tweet ... because everything you say is going to have a repercussion.” Fozia is a Community Leader who works with the community on local, national and international campaigns and is one of the public figures for her organisation, so she feels she has to be extra careful to ensure she isn’t misquoted by the media. Tahira, a Grassroots Activist explains that she doesn’t feel safe on social media, and she had to take a “step back from voicing my opinion on social media because you just get a whole load of racism and Islamophobia targeted towards you.” These online Islamophobic abuse and repercussions is often in the form of ridicule, interrogation and harassment towards Muslim women.

Leyla cites two prominent Muslim women who faced Islamophobic abuse, offline and online on social media: Apsana Begum, the first British Muslim woman MP to wear the hijab (elected in December 2019) and Zara Mohamed, the first female and youngest General-Secretary of the MCB, elected in January 2021. Both were vocal on Islamophobia, social

inequalities and other issues affecting the Muslim community and Muslim women. Consequently, they faced a lot of questioning and interrogation from the British media and the general public. Apsana Begum MP, for example, received “18 months of false accusations, online sexist, racist and Islamophobic abuse, and threats to my safety.” (See The Guardian, 23 August 2021).

On the anniversary of 9/11 in 2021, Zarah Sultana MP gave a speech on Islamophobia which was shared via her Twitter handle and reported by the press media. Her speech confirmed how Muslim women in the public eye are subjected to racism and Islamophobia which she claimed was “taught from the very top ... by people in positions of power and privilege.” She gave the example of Boris Johnson (then Prime Minister) who mocked Muslim women as letter boxes and bank robbers. Participants in this study shared similar sentiments as Zarah Sultana MP and sympathised and understood the gendered Islamophobia faced by Apsana Begum MP and Zara Mohamed. Religion is a significant identity marker for these public, Muslim women and the heavier weighted factor in the equation of intersectionality for Muslim women, resulting in the high rates of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiments (Bi, 2019, 2020) for both these women and the participants in this study, who choose to participate in faith-inspired activism, working for justice, equality and fairness in society (see chapter four).

Earlier, we noted how participants like Adila, Bina, Fozia and Leyla were often judged by people based on their external and physical appearance (religion, colour, culture and country of origin) and confronted by people (colleagues, teachers, health staff and the general public) who made judgements about their ability. They reported feeling undervalued, lacking recognition and not given the due respect for their work. For example, Leyla felt undermined, underestimated and infantilised because she is a young, Muslim woman (brown, South-Asian female, wearing hijab) whose capabilities were questioned even though she run a successful campaign which was covered by the local media. These examples demonstrate how Muslim women (participants) face gendered Islamophobia and how anti-Muslim discrimination (Islamophobia) is related to their religion, colour, culture and country of origin (Sweida-Metwally, 2022) and how they are seen as ‘spaces invaders’ in activist and political spaces (Puwar, 2004). Participants find themselves as ‘matter out of

place' in what Puwar calls, 'privileged spaces of the political realm' as the boundaries between public and private domain are complicated by race and colonialism. Furthermore, Papia, a Politician and Campaigner explains all this as the "gendered kind of Islamophobia... all rooted in dominance of the legacy of colonialism in the world". Based on her experience, Papia suggests that gendered Islamophobia "still centres on whiteness and prioritises and legitimises that and sees that as the goal."

Papia points out how activist and political spaces are often marked by masculinity and whiteness and discriminatory practices by the state and society at large that marginalise and exclude Muslim women who are seen as space invaders. She makes references to the ongoing political discourses about Muslims and Islam where Muslim women are seen as threat and victims of Islamophobia/anti-Muslim racism and hostility due to their hijab and Muslimness, as discussed previously in the literature chapter (see Allen, 2018; Awan 2012, 2016, Kumar, 2012; Massoumi et al, 2016, Saeed, 2016; Zempi and Awan, 2016; Zempi, 2020). Consequently, Muslim women in power (politicians, community leaders and public speakers and other activists) are interrogated and harassed, argues Leyla, citing the example of Zara Mohammed who faced "a load of people questioning her" (as discussed above). Similarly, participants are questioned, interrogated and harassed by the public in the street (Aiza, Sadia), by colleagues/organisations (Madiha, Tahira) and on social media platforms (Fozia, Sadaf).

Participants are seen as "highly visible as conspicuous bodies" (particularly if they wear the hijab) but "invisible as they struggle to be seen as competent and capable" (Puwar, 2004: 58). For example, Aiza, Leyla and other participants explained how their capabilities are often doubted, where they have to prove themselves (see above). Participants also stated how they are seen as a threat and how conversations were often shut down when they tried to express themselves. For example, Aiza said that as a Muslim woman she gets "completely shut down" in her work environment and politics. On the other hand, Ruby believes she is seen as a threat when she speaks up against injustices, prejudices and Islamophobia. Ruby explains:

“If I'm campaigning on my social housing side of things, I'm not considered so much of a threat. But as soon as I start speaking about Islamophobia, or as soon as I start speaking about racial prejudices ... Now, we know prejudice exists but as soon as you start speaking as a Muslim Bengali woman, talking about lifting the lid or asking to see, why is it that unemployment is affecting Bangladeshi Muslims disproportionately, when we look at the death rates of COVID, when we look at how that affected the East London community and again, disproportionate numbers, conversation shuts down very, very quickly.”

The impact of being seen as a threat, being shut down and not being able to express their views can often lead to a range of psychological and emotional responses (such as low confidence, depression and anxiety) and increasing feelings of vulnerability, fear and insecurity and mental health. Similarly, Awan and Zempi (2016) found that Muslim women are more vulnerable to intimidation, violence and harassment, both online and offline. These psychological and emotional pain is further highlighted by Fozia who had to deal with recurring experiences of both racism and Islamophobia as trauma, which had “a very big health impact and its usually mental health.” Fozia explains:

“When you feel, when we're [Muslim women] really triggered, when we've really gone down into the root causes, we can find that a lot of them are related to experience, trauma around racist abuse and exposure ... all those [memories] come back every time there is an incident, it all comes gushing back and you have to deal with that [trauma again].”

Fozia explains the racist abuse and exposure she faced when she was young (see above) and how racism and Islamophobic abuse continued in her adult life at work and activist spaces, which led her to find incidents like 9/11 and 7/7 and other recent terrorist attacks as reported by the media, as triggering:

“The emotions that come back, the flashbacks that come out and that affects me for days [and] it just puts you in a different place.”

Fozia said she was not alone in her experience as counselling services and organisations have also reported a rise in Islamophobic attacks on Muslim women and she personally heard similar stories from Muslim women in her campaign to get Islamophobia recognised and hate crime reported.

Karima, a Politician and Campaigner on the other hand, described her fear of being attacked by Islamophobes:

"I feel that I can be attacked because of my political voice. I could be attacked about Palestine, just because I'm a Muslim woman. But when my counterpart, who is white says it, it is different ... then as a Muslim woman, you're more fearful that you'd be attacked. As a Muslim politician, you'll feel that you'll be attacked more, you are a lot more freer if you are not a politician and Muslim. So, there's constraints there."

Participants like Adila, Leyla, Madiha, Rabia and Ruby concur with Karima and said they had to keep their guard up and think about the implications of speaking up on issues of injustice, inequalities, and discrimination (and being careful with tweets as mentioned above). However, these Muslim women, inspired by their faith, Islamic values and ethics, did speak out against issues covered by the media including Palestine (Fozia, Ruby), BLM (Bina and Karima) and the disproportionate deaths amongst ethnic minorities during the Covid-19 pandemic (Leyla, Sophia), however, they recognised the repercussions of speaking out as a Muslim woman. Some were fearful that they will be shut down, and others felt they would be attacked for their views. Participants pointed to female Muslim MPs (Apsana Begum, Naz Shah and Zarah Sultana) who have spoken out against several national and global issues including Islamophobia and how they were interrogated, harassed and ridiculed in the media (see above). Participants like Tahira, Sadaf and Fozia also mentioned the impact of online abuse (and the fear of being attacked on social media) on their activism and politics.

The Muslim women in this study were susceptible to sexist, racist and Islamophobic abuse and discrimination because they were seen within the narrow framing of the oppressed Muslim woman and the negative stereotypes of Muslim women. In this research, I argue that Muslim women face several barriers to their political activism as shaped by their

gender, religion, race/ethnicity. They are also seen as space invaders in activist and political spaces as they have taken up privileged positions of authority and/or power, which have not been reserved for them (Puwar, 2004). However, I argue they are outsiders inside and ‘still do not have an undisputed right to occupy’ these spaces (Puwar, 2004: 42). Consequently, Muslim women space invaders in a position of authority/power face sexist, racist and Islamophobic abuse in activist and political spaces. Participants experience non-recognition, disrespect and stereotyping (Hussein, 2023) but they also have the potential to use their voice to navigate and strategize in solidarity with others (discussed in the next chapter) to overcome these barriers to their political activism.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I answered two research questions: 1) What are the key motivations behind Muslim women’s political activism? and 2) What are the barriers to their political activism? Using empirical data, I explored faith-inspired activism and the barriers to their political activism. Faith is the primary motivation for political activism for Muslim women in this study who believe in the Islamic principles and ethics of equality, justice and fairness and getting involved in the community. Religion is the main driver for Muslim women in this study as it guided their morals and provided a framework to carry out their activism, hence they participated in faith-inspired activism.

Faith-inspired activism means to participate in activism and/or politics as Muslim women, abiding by the Islamic principles and values of upholding justice, challenging oppression (and oppressive stereotypes) and volunteering in the community to support vulnerable community members – an ethical and entirely positive project of personal cultivation as a good Muslim woman. This meant stepping up during Covid-19 pandemic (running food banks and mutual aid). This is in line with previous studies that found religion to be one of the main drivers for Muslim women’s political participation (Easat-Daas, 2020, Finlay and Hopkins, 2019; Joly and Wadia, 2017; Mahmood, 2005) with faith guiding and inspiring Muslims to be ‘active citizens’ who were deeply concerned about the misrepresentation of Islam and Muslim women in the West (Nagel and Staeheli, 2011: 438). Religion plays an important part of life for these Muslim women like the British Muslims in a previous review

of surveys on British Muslims reported by Ipsos MORI and commissioned by the Aziz Foundation and the Joseph Rowntree Trust (Kaur-Ballagan et al, 2008).

Religion is the heavier weighted factor in their activism as they work simultaneously to contest the negative stereotypes of Muslim women as victims of a sexist and fundamentalist patriarchy (Ali and Hopkins, 2012; Alimahomed-Wilson, 2020). Muslim women were fully aware of the negative religious and cultural representations of Muslim women and often felt the need to explain Islam and correct or define misconceptions of Islam. They are often seen as the 'Other' and in terms of their minority status as ethnic women and racialised due to their gender and religion. However, the two white English converts in the study were also 'racialised' and ethnicised because of their hijab and Muslimness. Thus, this study concurs with the study of Franks (2000) and Moosavi (2015) who found that 'white converts are re-racialised as 'not-quite white or even, non-white' because Islam is seen as a 'non-white religion. Subsequently, Muslim women are situated at the intersection of religion, gender and race as discussed by Skenderovic and Spati (2019).

A second finding is that Muslim women are 'space invaders' in activist and political spaces. Their gender and religion are seen as an inequality and a disadvantage as they are treated like the women and racialised minorities in Puwar's study (2004). They experience non-recognition, disrespect and stereotyping (Hussein, 2023) as Muslim women space invaders.

Finally, Muslim women experience sexist, racist and Islamophobic abuse in addition to being a space invader. As Hafsa suggest, Muslim women face "layer upon layer of oppression" because they are a woman facing gender impacts (sexism, misogyny), a woman of colour facing racism and a Muslim woman facing Islamophobia as barriers to their political activism. The combined impact of these is gendered Islamophobia [and space invader], which negatively impacts Muslim women's political activism. Muslim women activists (including politicians) are disadvantaged, stereotyped and treated differently (Tartari and Mencutek, 2015). Muslim women face what Adila describes as a "quadruple whammy because of all those experiences", exacerbated further by the triple penalty or the Muslim penalty (Heath and McMahon, 2001; Khattab and Johnston, 2012) and the new Covid-19 pandemic. The Muslim women in this study are resilient in their faith and continue to

participate in political activism despite these barriers. They circumvent and overcome these barriers through support, solidarity and allyship which is discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Six: Strategies: Support, solidarity and allyship

I've now learned this stuff from having spoken to other [Muslim] women and built that confidence up and having that other group of women that have shared [their] experiences is real power, like it really makes you feel stronger.

Shazia, Women's Rights Activist

Introduction

In the previous chapter I shared examples of the motivating factors that shape and influence Muslim women to participate in faith-inspired activism and the barriers they faced as a result, namely sexism and Islamophobia (racial and religious prejudice, abuse and discriminations).

The aim of this chapter is to answer the research question: 1) How do Muslim women overcome the barriers to their political activism? To answer this question, I have grouped the strategies to overcome barriers to political activism into three types: micro strategies include getting support from individuals e.g., family, friends and supporters (including Muslims and non-Muslims); meso strategies include support and solidarity from groups and organisations (e.g., secular and Muslim organisations); macro strategies include solidarity and allyship on a wider scale, from national campaigns to international groups and movements (e.g., Sarah Everard and #MeToo, Black Lives Matter (BLM), climate change, and the issue of Palestine). I start with a brief overview of the terminology before I use examples from the empirical data to demonstrate the support, solidarity and allyship used by Muslim women to overcome their barriers to political activism.

Is there a difference between support, allyship and solidarity?

Allies are individuals outside of the disadvantaged group (i.e., Muslim women) who become involved in individual and collective actions and who work towards social or political change (Kutluca and Radke, 2022). In other words, an ally is someone from a non-marginalised group who uses their privilege to advocate for a marginalised group (e.g., Muslim women, migrants, refugees etc). As there is an overlap between a supportive contact and allyship

(Louis et al, 2019), when I talk about support from family members and friends, these are considered to be a supportive contact, often within interpersonal relationships (providing verbal or emotional support). However, this concept is not always encompassing as it does not account for the support from community members (e.g., Muslim men from the Muslim community). Due to the overlap between supportive contact and allyship, I refer to these as 'support' using the words of participants.

In recent years, however, the term performative activism and performative allyship have become very popular, highlighting how allies may act in ways that either do not contribute or may even be harmful in the long run for disadvantaged groups as it can be seen as a form of 'inauthentic allyship' (Kutluca and Radke, 2022: 3). This is when an ally professes support and solidarity with a marginalized group in a way that is not helpful as they are motivated by some type of reward e.g., getting a virtual pat on the back on social media (Kalina, 2020). However, it may not always be easy or clear to identify genuine allies from performative allies or if colleagues are true to their words. For example, Madiha, a Social Media Activist came across one of her white colleagues sharing a post that she could only describe as a racist and Islamophobic social media post (online). She claims that this colleague's action online did not match their words as they often remained neutral on global issues in face-to-face conversations and discussions. She came to the realisation that some of her white colleagues were racist but did not have the confidence to share their racist views with her (Madiha works for a local authority). This happened at a time of global social and racial unrest when people were discussing the BLM movement and Solidarity with Palestine campaign in Britain. However, in the sections below, I focus on the positive support participants said they received from individuals, groups and organisations and solidarity and allyship from the wider community.

Sachi Edwards (2021) explores the concept of allyship and solidarity with religious minorities, arguing that "allyship is a continual process of learning, reflecting, self-assessing and doing, whereby one's intentions, actions, and impacts must be continually analysed" (2021: 286). She describes Keith Edwards' conceptual model for allyship (motivations held by aspiring allies): self-interest, altruism and social justice and argues for an intentional process of self-reflection. The notion of allyship has been discussed in terms of specific

identities and privileges including race and White privilege and now the term has “become almost ubiquitous to the point that it is often misused” and disliked as it is easy for people to label themselves as “an ally without actually doing anything” (2021: 287). This may explain why a few participants use the term allyship, or political allies but they mention solidarity, which is seen as an alternative as there is a “growing preference for the term solidarity” (Boucher cited in Edwards, 2021). Solidary evokes ideas of movement building which is something participants refer to when working together to build a momentum towards a shared end goal (hooks cited in Edwards, 2021: 287). Participants provide examples of this through their solidarity with Women100, Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, climate change, Sarah Everard and the #MeToo campaign and Palestine (as discussed later).

According to Edwards, the term solidarity is therefore preferred as the emphasis is on the “relationship between dominant and marginalized groups/individuals rather than focusing on the dominant group member, the ally, exclusively” (2021: 287). Similarly, Tava argues that solidarity is a ‘pivotal concept’ as recent emergencies such as the European migrant crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the resurgence of racist crime and violence have impelled the public to reconsider ways of uniting and protecting each other and fighting for shared political goals (2023: 39). But there is a lack of an agreed/shared definition of this concept. Tava (2023) argues that solidarity has been described as a “political principle, a moral obligation, a civic value, a collective sentiment, and more” (ibid).

Although these two terms are often used interchangeably, Louis et al (2019), argue that solidarity and allyship may describe the same behaviour, enacted for two different motives thus allyship can be seen as motivated by one’s own group’s values, norms and needs and solidarity motivated by a perceived shared superordinate or opinion-based group identity that unites some advantaged and disadvantaged group members. Collective action and solidarity between disadvantaged groups can be a consequence of perceiving a common experience of discrimination (ibid, 9). For example, participants (female/women and from an ethnic minority background) experience common disadvantages and discriminations e.g., austerity measures during Covid-19 pandemic, sexism and Islamophobia (racial and religious

prejudice) as discussed in the previous chapters. Therefore, they undertake collective action and work in solidarity together to achieve social justice goals.

Jolly et al's (2021) work on allyship as activism offers an interesting theoretical context and framework for this chapter. Although they focus on sport, the three different types of allyship they mention fits loosely into the broad areas of strategies that participants explore and use for support, allyship and solidarity for their own activism. Jolly et al (2021) argue that allyship can stimulate changes at the micro (individual), meso (organisational) and macro (structural) level. However, they insist that allyship is most transformational as a form of resistance when it moves beyond agency and advocacy to activism (ibid). In this thesis, I refer to these levels as different types of activism that can overlap and interact with each other (see chapter four and five). Micro activism deals with individual, local and grassroots issues that affects individuals directly, meso activism focuses on national issues or interest and macro activism is about international or global issues and concerns that impact Muslim women. Table 6A describes the three types of activism and how it is adapted from the works of Jolly et al (2021) for this research to capture the activism, barriers and strategies used by Muslim women activists under the three types of activism: micro, meso and macro activism.

Types of activism and strategies			
Types of Activism and Strategies	Micro	Meso	Macro
Jolly et al (2021)	Individual	Organisational	Structural and institutional
Adaptation of Jolly et al (2021)	Micro activism Individual and local, grassroots and community activism – that directly impacts women and their community	Meso activism Participants involved with national issues, concerns and interest e.g. national campaigns, networks, organisations and party politics	Macro activism Participants involved with international (global) issues, concerns and interests e.g. BLM, Palestine, climate change, hijab activism
	Participation in social media awareness building		
	Barriers affecting Muslim women's political activism ☐ Sexism (and misogyny) ☐ Islamophobia (racial and religious prejudice and abuse) ☐ Space invader in activist and political spaces		
Strategies	Support from individuals (family members, personal friends, work colleagues, political allies)	Support from groups and organisations including secular and Muslim organisations (includes mosques, women's networks, inter-faith alliances) - Includes solidarity and allies	Support through solidarity and allyship on a wider scale including national and international campaigns and movements (BLM, climate change, #MeToo and Sarah Everard, Palestine etc)

Table 6A: Types of activism and strategies

In this chapter, I refer to allyship when participants mention allies, meaning friends, colleagues and political allies (people who share the same political or religious aspirations/goals). I use solidarity when the focus is more about movement building (not individuals) and working with other people towards a shared goal (e.g., to raise awareness, change a policy or rectify an injustice). When referring to support, I talk about individuals offering a range of support (advice, emotional and practical support) to participants which they don't refer to as allyship or solidarity as described above.

Participants navigate and try to overcome barriers to their political activism using various support from individuals and organisations and allyship and solidarity from organisations, structures, and institutions in British society and abroad. Participants argue that allyship as activism is transformational as they recognise the importance of 'connecting', 'supporting' and 'communicating' with different people, networks, and organisations to advance and make social and political change and they do this individually and collectively with other people and organisations, to raise awareness, campaign and mobilise Muslim women and others to fight for a variety of causes including women's rights, anti-sexism, anti-racism, anti-Islamophobia and climate change at the three levels of allyship identified by Jolly et al (2021).

Support from individuals

Muslim women activists in this research conveyed the importance of having support from individuals which include individual family members, personal friends, other Muslim women and men, individual followers and supporters, online and offline. These followers and supporters were other women of faith, colleagues, and political allies.

Participants stressed the importance of having supportive family members. Eighteen participants talked about family members as an enabling factor in their political activism journey. Eight women mentioned their husband as being 'supportive' towards their activism and four spoke very highly about their father's encouragement. For example, Fozia, a Women's Rights Activist who is also seen as a Community Leader, works in community organising and campaigning (women's rights and leadership, hate crime, anti-racism, and

climate change) which often means working long hours, some evenings and weekends, time spent away from her family. Fozia explains:

“I couldn’t do everything that I do if I didn’t have the support from my family, from my husband [and] from my kids and I think that’s really important, we forget that.”

Participants mentioned the support they received from their husband, from encouragement to practical help and emotional support. For example, Rabia, a Community Activist, initially worked to support her husband in his community role but then with deep knowledge and understanding of her community and the issues affecting them, she started to fundraise, campaign and spearheaded community initiatives and programmes whilst bringing up a family, all with the support and encouragement of her husband. On the other hand, Karima, a Politician and Campaigner describes her husband as the most “positive” and supportive family member who asks, “how do we make it easy for you?” thus, providing practical help and advice when she needed it.

Bina, a Social Media Activist, gets practical and emotional support from her husband who she describes as compassionate, loyal and considerate. Her husband supports her activism (he promotes it with other people) and helps with cooking and other chores at home so she “can do better work” whilst Ruksana’s husband allows her to “do anything” within her Islamic and religious boundaries. Ruksana, a Grassroots Activist explains that her husband understands and “knows my boundaries” as she works with the community on social justice issues such as education, health and poverty. These women participate in faith-inspired activism where they abide by Islamic principles, values and ethics, seeking equality, rights and justice for marginalised groups of people including Muslim women (Mahmood, 2005).

Participants mentioned fathers as role models (Sadiah, Papia) and an inspiration and teacher (Madiha, Rahma). For example, Sadiah, a Politician and Campaigner described her father as “a man on a mission” for his community activism and charitable actions. Sadiah decided to go into politics to give back to the community because she wanted to carry on with her father’s legacy. Similarly, Papia, another Politician and Campaigner said she had “political privilege” as her father was “involved at the local level” which encouraged her to create a space for

herself in politics. On the other hand, Madiha, a Social Media Activist shared how her father got her into activism stating, “my dad sort of pushed me to volunteer for an election campaign.” On reflection she concludes, “having those platforms [to write] helped and facilitated at least the written part of my activism.” Madiha’s father encouraged her to write for his newspaper, covering campaigns and issues that impacted the Muslim community, which she continued into micro-blogging. Rahma, a Community Activist said her father believed in equal access and opportunities for “older children... regardless of whether they are male or female”. Consequently, she found her father inspiring as she was encouraged to feel, “Yes, I can be whatever I want to be.” Rahma describes her father as “someone who brought us hope... [and] presented Islam that is so beautiful to me.” Similarly, her mother also encouraged her to succeed, thus Rahma talks about her “double motivation”, where both parents encouraged and supported her to be active in her community.

Family members are described as key enablers for these participants. The support from their family especially the husband or father is a significant factor in their political activism and as Leena, a Women’s Rights Activist sums up, it is a “sacrifice” (time, money, career) that these women often choose to make, with the support of their family. This includes inspiration and support from female members of the family as well. For example, Tauhida, a Community Activist refers to taking inspiration from her mother and grandmother. On the other hand, Karima recognises the importance of having strong female family members (which included her mother):

“I come from a long line of very strong women, my family... where people don't say, ‘don't do that’ and instead, they said, ‘keep going’. So, I have that positive aspect of a strong Muslim woman from my family. ... I come from that kind of long line of women who would say, ‘what do we do to support you? rather than do you think you can do this?’”

What is interesting to note here is the involvement and the support from male members of the family, husbands and fathers who are often seen as unsupportive of women’s political activism outside the home and family (Akthar, 2015). As discussed previously, Muslim women are often represented as suffering from a triad of oppression: honour-killings,

forced marriages and the Islamic dress (hijab, jilbab and niqab) which is used to portray Muslim women as victims of a sexist and patriarchal culture and religion and therefore in need of saving and protection from men (husbands and fathers). This has been discussed earlier in chapter two in more detail (see Abu-Lughod, 2013; Ahmed, 2002; Dustin and Phillips, 2008; Mirza and Meeto, 2018, Rashid, 2014, Razack, 2004). On the other hand, Takhar (2014) noted how South Asian women (including Muslim women) received the encouragement of their fathers, who motivated them to get proactive in their local communities. It is clear in this research that participants had the support and backing of their husband/father and other family members, contrary to prevalent stereotypes about unsupportive Muslim men.

Some participants (7) were brought up by parents who were also involved in charity work and/or politics, and this is one of the reasons why participants have supportive families. Participants were inspired, encouraged and supported to get involved in political activism, following their parent's example. For example, Aiza grew up seeing her parents help other people and this is something she has continued with in her adult life as well. Similarly, Sadia followed in her father's footsteps to help the community and give something back. Muslim women have a "passion of seeking justice" according to Fabiha and with the support of their families (parents, husbands and fathers, women) they are encouraged to participate in a range of faith-inspired activism to achieve social justice. Just like these women, their families do not separate faith from their activism and politics, resulting in their support and encouragement for their daughters and wives to go beyond the usual forms and institutions of politics and create a positive project of self-cultivation as Muslim women (Mahmood, 2005).

Participants refer to a network of support or relationships that they have built for support. This includes the critical support from their husband and/or father and female members of their families as discussed above. However, a network of support also includes other people from different faith communities and groups as almost two-thirds of participants (21) built their networks through inter-faith work, some through their local mosques, others through charities and organisations they were involved in. For example, Rabia, a Community Activist said she worked hard to build relationships within and outside the Muslim community to

have “a strong sort of inter-faith network of people” that she could depend on for their support during campaigns and project delivery.

Participants spoke about their relationship with non-family members (Muslims and non-Muslims) and how they connect with these people in their political activist journey. For example, Leyla, a Politician and Campaigner talks about “like-minded people” and “friends” who “hold the same religious views as me” i.e., Muslims and those who “hold the same political views as me” (Muslims and non-Muslims). Leyla explains how the “camaraderie” works for her:

“Having that small network of support, people that really support you and understand your politics and see past all that unconscious bias. Those are the things that helped me, and kind of pushed me to carry on”.

During campaigns and elections, Leyla and her political party supporters “reach out to each other... take care of each other because we are all aware of the strain that it would have on our mental health”. Creating those spaces, advises Leyla is very important, to “support each other and build allies.” Leyla strongly believes when you build allies, “you build power” and then “it’s very hard for people to knock you down.”

In the world of politics, you need political allies and supporters as mentioned by the six politicians in the research. For example, Aiza confirms that politics is hard work and that you need “support and backing” of people and allies, otherwise activists are likely to have a “breakdown” or “leave” as politics is “not the easiest space to be in” as discussed in chapter five. Consequently, Aiza joined a mentoring scheme for women in public office that she found really supportive “because it opened me up to a whole network of other women... many Muslim women across the country... and many other really fantastic women.” Aiza works with these women “opening up spaces for each other to speak and take part in campaigns and activism.” She also builds relationships and has a “solid group of support” with “women of colour” and “white women” at a local and national level and stressed how “vital” these relationships were to her. She confirms, “It is the only thing that keeps me in politics.” Similarly, Karima also mentions how she gets support from people around her and

people on social media. Participants refer to individuals, non-family members, Muslims and non-Muslims who they turn to support. Some are seen as friends; others are seen as political allies. For some participants, this support can turn into solidarity with groups, networks and alliances which I talk about later.

Participants conveyed the importance of having support from other Muslim women and men: this was another important enabling factor in their political journey. Often Muslim women point to cultural barriers within their own communities producing hindrances to Muslim women's political activism which has been discussed in the previous chapter (Joly and Wadia, 2017). However, it is interesting to note that participants acknowledged the support of their male family members (see above) and community support for their activism. For example, Leyla describes her difficult journey into politics, stating that without the camaraderie (see above) and her supportive networks of women and the "small number of brothers [Muslim men] and men" who supported and stood by her, she would not have continued with her activism and politics. Similarly, Papia, another Politician and Campaigner, shared how she received a lot of support from Muslim men, people from her "dad's generation" who are older men, and support from "members of my own community" and other Muslim men. She said, "a lot of them were very, very supportive". Here, Papia is referring to the support she received in terms of her campaign (verbal and emotional support) and getting her a political role (e.g., voting).

The participants especially mention the support they received from other Muslim women. For example, Farah, a Grassroots Activist reached out to Muslim women leading charities, organisations, and networks (trustees, board members, senior staff) for their advice and support in setting up her own network to help Muslim women. She emailed them, met them on zoom (during Covid) and said, "just seeing so many Muslim women, strong Muslim women who were also running their own charities and organisations gave me hope." Farah set up her network for Muslim women during Covid with help and support (e.g., advice and moral support) from other Muslim women and joined "a mentoring scheme that encourages Muslim women to grow and be connected to women that are heads of [charities and organisations] that are progressing." The support of other Muslim women was paramount, according to Farah as they "facilitated" the set-up of her own network.

Ruby, a Grassroots Campaigner and a board member of a large campaigning organisation said women from her local faith (Muslim) community were very supportive and provided practical support like childcare, enabling her to attend assembly meetings and board meetings. Ruby explains how her faith is a great enabler for political activism:

“It’s part of our [Islamic] ethos to ensure, it’s not just our families that thrive but we have an obligation towards our wider community so in doing these things [being involved at board level], I’ve had support from [the Muslim community] as little as childcare to allow me to attend accountability assemblies and attend board meetings... to lendings [support] when we’ve had our [campaigning] projects.”

Ruby highlights how the Muslim community, in particular, her local mums group who “have come in their numbers to support our campaigns.” These women attended campaign protests and provided financial support (donated) to charity causes.

Tahira, a Grassroots Activist states the importance of having Muslim women for emotional support. She explains how she turns to Muslim women when she is “frustrated” or “upset”, to discuss her feelings and share experiences, acknowledging the emotional support as imperative. Tahira explains why a “safe space” is necessary for Muslim women:

“I think the main thing that helps me is other women, Muslim women [who] are going through the same thing [same issues], and that we can understand each other, even if other people think we are being too like dramatic or whatever, like there’s a safe space [for us to talk].”

Being able to talk freely and openly with other Muslim women in a safe space is important to participants including Fozia, Karima, Leyla, Ruby and Tahira.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, “Muslim women have gathered and done really good stuff more than ever before,” states Leena. She describes Muslim women as “empowered” and having “connections, those links, those friendships [and that] kind of support groups [and]

trust” with each other, particularly on social media platforms like Instagram, that was not there before the pandemic. Leena offered support to Muslim women who were struggling to get support with various issues including the impact of domestic violence and misogyny. Leena and Rahma observed how Muslim women were offering help and support to Muslim women activists through supportive networks, online support and friendship during Covid-19 pandemic and suggested this should continue.

With a similar understanding, Karima encouraged Muslim women to support other Muslim women to have “social media representation” and to “amplify what they [Muslim women] are saying... because they are Muslim women.” Karima wants underrepresented voices of Muslim women to be amplified and shared across networks so that Muslim women can challenge inequalities and run campaigns with the support of Muslim women. Karima advocates for Muslim women to support other Muslim women as they are likely to be attacked on social media platforms. This means, supporting them online by becoming their followers, amplifying them and highlighting their cause, fight and/or activism by sending a message of support, to say, “I am here for you.” Karima shares how she supports Muslim women on Twitter to speak out against Islamophobia and various other social justice issues and encourages other Muslim women to do the same. Karima turns to her supportive contacts (online friends) for help and support and recognises the support Muslim women offer to activists online saying this is especially important as Muslim women are more likely to experience gendered Islamophobia as discussed in previous chapters (Afshar, 2008; Ahmad, 2010; Allen, 2014; Birt, 2009; Hussain and Bagguley, 2012, 2013; Mirza, 2015; Tarlo, 2007b).

Learning from other Muslim women is necessary according to Shazia, a Women’s Rights Activist who set up a professional Women’s Network as it helps with skills, knowledge and activism (know-how to deal with discrimination). This infrapolitics as described by Balazard and Peace (2022) also fosters co-operation, support and confidence in Muslim women like Shazia who learn from the shared experiences of others which she believes is “real power, like it really makes you stronger.” Similarly, Madiha mentions having “mentors” and “educating and changing yourself” through learning from others. Madiha’s mentors are other Muslim women that she knows and learns from and follows online. On the other

hand, Tauhida who partook in the virtual International Women's Month (March 2021) was pleased to see Muslim women across the world were supporting one another through social media. Tauhida said she received encouragement, advice and emotional support from friends and followers on social media platforms like Facebook, to set up her own voluntary group to help local community members. Her support mainly came from female family members (as discussed above) but also social media friends. Consequently, she set up an online training programme for young girls and women and is in the process of formalising her voluntary activities into a charitable organisation.

Leena believes Muslim women's networks are getting much better with Muslim women recognising the "sisterhood" and the power of women coming together to "do our own things" and "push some of these [social justice] issues." A new wave of support emerged during the Covid-19 pandemic for these women similar to the earlier South Asian women groups and the Asian women's movement (both included Muslim women) coming together to support campaigns against racist immigration practices and violence against women within the community by establishing services to meet their needs (Bhandar and Ziadah, 2020; Joly and Wadia, 2017; Siddiqui, 2000; Takhar, 2013). More recently, Joly and Wadia (2017) demonstrated how Muslim women's organisations strengthened and expanded to represent Muslim women on various housing and health needs at the local level with Islam-inspired organisations contributing to the rise of new women's organisations post 9/11 (Joly and Wadia, 2017, 148-151). Similarly, participants mention the Covid-19 pandemic as contributing to a surge of practical and emotional support provided by mosques, local community groups and organisations. This benefited local people including the participants who were encouraged and supported through a network of people who cared for their community and contributed their time to volunteer for their local food banks and mutual aid during the Covid-19 pandemic including during the month of Ramadan which took place during the first lockdown. Participants provided moral, emotional and practical (including physical) support to each other as they felt it was their religious and moral obligation to do so.

This section therefore concurs with previous studies where Muslim women use support from others to advance their activism (see Balazard and Peace, 2022; Joly and Wadia, 2017;

Takhar, 2013). Participants are politicised and politically active Muslim women who do infrapolitics and they are supported by like-minded Muslim women who offer their advice and practical help (Farah), empathy and emotional support (Tahira, Tauhida), “bonding”, “sisterhood” and “connectivity” with each other (Fabiha, Leena, Zahra). They received various support from family and friends, Muslims and non-Muslims and from Muslim men. This support has been critical for micro activism to flourish in the community. However, Muslim women also receive support from groups and organisations where support, sisterhood and political allies are used as strategies within meso and macro activism as well.

Support from groups and organisations

Support for meso activism came from Muslim organisations and mosques, inter-faith organisations and women’s groups and networks whose desire to help others meant connecting with participants and their organisations to work towards a shared end goal (e.g., end to violence against girls and women). Participants worked collectively with national groups and organisations including mainstream, secular organisations and Muslim organisations (including mosques) to offer support (promoting and supporting campaigns, solidarity and project delivery) to other organisations and in return, they gained inspiration, encouragement and support from other activists working in these organisations. This networking, co-operation and relationship building gave support to organisations needing people power (numbers) to support their campaigns and work towards social and political change at the national level.

Working with groups and organisations, participants develop a network of support and relationships that they can turn to when they need support. For example, Rabia created an interfaith network of people whilst Ruksana built her relationship with schools, colleges and faith organisations (including Jewish and Christian) to tackle social challenges such as poverty (e.g., debt, living wage and housing campaigns). On the other hand, Madiha emphasised the importance of fighting together and supporting each other to achieve change for the wider community. Thus, she stands up for Muslim women and minority group rights. Other participants sought support from women’s groups and networks and Muslim organisations including mosques.

Rahma works with a large, national Muslim organisation and through this organisation, she came across many Muslim women's networks, projects and organisations that offer support and encouragement to Muslim women in various projects, from advice, emotional and practical support to capacity building and good role models. Rahma suggests these support networks for Muslim women are key to supporting Muslim women in their activism as it encourages Muslim women to be confident and stand their ground on issues of importance (women's rights, discrimination and social justice). Having good role models in activism and politics like Zara Mohamed, Apsana Begum MP and Zarah Sultana MP and others also encourages Muslim women to continue with their activism and politics (despite the barriers they all face).

Participants mentioned organisations that offer emotional and practical support to deal with Islamophobia and hate crime. Organisations like the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND), the Muslim Youth Helpline (MYH) and Inspired Minds offer advice, emotional and practical support to deal with a range of issues including Islamophobia, women's rights and hate crimes. Tauhida explains how these national organisations provide "another safe space where they [Muslim women including participants] can call up and ask for advice and just have that emotional support given to them." This includes Muslim women (seen as space invaders) who face sexism and Islamophobia (racial and religious prejudice) in activist and political spaces and obtain advice and emotional support from various organisations including the ones mentioned above. Participants also named various Muslim women's groups and networks including the Muslim Women's Network UK (MWNUK), Muslim Women's Collective, Women Inclusive Team (WIT), and the NHS Muslim Women's Network that work with Muslim women on a range of issues from education, employment to health and Islamophobia. These organisations are supportive and sympathetic to Muslim women's needs and often provide advice, training and capacity building on a range of issues to help Muslim women lead campaigns, develop skills and experience, to support other women and stop discrimination against Muslim women and mobilise them to act (e.g., petitions, letters to MPs and calls for solidarity).

It is not only Muslim organisations and Muslim women's groups and networks that support Muslim women but also mosques and inter-faith projects and alliances. For example, Fahima and Rabia (both Community Activists) brought up the issue of mosques offering women-only spaces which enabled women to take part in religious services and meet other Muslim women and network and build alliances (Brown, 2006; Nyhagen, 2019). In addition, mosques like the London Muslim Centre (LMC) host Visit My Mosque events, inter-faith activities and other women networking events which offer support to participants like Fahima. Support from the "mosque community" when doing inter-faith work is greatly appreciated by Rabia who uses mosque spaces to hold inter-faith discussions and activities. This type of support helps Muslim women in their activism as often they do not have the financial resources to hire large spaces for promoting campaigns of particular interests to Muslim women and the wider community e.g., inter-faith and environmental issues.

Participants received various help and support from secular (e.g., Citizens UK) and Muslim organisations (e.g., MCB and MEND). Some participants like Fozia and Leena mentioned witnessing the emergence of Muslim women's political agency especially in the aftermath of 9/11 and 7/7 events (Easat-Daas, 2020; Joly and Wadia, 2017; Lewicki and O'Toole, 2017; Massoumi, 2015; Rashid, 2014) and more recently, they observed how Covid-19 pandemic pushed Muslim women to volunteer for food banks, campaign for better information and mobilise against health inequalities, all with the support and solidarity of other groups and organisation and allies from these national organisations. For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, participants (12) worked with the NHS and government agencies dealing with the vaccine issue and other health impacts, at times campaigning for specific issues in their local community (e.g., better information) and other times, speaking against Covid-19 inequalities affecting the Muslim community (MCB, 2020). By working together with other organisations and networks (people from different faith groups and different socio-economic groups), participants created informal and formal networks and 'critical spaces' to help support each other (Takhar, 2013) and influence social policy on issues such as living wage.

Participants (6) mentioned Women100, a project of Citizens UK and an inter-faith alliance training network of women in leadership which they said welcomed Muslim women and women of other faiths and none to come together to work on matters deemed to be

important for local women such as local campaigns on getting a living wage and better housing for local people and national issues on misogyny and Islamophobia. For example, Fozia and Safura saw their collective work with Women100 as a 'critical space' to raise awareness, run campaigns and have discussions with policy makers and politicians. Fozia explains how Women100 became a good support base for Muslim women activists (as well as other women) as it campaigned on similar issues and causes of interest to Muslim women (e.g., social justice, human rights including women's rights) through peaceful negotiations, relationship building and collaborative work. For example, Fozia worked with Women100 to change a local school policy to allow a Muslim woman to attend parents evening with her niqab. Women100 used their numbers (women from all faiths and none) to make demands and changes for local women and celebrated their solidarity through online events during International Women's Day (IWD) and their Women100 magazine showcasing activist work by allies (including the work of female Muslim community leaders). Both Fozia and Safura recognise the significance of having allies from secular organisations and projects like Citizens UK, and the Women100 project.

Participants recognise the importance of having the support, allyship and solidarity of people with privileged identities and platforms as well as political power (Jolly et al, 2021) as Muslim women continue to be "excluded from public life and powerful political positions where power is usually associated with the male (white body)" (Takhar, 2014: 121; see Puwar, 2004). Due to their exclusion, Muslim women as part of South Asian women previously worked together as active agents and collective agency, influencing social policy on issues such as forced marriages and domestic violence (Takhar, 2013). However, participants in this research identified more with their Muslim identity and worked with Muslim organisations including mosques, Muslim organisations and institutions. They formed alliances and joined networks with other faith organisations, mosques, charities, and voluntary organisations to mobilise on issues that impacted their communities (e.g., living wage, Covid-19 inequalities). This included seeking help and support from allies. For example, Sana set up a national network for professional Muslim women in her work sector and received "really good support" from female sector leaders who encouraged her to write a blog about her network and promoted the blog, which gained a lot of interest from the

sector. Consequently, Sana turned to other senior women in her sector for support and realised they were “opening doors for us” and giving “really, really good advice.”

Sana was very pleased with links to “key senior people” who promoted her network which gave a wider coverage (amplification) and recognition to her work. These senior women were not Muslim women but their “ally support has been very recognised.” Here, Sana alludes to a distinction made between being supportive and being an ally. A white, senior woman in a position of power in this sector is described as an ally. It suggests that an ally is someone in a more advantageous position, holds more power/privilege and therefore taking an action on behalf of the disadvantaged group (i.e. Muslim women) is described as allyship (as discussed previously). Consequently, participants like Sana and Shazia see this type of ally as an important strategy for Muslim women activists, as they need someone in power with advantages/privileges who can support and open doors for their cause and/or initiative (led by disadvantaged Muslim women).

Participants (21) work collaboratively with other people, sometimes in partnership with groups and organisations where they feel supported to make a collective demand and work towards a shared goal. For example, Ruby, a Grassroots Activist recognises the support of her “white allies” (men and women) which she believes enabled her to progress in a large, national campaigning organisation, from steering group member to Vice-Chair position. Ruby strongly believes that without the support of her white allies she would not have a seat at the table with decision-makers as she would have been ignored and excluded from because of her intersectional identities: being female, Muslim and ‘brown-skinned’.

Participants sought allyship and solidarity to support their campaigns and political aims especially as they are seen as ‘space invaders’ where they have been historically and conceptually excluded from institutions and organisations in British society (Puwar, 2004). Consequently, participants worked with various groups and organisations as discussed above and they worked with the wider community, institutions and politics (including campaigning groups, new social movements) to advance their national and international causes through solidarity and allyship on a wider scale.

Support through solidarity and allyship on a wider scale

Participants said they needed allies and solidarity from others to support their campaigns and political aims. This include seeking support on a wider scale, from institutions, politics and new social movements (NSM) which involves political and collective action, resistance to oppression and various national and international networks to overcome the barriers to their activism.

According to Aiza, a Politician and Campaigner, Muslim women need allies and solidarity to overcome the 'toxic' environment of politics arguing that her political allies (women from different backgrounds) understand "how toxic it is for them [women of colour and white women] but also how much more toxic it is for us [Muslim women] to be there [politics]." Legally, Muslim women like other women can enter positions they were previously excluded from however, not being the somatic norm, they are often underestimated, 'invisible' and excluded due to the 'maleness' and 'whiteness' of public spaces (Puwar, 2004: 7-8). The six politicians in the research emphasised these exclusionary issues as barriers to their political activism and made references to living in a patriarchal society and living with the aftermath of 9/11 and 7/7 in a climate of state sanctioned gendered Islamophobia (Ahmad, 2010; Awan, 2016; Hussain and Bagguley, 2012, 2013; Gyima et al, 2022; MCB, 2015). For these participants, solidarity and allyship is key to their survival in British politics.

Participants like Fozia, Ruby and Safura believe in the power of solidarity and argue that collectively working with others is a strength as it provides a solid support base for campaigns (see discussion above on Women100 project). For example, Fozia believes in "collaborative work" as "you've got the support there" whilst Ruby says working as a collective "we lend each other support in numbers... it lets you know that you are not alone ... [and] that [we] are all working collectively towards that [shared] goal."

Papia, a Politician and Campaigner also believes that "having a good team and having a good set of people around you to collaboratively work" on specific political campaigns is important." She explains how the word 'solidarity' is often "thrown around like confetti"

with everyone talking about solidarity without fully understanding the term. Papia explains what solidarity means to her:

“Meaningful solidarity is when you stand alone or feel like you are standing alone on an issue and be under so much attack and nobody believes you and anything that you want, these things that you want to fight for, [people don’t] believe that it’s possible, but then to actually find other people that are willing to stand with you on these things.”

This concept of solidarity can be described as allyship instead of solidarity as it focuses on people (individuals) providing support to someone who is alone and under attack. However, it can be seen as solidarity if the support is from a group of people who support a shared goal. Thus, “collectivism” and “collective action”, according to Papia that “exists between different people from different walks of life” can be seen as solidarity. For example, participants working with others via Women100, TELCO, Citizens UK or any other campaigning organisations to change people’s attitudes and policies might find allyship as transformational but when they come together with a shared purpose to achieve a political goal, it suggests solidarity in action due to collective action (Jolly et al, 2021).

Allyship and solidarity is often linked to international or global issues. For example, the Woman’s March in January 2017 in Washington, D.C. was the ‘largest single-day protest in United States history’ (Watters, 2017) which highlights the importance of White women’s participation in intersectional movements where they use their privilege to support women of colour and intersectional movements and amplify the causes of marginalised people (because they have the privilege to protest without fear of state violence). Watters (2017) argues that “allyship requires recognising one’s privilege but not utilizing it to wield power of control over a marginalized group. There is a distinct difference between recognising that White women are afforded the benefit of protection while protesting and asking White women to come to “the rescue of” people of colour” (2017: 206).

Edwards argues that “as persons with positions of power, dominant group members have the potential to either impede (through non-action or apathy) or expedite the efforts of

oppressed peoples” (2021: 289). Similarly, examples of advantaged groups engaged in action to improve the treatment and status of disadvantaged groups include men championing gender equality initiatives in organisations, and White protesters joining Black Lives Matter (BLM) rallies (Louis et al, 2019: 6). Participants mentioned several national and global social movements that they were part of and/or attended protests, marches, and meetings. Participants said they attended one or more of the following movements and protests as an activist (see Table 6B).

Types of protests, demonstrations and marches attended by participants		
Anti-Policing Bill protests	Anti-Racism Movement including local Stand up to Racism protests	Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement incl. George Floyd protests
Climate Change protests including IFEEs	End Violence Against Girls and Women and other protests	Ending Apartheid in South Africa demonstrations
#MeToo campaign and Sarah Everard peace vigils and other protests	Solidarity with Palestine demonstrations	Stop the War Coalition and Anti-War protests and demonstrations

Table 6B: Types of protests, demonstrations and marches

Locally participants were involved in women’s rights campaigns (including saving women’s organisations to get funding), Save Brick Lane Campaign, the Living Wage, End Debt, air pollution and Covid-related campaigns as well as campaigns on Islamophobia and hate crime. Participants referred to the BLM movement, climate change and the Sarah Everard peace vigil and other national campaigns on Islamophobia.

Participants talked about BLM and how they stood in solidarity with the movement and pointed to how it started discussion within the Muslim community around ‘shadyism’ (the different shades of brown and black), and anti-blackness and anti-black racism. Through the lens of BLM, the MCB with partner organisations and as part of the Proudly Muslim and

Black project launched a landmark collection of essays on Race, Faith and Contemporary Britain in September 2022. One of the participants helped with the series of workshops delivered online to engage with the Muslim community on the topic of anti-blackness. Similarly, other participants mentioned solidarity with BLM movement. For example, Karima suggests BLM movement can help the Muslim community as it has both colour and religion as discriminatory factors.

According to Fozia, the BLM movement impacted the activism of participants as it brought up “unconscious biases” and “stop and search” issues which have “impacted [Muslim] people and [their] mental health.” Fozia, Karima and Papia believe that Muslim women were able to contribute to the movement because of their multiple, intersecting identities and in return they gained allyship and solidarity.

Climate change is a global issue that women and men from all backgrounds rally together to affect change at a global level. It is seen as one of the main social movements where solidarity is expected at street level through protests and demonstrations and on social media platforms. The youngest and oldest participants in this research are passionate about climate change as well as other participants. For example, Maryam talks about climate change and how it has informed Muslim women’s activism because she argues, a lot of “the preservation of the home [and] the preservation of the land is done by women” in the global south and recognised by Muslim women in Britain. Maryam, a Women’s Rights Activist involved in climate change claims that Muslim women “are more ethical” but she recognises that this might be a big statement, however, in her experience she has seen more Muslim women involved in climate change activism and “consciousness of the environment.” Maryam and Hana (both involved in climate change activism) explain how climate change (damage to the planet) is in line with their religious beliefs of taking care of the planet but expected more allyship and solidarity from the wider community.

Karima, on the other hand has been supporting green policies on environmental and social justice issues and she provides an example of Extinction Rebellion where Black people and people from the Muslim community are more likely to be arrested once they join Extinction Rebellion or BLM groups as they do not have the privilege to protest without state violence

like white people (see Watters, 2017). Karima said she knows a lot of Muslim women through Twitter (now called X), and she supports them speaking out on these issues, however, she wants to see more Muslim women supporting other Muslim women online and get the support of allies and solidarity on environmental issues on a national and global scale as well.

Participants spoke about the death of Sarah Everard (killed by a police officer) that sparked a national discussion about violence against women. Thousands of women walked and participated in peace vigils as an example of national solidarity. For example, Fozia, Leena and Sadia mentioned how they (and other women and men) from different backgrounds held peace vigils and campaigned to get misogyny recognised in law. They also participated in global campaigns like the #MeToo campaign that resulted in mobilising groups of people and showing solidarity on the streets (e.g., protests and demonstrations) and on social media platforms.

The murder of Sarah Everard “impacted” women and Muslim women said Leena, as women from different backgrounds started sharing their daily reality of feeling unsafe on the streets including some participants. Leena, a Woman’s Rights Activist spoke about her “fears and anxiety about going out” and described a recent walk that made her feel “different” and a “bit scared.” She said it was “still fresh in my mind and [that this] is a reality that we [Muslim women] have to think about and worry” because Muslim women she says have “different layers, parts of your identity” which subjects them to Islamophobic attacks (e.g., being Muslim, black/ethnic minority and from another country).

Similarly, Fozia spoke about the “renewed sense of fear for Muslim women going out and about” and she felt anger with the number of women’s organisations that have collapsed or half-closed due to lack of funding (something she says she has been campaigning about) in the last 10 years. She highlighted how Somali women, for example, face a lot of intersectionality and misogyny (or misogynoir – how racism and sexism manifests in Black women’s lives). Fozia was happy that after “many, many years of campaigning [in solidarity with others], getting misogyny recognised as a hate crime has been a result, but it was sad that it had to be on the back of Sarah Everard’s death.”

The Sarah Everard case “brought up a lot of conversations for Muslim women” said Maryam, “because we were told once again, that it doesn't matter which space you're in, you're not safe and I think Muslim women have always been quite aware of that” and that the police have never been a source of safety for Muslims (or Muslim women). As a consequence, participants talked about being involved in strictly women only WhatsApp groups and following on from discussions on safety, one of the six politicians started organising safety walks in her London borough to find out the specific areas where women (including Muslim women) feel unsafe, during the day and during the evening and night (this was done in solidarity with women's groups and organisations in the area). Leena said Muslim women were also affected by the #MeToo movement which brought up issues around the same time, so she hosted meetings on domestic violence and worked to create safe spaces for Muslim women (all in collaboration with others).

These new social movements and national and global issues affected the whole community and not just Muslim women or the Muslim community. Participants got involved in these movements to show solidarity with those affected by racism and discrimination, violence against women and environmental and climate change issues. A few participants also mentioned attending Solidarity with Palestine marches and mentioned how people are affected by the injustices they see around them and globally. For example, Adila also made links to earlier protests against the apartheid in South Africa (mid 1980s) and the more recent marches for Justice for Palestine. By showing solidarity with these social movements, Muslim women get involved in political activism because they care about justice, fairness and equality (see chapter four on political activism) and they show solidarity with various social and political causes (see Table 6b). This breaks down lazy stereotypes about Muslim women who are often seen as passive, uninterested and apolitical (Joly and Wadia, 2017). As can be seen from the various types of activism they participate in, Muslim women (participants) do not just get involved in Muslim matters and Muslim women's rights and freedom. Muslim women are involved in a range of political actions and activities (see chapter 4), and they are heavily involved with individuals, groups and organisations that offer them support, encouragement and understanding of issues that impacts them. They are more likely to work with other groups and organisations such as Citizens UK and

Women100 project and other campaigning and faith-based alliances as they often share the same goals to advance social justice.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to answer the research question: 1) How do Muslim women overcome the barriers to their political activism? To answer this question, using empirical examples, I developed three types of strategies: support, solidarity and allyship that Muslim women use to navigate and overcome barriers at the micro, meso and macro types of activism (Jolly et al, 2021). Participants received support from a wide range of individuals, groups, organisations and movements, focused on a variety of local, national and global causes.

Firstly, Muslim women had the support and backing of their husbands (8) and fathers (4) and men from the Muslim community, contrary to prevalent stereotypes about unsupportive Muslim men. This study concurs with Takhar's (2013) study of South Asian women who received encouragement and motivation from their fathers to get involved in their local communities. Participants like Aiza and Sadia were brought up by parents involved in charity work and politics, hence, another reason for supportive families, demonstrating the importance of faith in activism and politics (Mahmood, 2005).

Participants especially mention the support from other Muslim women too, in the form of advice, moral, emotional and practical support. In particular, they learn skills, knowledge and the know-how to deal with discrimination, therefore this study concurs with Balazard and Peace (2022) concept of infrapolitics and other studies that demonstrates the support Muslim women offer to each other through women's networks, campaigns and movements (Afshar et al, 2005; Ahmed, 2011; Anwar, 2015; Bhandar and Ziadah, 2020; Birt, 2009; Haw, 2009; Joly and Wadia, 2017; Peace, 2015a, 2015b; Takhar, 2007, 2013, 2014). This study also confirms how Muslim women enable other Muslim women to gain confidence by helping them with support to set-up their own networks and organisations.

A second finding is that Muslim women seek help and support from secular and Muslim organisations (Citizens UK, Women100, MEND, mosques and inter-faith projects, women's networks), recognising the importance of co-operation, networking and relationship

building to support their causes and campaigns for a better society (Balazard and Peace, 2022). They seek advice, emotional and practical support from organisations that are supportive and sympathetic to their needs and discriminations they face in the wider society (sexism and Islamophobia). Consequently, they recognise the importance of informal and formal networks and 'critical spaces' to help each other through sisterhood, bonding and allyship (Takhar, 2013).

Participants also acknowledge the support, solidarity and allyship of people with privileged identities and platforms and political power (white allies) as they form alliances and join networks with other faith organisations, mosques, charities and voluntary organisations to show solidarity on national and global issues and campaigns such as the #MeToo, Black Lives Matter (BLM), climate change, and Solidarity for Palestine. In return, they expect support, solidarity and allyship for their causes too.

This empirical chapter shows how Muslim women not only challenge stereotypes that paint Muslim women as passive and uninterested in public and political issues, but they also acknowledge their role as agents of change and as agents of support for others. By exploring how British Muslim women use support, solidarity and allyship, this research helps us to understand how Muslim women can be better supported in the future as their political activism takes place in a multitude of sites and spaces, including within and outside formal political institutions, religious and secular organisations and within their local communities and grass-roots organisations and volunteer projects. When working in solidarity and allyship with others, Muslim women have created change at policy level (see Women100 and Citizens UK). Thus, Muslim women's political activism as supported by family, friends, allies, supporters and through solidarity can be transformational.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Introduction

I started my PhD journey seeking to challenge the negative stereotypes about Muslim women through conducting a qualitative study to demonstrate how Muslim women are politically active in British society. In this final chapter, I highlight the contribution of my research, return to my research questions and summarise the main findings presented in the empirical chapters four to six. Following this, I provide some reflections on the research during Covid-19 pandemic and its limitations and identify future research opportunities before I share my concluding thoughts.

The research contributions

The research study fulfilled the original aim of the research project to challenge Islamophobic perceptions of British Muslim women as oppressed and/or dangerous.

Firstly, through my empirical data, I have demonstrated how the participants of this study are politically active in British society through micro (local), meso (national) and macro (international) activism, participating in local charities, campaigns, food banks and mutual aid during Covid-19 pandemic. They are space invaders (Puwar, 2004) whose raced, gendered and religious bodies overcome various struggles to occupy spaces in the public realm traditionally reserved for white men. Participants of this research were worried about the impact of Covid-19 on their local communities and took up volunteering opportunities within their local food banks and mutual aid during the pandemic lockdowns. As Muslim women, they were also deeply concerned about the misrepresentation of Islam and Muslim women in the West and participated as 'active citizens' (Nagel and Staeheli, 2011: 438) in British society through their diverse political activities (micro, meso and macro activism), before and during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The three types of activism enabled me to expand existing studies on Muslim women and their political participation particularly Joly and Wadia's (2017) study to specify micro, meso and macro activism, redefining political activism to include grassroots to international level work. My study is amongst the first to explore how micro, meso and macro activism was enacted by Muslim women in Britain during an unprecedented time of Covid and global

racial and political unrest. It revealed how Muslim women constituted themselves as activists within British society and contributed to political discussions and debates about Covid-19, the BLM movement and Sarah Everard murder. Through their involvement in these types of activism, participants have also challenged the negative stereotypes of the 'oppressed Muslim woman' (van Es, 2017) by being 'active citizens' (Nagel and Staeheli, 2011) and not disengaged, submissive or apolitical (Joly and Wadia, 2017). They have redefined their place in British society as well-integrated political subjects. This research has contributed to knowledge on Muslim women in Britain.

Secondly, I have provided empirical evidence of Muslim women's faith-inspired activism, explaining how these participants are motivated by their religion and its promotion of social justice and care for the community. Their faith (religion) is a powerful motivator as they see their religion and politics interlinked like the Egyptian women in Mahmood's study of *Politics of Piety* (2005). The term, faith-inspired activism came directly from one of the participants who referred to Islamic principles, values and ethics of upholding justice and caring for the needy. It is through their faith-inspired activism that they are contributing to British society with their public roles as campaigners, community activists, politicians, charity workers and volunteers. Through these roles, participants were transforming how they choose to do politics by leading debates around social justice, human rights and integration through inter-faith activities, charity works, campaigns and social media awareness building. This provides an important insight into how faith-inspired activism enables participants to contribute to British society as well-integrated political subjects, particularly during a time of crisis. Hence, these findings provide an impetus to explore Muslim women's contribution to British society (the public sphere) during times of crisis.

Thirdly, this research (stemming from the above two points) contributes to the wider discussions on the widely-held dichotomies of religion versus politics, secular versus faith and victim versus dangerous Muslim women. My research demonstrated how faith plays an instrumental role in the different types of political activism these women participated in pre and during Covid-19 pandemic time. This research therefore finds support in the work of international studies of Muslim women including the works of Saba Mahmood (2005) who argues that religion and politics are indelibly linked for the women in the piety movement in

Egypt however, this also provides an additional and interesting insight into the understanding of secular versus faith debate. Through their faith-inspired activism these participants are in fact deconstructing the notions of what it means to be secular. They are using their faith, a powerful motivator to become active citizens in British society – becoming integrated into the fabric of British society through their activism. It is through their faith which encourages working for humanitarian values, social justice and caring for the community, that they are participating as political subjects in faith-inspired activism: grassroots community work, volunteering for various charities (including food banks), campaigning, party politics and social media awareness building. This research demonstrates how participants are interested and knowledgeable about politics and civic life and how they are fulfilling what it means to be a secular citizen in British society, albeit through their faith. What does it mean to be secular? And what does it mean to be religious? These participants have shown that there is a middle-ground, where the secular and the religious can be combined and utilised for the betterment of society. This indicates the need for further exploration.

In summary, this research visibilises Muslim women's political activism in British society and demonstrates through empirical evidence the resilience of participants who continued with their activism and politics despite the barriers they faced in British society. Similar to other authors (Easat-Daas, 2020; Finlay and Hopkins, 2019; Joly and Wadia, 2017), my participants faced sexism, racial and religious discrimination (Islamophobia). However, the empirical data demonstrated how participants were also space invaders in activist and political spaces, facing a range of additional barriers such as infantilisation, suspicion and surveillance because they were viewed as 'outsiders' and 'trespassers' due to their raced gendered and religious identity (Puwar, 2004: 8-10). As Muslim women, they simultaneously experienced gendered Islamophobia and space invader barriers in activist and political spaces. However, participants used support from male and female family and community members (including husbands and fathers), solidarity and allyship from other women and community campaign groups such as Citizens UK, MEND, Women100 to overcome these barriers and continue to participate in British society through their faith-inspired activism. This concurs with Takhar's (2013, 2014) study of South Asian women who received support

from their fathers and worked in alliances with other community members in their fight against sexism and racism.

Participants were agents of change and agents of support for others and their sisterhood, bonding and allyship amongst Muslim women and women of other faith is what helped them to stay in activism and politics. In addition, this study showed how participants gained confidence through the advice, support and guidance of other Muslim women who helped them to set up their own networks and organisations. This sisterhood and support through faith was critical for participants who learned about 'infrapolitics' through their faith-inspired activism (Balazard and Peace, 2022). Therefore, faith-inspired activism for these participants can be seen as transformational for themselves and their causes. Hence, the findings of this research recommend further exploration into sisterhood and support through faith, particularly in times of crisis. Similarly, the barriers to British politics need to be explored including the impact of space invaders on Muslim women entering formal politics (e.g., political parties, Parliament, Council).

The research questions and findings

The empirical findings of the research are summarised below addressing the research questions of the thesis.

How do Muslim women engage in political activism? What type of political activism do they participate in?

In chapter four, I defined political activism as the activities that people engage with to voice their concerns, support activities and initiatives that aid those in need or challenge structures and practices that marginalises or discriminates against people. I demonstrated that all participants in this research engaged in political activism in various ways, from grass-roots community activities to local and national campaigns, party politics to international protests and politics. These women participated in micro, meso and macro activism where they got involved in political issues and causes that directly or indirectly impacted them. For example, they participated in everyday politics and volunteering through local community groups and social media awareness building.

In this thesis I define micro activism, as getting involved with grass-roots, community-based organisations, often in response to the negative stereotypes and representations of Muslim women and the misrepresentation of their faith. To follow that, meso activism is defined as national issues and causes such as climate change, women's rights and interfaith activities. The six politicians involved in party politics and local and national campaigns also fall under this category. Finally, macro activism has a more global focus such as global campaigns, protests and social media awareness building. For example, participants were involved in human rights issues, Solidarity for Palestine and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests.

I expanded on Joly and Wadia's (2017) typology of politics by exploring the different types of political activism participants carried out by dividing their political activities into three types of activism: micro (individual, local), meso (national), and macro (international) activism (these were discussed in chapters two and four). In addition, this research demonstrated how participants used the internet and social media in meaningful ways to assert their opinions, propose change and create awareness (e.g., participants used WhatsApp and Facebook to seek council action for local residents). Thus, this research employed a broad definition of political activism that included both conventional and unconventional modes of participation as well as the politics of everyday life and civic engagement (e.g., organised voluntary activities) and 'doing politics' within a range of informal, community and formal political activities (from online activism, campaigning, community organising and holding political roles and office) that indicated a more fluid way of doing politics with looser boundaries and openness (Norris, 2009).

This research concurs with previous studies on Muslim women and political participation who show resilience and determination in defying the negative stereotypes of Muslim women (Alimahomed-Wilson, 2020; Ali and Hopkins, 2012; Easat-Daas, 2020; Finlay and Hopkins, 2019; Hussein, 2023; Joly and Wadia, 2017; Leweck and O'Toole, 2017). Participants' activism and politics demonstrate a more nuanced picture of how Muslim women's do politics as they champion women's right, social justice and care (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Burney, 2021; Mahmood, 2005; van Es, 2017).

What are the key motivations behind Muslim women's political activism? Why do Muslim women 'do politics'?

In chapter five, I identified faith as the primary motivation for participants who believed in the Islamic principles, values and ethics of equality, justice, fairness and caring for their communities. This led them to uphold justice, challenge oppression (including oppressive stereotypes) and volunteering in the community. Similar to other authors (Deeb, 2005, 2006; Easat-Daas, 2020; Finlay and Hopkins, 2019; Joly and Wadia, 2017; Mahmood, 2005) for my participants, religion is the main driver that guides their morals and provided a framework to carry out their activism. For example, they became more active in their communities during Covid-19 pandemic by running food banks and mutual aid which they believed was a declaration by their religion to support community members during a time of crisis. As 'active citizens', participants contested the misrepresentation of Islam and Muslim women in the West through their activism and politics by participating in inter-faith activities and social media awareness building (Nagel and Staeheli, 2011: 438). Thus, this research showed how participants were simultaneously impacted by the negative stereotypes of Muslim women as passive, submissive and subordinated (Joly and Wadia, 2017) and subsequently, they were involved in challenging prevalent stereotypes and Islamophobic perceptions of Muslim women through their activism and politics.

Chapters four and five have shown how participants in this study are motivated by their faith and involved in micro, meso and macro activism, showing an alternative narrative of politically active Muslim women in British society especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.

What are the issues impacting their political activism? What are the barriers to Muslim women's political activism?

In chapter five, I also explored the barriers to participant's political activism, namely sexism and Islamophobia (racial and religious discriminations). I demonstrated how participants (Muslim women) were often seen as the Other, as minority women and racialised due to their gender and religion and therefore, situated at the intersection of religion, gender and race (Skenderovic and Spati, 2019). Consequently, they experienced gendered Islamophobia

and space invader barriers in activist and political spaces. As space invaders, participants experienced non-recognition, disrespect and stereotyping (Hussein, 2023) and were treated as ‘outsiders’ and ‘trespassers’ in local community and political decision-making spaces (e.g., meeting in GLA building, Cabinet meetings, Council etc), causing a state of ontological anxiety as they were not seen as the ideal or natural occupants in privileged positions of Chair, board members or Council and steering group members (Puwar, 2004: 8-10).

I have shown how participants experienced sexist, racist and Islamophobic abuse in addition to being a space invader. The combined impact of these was gendered Islamophobia which disadvantaged Muslim women negatively as they were stereotyped and treated differently, becoming the key barrier to their political activism (Alimahomed-Wilson, 2020; Tartari and Mencutek, 2015). According to Adila (Researcher), Muslim women like herself, faced a “quadruple whammy” based on their gendered Islamophobia and space invader status, exacerbated further by the Muslim penalty and Covid-19 pandemic however, participants were resilient in their faith as they circumvented and overcame these barriers.

How do they deal with these issues? What are the enablers? What strategies do they use to navigate and overcome these issues and barriers?

In chapter six I addressed how Muslim women used three strategies to navigate and overcome various barriers as they carried out their activism and politics. I demonstrated how participants used *support, solidarity and allyship* to help navigate and circumvent their barriers. I have shown how participants had the support and backing of their husbands, fathers and men from the Muslim community contrary to prevalent stereotypes about unsupportive Muslim men (Takhar, 2013) and in particular how they were supported by other Muslim women through advice, emotional and practical support and infrapolitics, where they learned to deal with discriminations and were offered support through women’s networks, campaigns and movements, thus confirming previous studies (Afshar et al, 2005; Ahmed, 2011; Anwar, 2015; Balazard and Peace, 2022; Bhandar and Ziadah, 2020; Birt, 2009; Haw, 2009; Joly and Wadia, 2017; Peace, 2015a, 2015b; Takhar, 2007, 2011, 2013, 2014). However, in this study I have also demonstrated how Muslim women gained confidence in setting up their own networks and organisations through the help of other

Muslim women. This is a significant finding that shows the importance of how they sought support from their family members and other Muslim women who understood the value of helping each other in faith and politics (Mahmood, 2005).

Participants showed solidarity with other people on national and international issues such as the Sarah Everard campaign around violence against women and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. They also received solidarity and allyship in the form of advice, emotional and practical support from secular and Muslim organisations who were sympathetic to their needs and the discriminations faced in wider society (Citizens UK, Women100, MEND, mosques and inter-faith projects). Participants worked with various networks, groups and organisations as well as people with privileged identities (white feminist groups), forming alliances, networks and showing solidarity on national and global issues and campaigns such as the #MeToo campaign, BLM movement, climate change and Solidarity for Palestine. Additionally, they also received solidarity and allyship from non-white women and women of other faith as they worked on collaborative projects with Citizens UK and Women100.

In this chapter, I have also demonstrated how participants were agents of change and agents of support for others: they worked in solidarity and allyship with others, creating local policy changes through their networks such as Women100 and Citizens UK. Thus, I argue that their faith-inspired activism as supported by family, friends, allies, supporters through solidarity can be transformational for themselves and the causes they champion. This sisterhood, bonding and allyship particularly with other Muslim women and women of other faith helped them through the barriers to their political activism.

In this section, I have provided summaries of the chapters answering the research questions and now I turn to some reflections from the research and its limitations before I identify future research agendas and plans.

Some reflections and the limitations of the study

In this final chapter, I wanted to share some reflections and learning from my experience of researching Muslim women. I am a British Muslim woman who took up the opportunity to undertake a BCU funded PhD after a long gap in education. Within six months of starting my

PhD, the first Covid-19 pandemic lockdown took place in Britain, shattering my plans and expectations for the research. The pandemic affected the planning, methodology and fieldwork for the research due to Covid-restrictions of carrying out face-to-face fieldwork.

As discussed in chapter three on methodology, my plans to carry out face-to-face interviews, focus group discussions and observations were changed to online semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion (which resulted in a discussion between two women) due to BCU's restrictions during the pandemic. However, within nine months, I was able to recruit and interview 31 Muslim women involved in some form of political activism in Britain during the Covid-19 pandemic. I was able to do this using my extended personal and professional networks, using purposive sampling and snowballing techniques. This proved to be the best approach to gaining the trust of women who were already busy and worried about the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on their families and the wider community. Using purposive and snowball sampling methods can skew the sample, for example, 14 participants were from different parts of London (my connections were mainly in London) however, I did not view this as a problem as London has the highest concentration of Muslims (15%) in England and Wales (ONS, 2022). In my situation, the purposive and snowballing sampling methods helped with the recruitment process due to Covid-19 pandemic. Without my extended networks, I would have struggled to recruit 31 Muslim women during the pandemic and would not have obtained the trust of my participants to secure the interviews.

The women I recruited and interviewed were very passionate about their activism and politics and agreed to be interviewed during this extremely busy time of the pandemic because they wanted to provide an 'alternative' and an 'authentic' picture of Muslim women in British society. However, a few women could not participate due to being extremely busy during the pandemic and the elections in 2021 and contacted me to let me know. I managed to recruit for a focus group discussion which turned into a discussion between two women (rather than four as planned), however, in hindsight, perhaps I could have planned and utilised a survey on political activism and explored the full range of political activism as carried out by a wider group of Muslim women during the pandemic.

However, the survey might have had a very low response rate due to the women being busy during the pandemic.

My objective to challenge negative stereotypes of Muslim women were fulfilled through conducting this research study into Muslim women's political activism, as these women were politically aware and active in their local communities, participated in local, national and international causes and campaigns, party politics and social media awareness building. They participated in micro, meso and macro activism, working in various activist and political spaces. These participants were inspired by their faith (religious beliefs), and they did not hesitate about getting involved in food banks or mutual aid. They continued with their charity work and participated in helping the wider community to get through the pandemic. Much of their activism and politics took place at the local level during the pandemic and via social media platforms, such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and online meeting spaces such as Zoom, which isn't often seen, talked about or highlighted by academics, policy-makers or the media and therefore, need to be emphasised and publicised in more detail.

The exact impact of Covid-19 pandemic on Muslim women activists should be documented. From this research, it appears that the Covid-19 pandemic caused the women great stress and exhaustion as the women were doing additional volunteering and/or looking after children and/or vulnerable family members. At the same time, this activism and politics during the pandemic can be seen as transformational as these women sought help and received help in the form of advice, support and solidarity from other Muslim women and women of faith (and beyond) which helped with continuity of their own political activism. Their activism and politics might be different post-Covid-19 pandemic (as some women planned to go into formal institutional politics and others planned to take a break and/or leave politics). Thus, the pandemic has far-reaching implications that goes beyond the pandemic years with links to politics, religion and gender, therefore it needs further research.

My second objective to demonstrate how Muslim women are politically active in British society has also been achieved through conducting this research and exploring how Muslim

women engaged with micro, meso and macro activism. Their faith is a powerful motivator - however, their faith-inspired activism has thrown up additional questions about the widely-held dichotomies of religion (faith) versus politics and secular versus faith that I did not originally anticipate. As indicated above, this is an area that can be explored further with faith communities. Are the fundamental principles of upholding justice and caring for the community an impetus to being a good citizen in British society? Is there a difference in Islamic values and humanitarian values?

It is interesting to reflect how a significant number of Muslim women came into civic and political life through Prevent (e.g., via the creation of women's groups and organisations), a policy that is highly criticised for its disproportionate focus and surveillance of Muslims for which there has been no accountability, however, the Muslim women in this study have privileged their religious identity (and their faith) to be the impetus to their political activism and empowerment as they strongly identified as Muslim and saw Islam and its promotion of justice as integral and an opportunity to participate in British society, contrary to popular beliefs that Muslim women are apolitical or radicalised as dangerous (Rashid, 2014; Wadia, 2015). These women did not see their religion as a problem rather it motivated them to participate in British society as active citizens. However, they were treated differently due to their intersectional identities: being female, Muslim and from an ethnic minority (non-white) background. Therefore, using the theory of intersectionality and the concept of space invaders has proved helpful in demonstrating how participants are space invaders due to their raced, gendered and religious identity and how their faith motivated them to participate in British society through micro, meso and macro activism.

Future research possibilities

This research has already indicated some future research possibilities including the need to explore Muslim women's contribution to British society (the public sphere) during times of crisis, to explore what it means to be secular and religious in the public sphere, and a study into sisterhood and support through faith, particularly in times of crisis. Below I make some future suggestions for research.

The online fieldwork during the pandemic was an interesting time to carry out this research however, it would be interesting to find out if other Muslim women (or the same participants) continued with their activism and politics after the pandemic. I used a small sample of politically active Muslim women to explore activism and politics during the pandemic, and it would be helpful to find out how many Muslim women (or women of other faith) participated in faith-inspired activism.

A large survey could be conducted and then followed up with focus group discussions to explore how Muslim women did politics during the pandemic or post pandemic and whether it has changed, shifted or remained the same. Is the focus on faith (religious beliefs) still an impetus to their activism and politics as it was during the pandemic? What does it mean to be secular in British society? What role does faith have in British society and politics? Can the religious be secular? A few case studies as examples would be helpful for academics, politicians, policy makers and faith communities. More studies on Muslim women and their positive contributions to British society during the pandemic is needed, including the impact of the pandemic on local and national activism and politics.

As space invaders, participants faced additional barriers to their political activism. A study exploring the impact of being a space invader in formal politics (Parliament) would generate much needed data on the barriers to politics for Muslim women: what would encourage more women to enter formal politics and why women leave politics. This is particularly pertinent given that we have a new government with plans to reconsider the definition of Islamophobia (Turner, 2024).

Muslim women used support, solidarity and allyship to overcome their barriers to political activism however, the sisterhood, bonding and confidence-building amongst Muslim women and women of other faith needs to be further explored. Did this sisterhood only exist during the pandemic or is this support and solidarity through sisterhood in post pandemic times as well? What else can this sisterhood offer to Muslim women? A longitudinal study would be useful to trace how and why sisterhood bonds remain the same or change over time.

I approached this research from the vantage point of the women's own motivations, experiences and perspectives however, it would be interesting to find out from secular and Muslim organisations about their thoughts on political activism and what could enable more women to participate in politics. What do they think of Muslim women as space invaders? What barriers need to be addressed by organisations and the government?

Concluding thoughts

This research makes a distinct contribution to knowledge by focusing on political activism (one of the most common forms of political participation for Muslim women) at a time of crisis, during the Covid-19 pandemic and global social and racial unrest. This research expands on Joly and Wadia's (2017) typology of political participation and civic engagement by exploring different political activism Muslim women carry out within micro, meso and macro activism, therefore re-defining 'what counts' as politics and political behaviour by providing empirical evidence about Muslim women's faith-inspired activism.

I claim that participants (Muslim women) participate in faith-inspired activism which enabled them to pursue social justice and care for their communities and challenge the othering of Muslim women through their activism. However, participants also experienced barriers (marginalisation, stereotyping and intersecting inequalities) which affected how they were seen as political activists. I argue that Muslim women are space invaders in activist and political spaces, and consequently faced additional barriers due to being a space invader (infantilisation, suspicion, burden of doubt etc).

I claim that Muslim women participants navigate and overcome the barriers of being a space invader through the strategies of support, solidarity and allyship. Through micro, meso and macro activism, these women have created spaces for their faith-inspired activism in British society, destabilising the binaries of secular and religious and faith versus politics. By using an intersectional and qualitative approach I was able to demonstrate the importance of religion (faith) in politics along with gender, race and ethnicity, which contributes to a body of empirical evidence about Muslim women's lived experience of religion and politics and the nuances involved in Muslim women's political activism.

In conclusion, I make three arguments based on my research: 1) Muslim women (participants) are motivated by their faith and its promotion of social justice to carry out micro (individual, local), meso (national) and macro (international) activism; 2) Participants as Muslim women are space invaders due to their raced, gendered and religious identity: they face intersectional barriers (sexism, racism and religious prejudices) and space invader barriers in activist and political spaces; 3) Participants overcome barriers to their activism and politics through the support, solidarity and allyship from a wide range of people, groups, organisations and movements. However, without the support and sisterhood from other Muslim women and women of faith, participants would not be able to continue with their activism or politics in British society.

Overall, the research contributes to new and existing literature on Muslim women's political participation and civic engagement in Britain by demonstrating how their faith plays an instrumental role in the different types of political activism they participate in, thus finding support in Mahmood's (2005) study of women in the Islamic piety movement in Egypt who saw religion and politics as inextricably linked. It also acknowledges that Muslim women are interested and knowledgeable about politics and civic life as they are politicised and politically active in British society thus providing an alternative framing of Muslim women (Easat-Daas, 2020; Joly and Wadia, 2017). Overall, this research visibilises Muslim women's faith-inspired activism pre and during the pandemic in the UK.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Socrel Article: Faith-inspired, ethically driven Muslim women during the Covid-19 pandemic

Faith-inspired, ethically driven Muslim women during the Covid-19 pandemic

By Shahanara Begum for Socrel, Dec 14, 2022

Available at: <https://socrel.medium.com/faith-inspired-ethically-driven-muslim-women-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-3b223b9195a0>

In July 2022 I presented a short paper to the annual British Sociological Association Sociology of Religion study group (Socrel) conference on faith-inspired, ethically driven Muslim women during the Covid-19 pandemic. Knowing that there is a wealth of research on Muslim women based on stereotypes and popular discourses where Muslim women are seen in “need of saving and increasingly symbolic of threat” (Easat-Daas 2020), I set out to explore how Muslim women engage in political activism in Britain.

Recent studies show how Muslim women are increasingly politicised and politically visible post 9/11 and 7/11 (Joly and Wadia 2017; Lewicki and O’Toole 2017; Massoumi 2015; Rashid 2014). However, we rarely hear from local Muslim women activists going beyond the prevailing stereotypes of Muslim women.

This blog examines how Muslim women are engaging in faith-inspired, ethically driven political activism during the Covid-19 crisis. Using qualitative interview and focus group data, I demonstrate the salience of Muslim women activists in their local communities and social media. Why is religion an important motivating factor? How do Muslim women participate politically during a pandemic and what types of political activism do they get involved in?

The Muslim women in my research engage in a range of activism from grassroots campaigns, online social media, running food banks and community kitchens to building networks and organisations. They are motivated by their “religion” and strive for “justice for [the] people” and for “fairness and equality”. These universal principles, which many of us observe and follow, were quoted by these Muslim women as they spoke about their faith (religion) and how it shapes their political actions and activities.

Using personal contacts, networking and snowballing techniques, I interviewed 31 Muslim women (aged 23–75) online during March to September 2022 who were involved in political activism through their roles as community leaders, campaigners, politicians and community activists. Coming from a variety of backgrounds, both in terms of employment and ethnicity as well as different geographical locations, these Muslim women activists “felt the need to help” their community and get involved during the pandemic crisis. They are politically aware and vocal about their local communities need and the impact of the pandemic on local people and the wider British society.

How did these Muslim women activists from my research participate in three different types of political activism during the Covid-19 pandemic?

Volunteering

Muslim women took up voluntary activities during the Covid-19 pandemic, such as running mutual aid programmes, foodbanks and community kitchens. Ruby volunteered for her local food bank, stating “the entire project is run by [Muslim] women”, while Leyla, a mutual aid volunteer, explained she was “more active... because of the situation that we’re in.”

Campaigner and politician Aiza organised a “mutual aid group... running hundreds of volunteers and food distribution and a phone line and getting people’s medication and shopping”. Seeing how other Muslim women across the country were doing the same thing, she became a ‘voice’ for her local community. Muslim women, she explained, take on caring responsibilities at home and outside the home because “that’s what we do in all our spaces.” These Muslim women were critical and vocal about the government’s lack of support during the pandemic and provided practical support to help their local communities.

Breaking the stereotypes, supporting Muslim women

Muslim women offered practical support through volunteering when they felt the need to step up, but they were involved in women’s rights campaigns too. They supported other Muslim women by speaking out and campaigning on issues that affect Muslim women and women in general. For example, Leena hosted meetings for Muslim women after seeing how the #MeToo campaign affected them. Similarly, Rahma and Maryam focused their

political activism on Muslim women's rights, representation, discrimination and justice. Describing herself as a faith-inspired activist, Maryam explained how her "lived experience [as a female, Muslim activist] really influenced my decision to stand up for other women [and] speak [out on women's] issues".

To ensure "our voices [are] heard", these Muslim women cited organisations such as Citizens UK, a community organising charity, and Women100 Citizens, a network of women from different faiths, as good examples of organisations where Muslim women are actively involved.

Using social media and online spaces

Muslim women used social media and online spaces to exercise their political activism and they are "more active on social media because they [cannot] raise their voices or protest in different ways" [due to the Covid-19 pandemic]. "They're using these [online] platforms a lot more effectively," said Shakira. During the Covid-19 lockdowns, Muslim women were "connecting together, organising events... seminars and webinars or WhatsApp groups or book groups, online prayer groups" and discussing issues on social media. For example, Bilqis used social media to challenge and discuss issues affecting her. As she explained, this ensures that "people will listen to me". In contrast, Jabeen used WhatsApp and Facebook to identify and denounce organisations that don't live up to residents' expectations of good service. She used social media to speak out against injustices and inequalities faced by local people, holding those in power accountable.

So, what drives these Muslim women to get involved in politics? The Muslim women in my research described their faith as their motivation with their activism as "rooted" in their religion, Islam:

"As Muslim women we do take our faith very seriously and everything starts and ends with our faith, we do everything with those intentions" (Farah)

"It was definitely my religion [and] being a practising Muslim, I felt I needed to give back to the community" (Sophia)

“We don’t separate our faith from the stuff that we do. We recognise that this is literally what Allah has commanded of us that we seek justice for people, we seek fairness and equality and to live in a society where people are all treated in fair ways.” (Fabiha)

Inspired by Islamic principles of justice, these Muslim women support and advocate for the poor and vulnerable in society: they speak out against injustices and inequalities and simultaneously challenge the prevalent stereotypes in public and political discourses that portray Muslim women as ‘passive’ and ‘uninterested’ in politics. These Muslim women actively volunteer and engage in a variety of projects, charities and social media platforms to provide a critical voice and fight against injustices and to protest inequalities. They raise awareness, run campaigns and set up foodbanks, mutual aid projects and networks to support people do what is right. They are **faith-inspired, ethically driven** Muslim women activists.

Shahanara Begum is a PhD researcher at Birmingham City University, investigating British Muslim women and political activism to demonstrate their active role in British society through community and social media activism and politics.

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Appendix 2: Interview Schedule

Interview Guide: British Muslim women and political activism

Introduction

Introduce myself as the Researcher. Welcome and thank you – remind them about confidentiality.

Please note that this interview is confidential, but it will be recorded for transcription purposes. All information will be anonymised unless permission has been granted on the Participant Consent Form. Your name will not be used unless you have given permission to use your name.

Are you happy to continue? (after verbal consent has been given, start the recording)

I'm going to start the recording now.

In the context of the UK British media, statements by politicians and counter terrorism policies and growing hostility and Islamophobic attacks on Muslim women, the dominant representation of Muslim women is often a reductionist and victim-focused representation of Muslim women as 'oppressed' or 'dangerous' and without a voice and agency.

This research aims to investigate how Muslim women utilise their personal, professional and community position to challenge stereotypes in public and political discourses by taking up activism - participating in a range of informal, community and political activism (which may include online activism, campaigning, blogging, volunteering, community work, community organising and political roles and office). In so doing, this research aims to show an alternative representation of Muslim women who are politically and socially active in their community, in politics and on social media platforms.

1. How do you see Muslim women represented in the British media, in policy and on social media platforms? What is your view or perspective on these representations?
2. As a Muslim woman activist, what facilitated or hindered your participation in 'activism'? Please think about your gender, ethnicity, religion, class, age, or other factors that played a part in your 'activism'. Did any of these hinder your participation? How? Please give an example.
3. What do you identify as the key barriers and facilitators (enablers) of Muslim women's activism? (professional, community and political success)
What are the barriers and facilitators at home, in your communities and at work?
(think about triple penalty/discriminations, intersectional and demographic factors, participation, and work practices – everyday sexism, microaggressions, racism, Islamophobia, cultural/structural/institutional barriers, etc).
4. What strategies do Muslim women use to navigate these challenges, barriers and representations in their everyday lives? Can you provide a specific

example/situation of how you managed to overcome these? What strategies did you use? (*Did it work? Why? How?*).

5. We have been in a pandemic since last year and have been in several lockdowns. How do you think the pandemic has affected Muslim women and activism? Has it had any impact on you and your activism? What has changed? (*positive and negative impact*).
6. During the pandemic we had a few issues arose, in Britain and abroad including the Black Lives Matter campaign. What kind of impact (if any) has the BLM had on Muslim women in Britain? What are your thoughts on this? Are there any other issues/campaigns/movements that has impacted on your activism? Please explain.

The first 6 questions may take up most of the interview time.

7. To what extent, do you feel Muslim women and their issues are being represented in local/national government? Are we seeing visible difference in the representation of Muslim women within mainstream media and politics? What can Muslim women (activists) do to ensure a better and true representation of Muslim women?
8. What remains the biggest barrier or challenge to Muslim women participating fully in British society? What changes need to happen to improve the engagement of Muslim women in politics?
9. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix 3: Discussion questions

Discussion – some questions

Thank you for your interest.

Reiterate the research – Participant Information Sheet (mention research summary).

Please note that this focus group (discussion) will be confidential, but it will be recorded for transcription purposes. All information will be anonymised unless permission has been granted on the Participant Consent Form. Your name will not be used unless you have given permission to use your name.

Are you happy to continue? (after verbal consent has been given, start the recording)

I'm going to start the recording now.

Before we start the group discussion, please introduce yourself and tell us how you would like to be called in the discussion.

....

How do you see activism? How would you define activism? What does political activism mean to you?

What type of activism are you involved in? Do you have any examples?

Muslim women activists face barriers and challenges in the community, in politics and on social media platforms. What do you think are the most significant or the biggest barrier and/or challenges facing British Muslim women activists?

Does class, gender, faith/religion, ethnicity, age or any other factors play a part in your activism? If yes, how?

The Covid-19 pandemic – how has it affected you? Has the Covid-19 pandemic hindered or empowered your activism in any way?

Has the BLM movement or any other campaigns impacted you? Muslim women activists? How?

What would you say are the priorities for British Muslim women activists?

Do you have anything else to add?

Thank you.... Stop the recording

Appendix 4: Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Project Title: British Muslim Women and political activism

Brief Research Summary

I am Shahanara Begum, a doctoral student and researcher at Birmingham City University, conducting research on British Muslim women and political activism in the UK.

The research project aims to explore how British Muslim women engage in political activism – how they become politically active and what they do – and the impact it has on other Muslim women and the Muslim community in general. The research questions will explore the issues, barriers, and enablers as well as the successes and achievements faced by British Muslim women who are politically active in the UK.

The research will be overseen by a supervisory team, led by Dr Zaki Nahaboo (Director of Study).

What will you need to do?

The study will interview British Muslim women (from different backgrounds) who are politically active in their community, to learn more about their views and experiences of activism. Your participation would involve a confidential online interview/focus group, conducted by myself. Online interviews/focus groups would last 45 minutes to 1 hour and will take place on a day/time that suits you.

Interviews will cover a range of questions about you being politically active, including discussing the issues, barriers, and enablers as well as the achievements and successes of political activism. As this will be an in-depth discussion based on your self-perceptions and experiences, there is a small chance you might find it upsetting in some way, although I hope you will find the experience enjoyable and interesting.

The interview would, with your consent, be audio-recorded and will be transcribed by me.

Your rights

Participation in this study is entirely **voluntary** and you may ask further questions before agreeing to participate. You would be able to withdraw from the research, without giving any reasons, prior to, and during the interview. You can withdraw all or part of your

interview material from the study for up to two months after the interview has taken place. During the study, you have the right to omit or refuse to answer or respond to any questions that is asked of you without any penalty. To withdraw from the research, all you need to do is inform the Researcher by email.

All information you provide in an interview/focus group is confidential. Identifying information will be changed, and a pseudonym given to any data used in publications (external and internal reports produced from BCU) arising from this research. Any personal information will be unidentifiable to an external party –your name, signature and any identifiable information will be kept separately from the main study data, which will be stored confidentially, using this personalised anonymous pseudonym. Once the interview is transcribed, you will have the opportunity to review the transcript, remove any parts you are not comfortable with. Alternatively, if you are happy to share your name for the research, you can give your consent to use your name in the Consent Form.

Your participation in the research study is **optional** and you have the right to choose whether your data is anonymised or give us your consent to use your name.

Are there any risks of taking part?

Risks to participants are likely to be very low due to the nature of the research and the topic of discussion. The topic of discussion may present some conflicting views and opinions and give rise to strong emotions in some participants (it might be upsetting for some participants). However, the experience may also be very enjoyable and beneficial to the participants. The potential benefit of participating in this study is an opportunity for you to share your voice and experiences about being active in your local community. The information you give will contribute greatly to exploring and understanding British Muslim women's political activism in the UK.

If you are happy to be interviewed, please let me know by emailing me and I will send you a consent form to agree and sign. If you have any queries or wish to know more, please do not hesitate to email me.

Contact for further information

If you have any questions or require further information, please email me at:

Shahanara Begum (Doctoral Student / Researcher)

Email: Shahanara.Begum@mail.bcu.ac.uk

What if I am unsure, unhappy or require more information or if there is a problem?

If you are unhappy at any point in the study, or if there is a problem, please contact the Business, Law & Social Sciences faculty ethics committee directly:

Email: blssethics@bcu.ac.uk.

Please see the Data Protection Privacy and Copyright Notice below.

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering taking part in this research study.

Data Protection Privacy Notice

The data controller for this project will be Birmingham City University (BCU). The BCU Data Protection Management Team provides oversight of BCU activities involving the processing of personal data and can be contacted at informationmanagement@bcu.ac.uk or +44(0)121 331-5288 or Data Protection Management Team, Birmingham City University, University House, 15 Bartholomew Row, Birmingham, B5 5JU. Your personal data will be processed for the purposes outlined in this Information Sheet. The legal basis that would be used to process your personal data under data protection legislation is the performance of a task in the public interest or in our official authority as a controller. However, for ethical reasons we need your consent to take part in this research project. You can provide your consent for the use of your personal data in this project by completing the consent form that has been provided for you.

Your Rights

You have the right to request access under the General Data Protection Regulation to the information which BCU holds about you. Further information about your rights under the Regulation and how BCU handles personal data is available on the Data Protection pages of the BCU website (<https://icity.bcu.ac.uk/blss/BLSS-Research-Ethics/Guidelines-and-Resources>). If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, please contact BCU Data Protection Management Team in the first instance at informationmanagement@bcu.ac.uk. If you remain unsatisfied, you may wish to contact the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). You can also complain directly to the Information Commissioner at Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK95AF, further information available at www.ico.org.uk.

Copyright Notice

The consent form asks you to waive copyright so that BCU and the researcher can edit, quote, disseminate, publish (by whatever means) your contribution to this research project in the manner described to you by the researcher during the consent process.

Contact for Further Information

This research study is funded internally by BCU and is not funded externally by any other funders. If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact Dr Zaki Nahaboo (Director of Study) at Birmingham City University.

Dr Zaki Nahaboo

Email: Zaki.Nahaboo@bcu.ac.uk

This research has been reviewed and approved by Birmingham City University (BCU)
Research Ethics Committee.

Appendix 5: Participant Consent Form

Research Participant Consent Form

Project Title: British Muslim Women and political activism

Researcher Name: Shahanara Begum

Brief Research Summary

The research project aims to explore how British Muslim women engage in political activism – how they become politically active and what they do – and the impact it has on other Muslim women and the Muslim community in general. The research questions will explore the issues, barriers, and enablers as well as the successes and achievements faced by British Muslim women who are politically active in the UK.

In order to participate in this study, you should have read and understood the nature of the research as outlined in the Participant Information Sheet. Please complete this form after you have read the Participant Information Sheet and/or listened to an equivalent explanation about the research.

Please tick the appropriate boxes	Yes	No
1. I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet outlining the nature of the study or it has been read to me.		
2. I understand that potential risks of participating in this research are very low: some issues discussed may be contentious or upsetting to me.		
3. I agree to take part in the study and understand that taking part involves sharing my views and opinions on political activism and my own experiences of an activist.		
4. I agree for my interview to be audio recorded and transcribed.		
5. I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time by notifying the researcher and I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part.		
6. Involvement in focus group I understand that if I am involved in the focus group discussion, I cannot withdraw my information from the project once the focus group has taken place as it may not be possible to isolate individual participants' data.		

7. I understand that all information I give is confidential and identifying information will be changed and a pseudonym given to any data used in publications, reports and other research outputs. <u>Unless</u> I give consent to my name being used for the research (see below).		
8. I am happy for my name to be used in the research publications, reports and other research outputs.		
9. I understand that my information will be anonymised and given a pseudonym <u>if</u> I have said that I would NOT like to be named in research publications, reports and other research outputs.		
10. I understand the information I provide will be stored securely by the researcher on the University password-protected server and will only be used by the researcher and the supervisory team for research purposes.		
11. I agree to waive copyright and other intellectual property rights in the material I contribute to the project.		

Contact Information

Shahanara Begum (Researcher)

Email Address: Shahanara.Begum@mail.bcu.ac.uk

Research Participant Declaration

Name of participant [printed]

Signature
(*print will be accepted*)

Date

I have accurately read out the information sheet to the potential participant and to the best of my ability, ensured that the participant understands what they are freely consenting.

Name of Researcher [printed]

Signature

Date

Appendix 6: Additional Information about Participants

Additional Information about Participants

No.	Pseudonym	Age Group	Title	Method
1.	Adila	Early 50's	Researcher and Human Rights Activist	Interview
2.	Aiza	Late 30's	Politician and Campaigner	Interview
3.	Bilqis	Late 40's	Politician and Campaigner	Interview
4.	Bina	Early 40's	Social Media Activist	Interview
5.	Fabiha	Early 30's	Researcher and Social Media Activist	Interview
6.	Fahima	Mid-20's	Community Activist (and Social Media Activist)	Interview
7.	Farah	Mid-20's	Grassroots Activist	Interview
8.	Fozia	Late 40's	Women's Rights Activist (seen as a Community Leader)	Interview
9.	Hafsa	Late 20's	Grassroots Activist	Interview
10.	Hana	Mid-70's	Environmental Activist	Interview
11.	Jabeen	Late 40's	Grassroots Activist	Discussion
12.	Karima	Mid-40's	Politician and Campaigner	Interview
13.	Leena	Late 40's	Women's Rights Activist (and Public Speaker)	Interview
14.	Leyla	Mid-30's	Politician and Campaigner	Interview
15.	Madiha	Late 30's	Social Media Activist (and Women's Rights Activist)	Interview
16.	Maryam	Early 20's	Women's Rights Activist and Climate Change Activist	Interview
17.	Papia	Early 30's	Politician and Campaigner	Interview
18.	Rabia	Early 40's	Women's Rights Activist	Interview
19.	Rahma	Mid-40's	Community Activist	Interview
20.	Ruby	Late 30's	Grassroots Activist (and Campaigner)	Interview
21.	Ruksana	Mid-40's	Grassroots Campaigner, Community Activist	Discussion
22.	Sadaf	Early 50's	Community Activist	Interview
23.	Sadia	Mid-40's	Politician and Campaigner	Interview
24.	Safura	Early 40's	Community Activist (seen as a Community Leader)	Interview
25.	Sana	Early 40's	Women Right's Activist	Joint interview
26.	Shakira	Early 40's	Women's Rights Activist	Interview
27.	Shazia	*	Women Right's Activist	Joint interview
28.	Sophia	Early 30's	Human Rights Activist	Interview
29.	Tahira	Mid-20's	Grassroots Activist (involved in humanitarian aid)	Interview
30.	Tauhida	Late 20's	Community Activist	Interview
31.	Zahra	Early 40's	Community Activist	Interview

*Did not want to give her age.

The ethnic background of participants

Ethnic Background	No. of participants (n=31)
Bangladeshi	14
Pakistani	7
Indian	3
White English	2
Somali	2
Nigerian	1
Mixed White Arab	1
Other Asian	1

The geographical location of participants

Geographical Location	Geographical location of participants (n=31)
London (East)	7
London (North)	3
London (South)	3
Essex	3
Manchester	3
Berkshire	2
Luton	2
Birmingham	1
Cardiff	1
Kent	1
London (West)	1
Nottingham	1
Scotland	1
Sheffield	1
Surrey	1