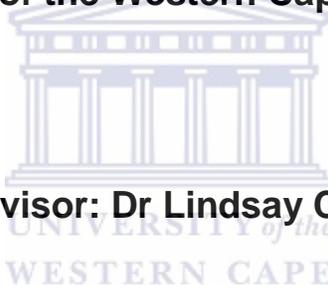


Perceptions of Empowerment: A study of Muslim women living in the greater Cape Town Metropole

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A full thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Magister Philosophiae in the Women's and Gender Studies Programme, Faculty of Arts, University of the Western Cape, Bellville.



Supervisor: Dr Lindsay Clowes

6 May 2011

Perceptions of Empowerment - A comparative study of Muslim Women living in the Greater Cape Town Metropole

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Keywords

Women

Gender

Muslim

Identity

Islam

Agency

Patriarchy

Feminism

Power

Subjectivity



Master Thesis

Declaration

I declare that Perceptions of Empowerment- A study of Muslim Women living in the greater Cape Town Metropole is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Zulfa Abrahams

5 May 2011



For Amina, my mother and my daughter



And

For Yahya, my father and my son

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Abstract

This thesis is a small scale in depth exploration into the perceptions of power held by eight Muslim women residing in the Cape Town Metropole area. Using a Qualitative Feminist approach the study aimed to explore and shed light on the multiple ways in which Muslim women negotiate, construct and co-construct agency, power and authority in their everyday lives. This study also sought to explore whether Muslim women who appear independent or empowered actually feel in control of their own lives; and how their ability to make choices is mediated by intersecting identities such as race, class, age, etc. The research highlights a number of emergent themes in which discussion of the women's views around education, finance, reproductive responsibilities, patriarchy, etc. takes place and also explores the ways in which the women contest and resist traditional cultural norms in their everyday experiences. Furthermore this study also sought to create a space where the researcher focused and refocused her gaze on the theoretical and epistemological aspects of her chosen method of enquiry in order to interrogate its merits and limits. Upon reflection the researcher also acknowledges that, similar to the participants, she also holds contradictory views on some of the issues discussed.

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To my family and friends, I am most grateful for their understanding, their patience, their motivation and their unwavering support. I also acknowledge with gratitude the participants who generously shared their stories with me.

Glossary of Terms

<i>Athaan</i>	The call to prayer
<i>Al-Azhar</i>	An Islamic University based in Cairo Egypt.
<i>Alif, baa, taa</i>	First letters if the Arabic Alphabet
<i>Barakah</i>	Blessings
<i>Batcha</i>	Recitation of the <i>Quran</i>
<i>Dien</i>	The Faith of Islam
<i>Do'aah</i>	Prayers
<i>Doekie</i>	Scarf
<i>Faskh</i>	The dissolution of a marriage as requested by a woman (wife)
<i>Fatwa</i>	Legal opinions about fine points of Islamic law.
<i>Hadj</i>	Pilgrimage to Mecca
<i>Hadith</i>	Statements attributed to the Prophet (pbuh)
<i>Hafiz/Hafiza</i>	one who has committed the <i>Quran</i> to memory
<i>Hijab</i>	Full covering for women leaving only face and hands visible. Also seen as the act of being modest.
<i>Imam</i>	Leader at the mosque.
<i>Kaalkop</i>	Without a scarf/with a bare head.
<i>Khalifa/Apa</i>	A female teacher
<i>Khutbah</i>	sermon
<i>Kitabh</i>	A book, usually Islamic literature on <i>shariah</i> laws.
<i>Mahrieb</i>	The evening prayer at sunset

<i>Mahram</i>	Males to whom a woman cannot be married, such as her father, brother, or uncle, who are allowed to be a woman's escort when travelling. Must be a close relative.
<i>Maningal</i>	To die/ to pass away
<i>Mawlana</i>	A male educated on <i>Shariah</i> Law
<i>Mehr/maskavi</i>	A dowry paid to the brides father to be given to bride as a gift which is retained by the bride regardless of the dissolution of the union.
<i>Muezzin</i>	One who performs the call to prayer at the Mosque
<i>Mufti</i>	An Islamic scholar who has the authority to issue legal opinions known as fatwa about fine points of Islamic law.
<i>Muslah</i>	Prayer mat
<i>Oemie</i>	An arabic term referring to Mother or Grandmother
<i>Outyds</i>	Traditional
<i>Purda</i>	The wearing of the veil
<i>Quran</i>	The holy book of Islam
<i>Saber</i>	To have patience
<i>Salaams</i>	Peace (a greeting used by Muslims universally)
<i>Salaah</i>	A prayer performed five times daily
<i>Shariah</i>	Islamic Laws distilled from the <i>Quran</i> and <i>Hadith</i>
<i>Shaykha</i>	Female teacher and/or religious leader

<i>Sheikh</i>	Male teacher and/or religious leader
<i>Shukr</i>	Give thanks
<i>Slim Bek</i>	Afrikaans phrase meaning 'clever mouth'
<i>Talaq</i>	Divorce
<i>Ummah</i>	Universal Muslim community
<i>Ulama</i>	Religious leaders/learned people
<i>Zina</i>	commit adultery



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Chapter One

Introduction

Motivation for the study

As a mature woman who was raised in a 'conservative' Muslim [It is important to note that the category 'Muslim', like other categories, is a contested category which I discuss later in this chapter] home where strict hierarchies of power and agency along gender lines were adhered to, I find myself surprised by the fact that up until this point I have been unaware of how so many Muslim women in Cape Town appear financially, psychologically, emotionally and socially independent. In addition, many of these Muslim women appear to have the ability to negotiate their positions in male dominated spaces with great confidence and vigour. Yet in total contrast to this, there appears to be a generally accepted perception that within patriarchal systems and religious praxis, women and Muslim women in particular, are imagined to be in especially oppressive situations where they are often primarily located as victims.

Dauids (2004) claims that academic constructions and popular representations of Cape Muslim women often render them invisible and powerless. Additionally, Dauids (2004) suggests that the historical approach to the subject of Islam in South Africa taken by most researchers has tended to side-line issues of gendered subjectivity, particularly the fluidity of culture as well as the position of women; she continues and makes the point that in the past researchers have tended to essentialise categories of race and gender as acultural and ahistorical. As Van der Spuy (1996) notes, most colonial histories on South Africa, particularly those focusing on Muslim communities, tend to

use the hegemonic notion of the division of people along race, geographical origin and class lines, silencing the determinedly gendered nature of colonialism and the patriarchal constitution of most of the cultures represented at the Cape.

Women's studies around the globe have attempted to counter the trend of an androcentric view of the world through men's eyes and as Davids (2004) notes, very positive strides towards this goal have occurred in South Africa. Yet there still remains a scarcity of literature that focuses on black women and Muslim women in particular. Davids (2004) claims that the fact that most scholars who have published or written on the subject of Cape Islam are men, lends a specific gendered slant to the constructions of Muslim women's lives. In most cases, issues pertaining to women are either relegated to the periphery or written from masculine perspectives, and discussions on South African Muslim identities tend to focus almost completely on male identities, with Muslim women occasionally receiving a separate mention.

I wonder whether stereotyping of this nature has resulted in a loss of sight/blind spot in my perception of patriarchy and its power, limiting my ability to make sense of gendered social reality. I wonder whether I have become overly concerned with what would seem the more obvious or more visible sectors where patriarchal power plays out at the expense of the limitations of that power. There are, after all, always cracks in the hegemony, hegemony is never absolute. Power is always contested and negotiated and it is some of the interstices of these contestations that I aim to explore in this research project. I intend exploring Muslim women's perceptions of their own agency,

empowerment, disempowerment; and some of the ways and spaces where patriarchal practices appear, in a manner of speaking, to ‘implode’ and in the end work against itself or themselves. Personally this study is partly fuelled by my own desire to identify and engage with this displaced space so that I can practice feminist politics within the category Muslim.

Aims of the study

The aim of this study is to gain insight into the perceptions of a group of Muslim women here in the Western Cape, regarding their experiences and understandings of their own agency and empowerment. I aim to explore the extent to which these specific women feel they have found ways of empowering themselves within the particular complex and often contradictory patriarchal structures of South African Islam as practiced here in the Western Cape. This thesis is in no way a comprehensive and extensive account of the complex interactions between religious ideology and practice, or the processes of social and political change within which women collectively and individually attempt to shape their lives in a specific context. Rather it is important to note that this small scale study seeks to explore a specific group of Muslim women’s views on their own agency and the ways in which women who appear to me to be autonomous actually feel that they are autonomous and in control of their own lives. One part of this involves exploring how individual Muslim women in the Cape negotiate and perceive Islamic discourses that regulate their lives in a politics of everyday living within an environment that encourages and promotes multiculturalism. Islam is the backdrop against which I explore particular understandings of a very limited group of women. While I do endeavour to explain and

clarify particular Islamic terms and practices, it should be noted that this study does not represent an analysis of Islam and gender in contemporary Cape Town. Before I begin I find need to clarify my own theoretical positioning as a feminist; and this I do in the next section.

A 'Potted' History of Feminism

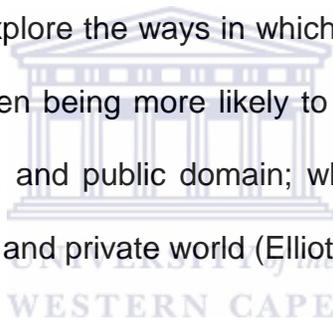
Weedon (1997: 1), defines feminism as a 'politics' directed at changing existing power relations between women and men in society. Similarly, Johnson (1995: 109) defines feminism in its broader sense as a "variety of interrelated frameworks used to observe, analyse, and interpret the complex ways in which the social reality of gender and gender inequality is constructed, enforced, and manifested from the largest institutional settings to the details of people's daily lives". From these two definitions of feminism we can deduce that feminism at its heart is a political ideology aimed at theorizing and challenging the institutionalised subordination of women, i.e. at challenging gendered power inequalities. This is how I understand it, and the understanding that informs the analysis in this study.

In the West, feminism has never been a unified body of thought. Under this broad umbrella, there are various feminist theories which present different analyses of the causes, or agents, of gendered power inequalities; and offer a variety of ways in which these should be challenged. Depending on the analysis, theories have been labelled as liberal, Marxist, socialist, radical, cultural, lesbian, black, third world, anti-racist, disability, power, global, victim and new feminisms (Bryson, 1999:8). However, feminist

literature and research has focused on mapping and documenting the negative impacts of the different forms of patriarchy on the lives and conditions of women in various societies, i.e. the ways in which women are disempowered (Mernissi, 1985; Moors, 1991; Risseuw, 1991; Badran, 1995; Minault, 1998).

For those labelled 'liberal feminists' such as Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem, their argument rests on equality of opportunity. They hold strongly that women's disempowerment has resulted from 'accidental' inequality of opportunities in education, employment and civil rights for women. For liberal feminists the problem was the legislative system that denied women equal opportunities, rather than the gendered power dynamics between men and women. Back in the mid nineteenth century, early advocates of liberal feminism, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, for instance, demanded equal rights for women in all spheres of life; such as education, employment, property and the vote (Bryson, 1992: 39, 59). In doing so they were seeking equality with men by extending to women those rights and privileges available to men. Liberal feminists construct their understanding of women's second class citizenship by accepting the core values of classical liberalism i.e. individualism, rationalism, freedom, justice and toleration (Heywood, 2000: 60). They believe that human beings are socialised into different gender roles; and that this process of socialisation imposes on the belief that 'human beings are endorsed with reason and therefore each individual should enjoy the maximum possible freedom' (Heywood, 2000: 60).

However, the assumptions of the liberal feminists did not escape criticism. Liberal feminism was criticised for its failure to deal with race, class and the 'deep-rootedness' of gendered inequalities and the 'interconnectedness' between different forms of inequality (Mannathoko, 1992: 74). Unlike socialist/Marxist and radical feminists, liberal feminists never developed a structural power analysis to investigate the source of women's under-representation in public and decision-making arenas. Structural power inequalities in women's lives in such sites as the family, the sexual division of labour and sex-class oppression is largely absent from the analysis of liberal feminists (Elliot & Mandell, 1995). Moreover the public and private dichotomy employed by liberal and other feminist writers, fails to explore the ways in which the private and public spill over into one another resulting in men being more likely to be associated with the rational, instrumental, scientific, secular, and public domain; while women are associated with the irrational, sacred, emotional and private world (Elliot & Mandell, 1995:8).



Drawing on a Marxist analysis of class and in response to the perceived weaknesses in liberal feminist theory, Marxist feminist theory started by criticising the liberal feminists for failing to recognise the economic oppression of women. Marxist feminist theory argued that trying to gain equality under a class system was impossible and that women's oppression was a symptom of a more fundamental form of oppression, that is, the capitalist system of social organisation (Elliot & Mandell, 1995:9). From this perspective women are an exploited class in the capitalist mode of production; exploited by their husbands within the families and by employers in the paid labour force.

According to Marxist feminism, women are exploited as both a sex and a class; and are consigned to reproductive roles.

Marxist feminist theory claims that capitalism involves an inherent division of labour by sex; hence the widespread association of women with the private, excluding women from public labour. Thus women who do work in paid employment will be paid less, are first to be fired or laid off; and are returned to the home when the economy no longer needs their paid labour. Men's work in the public sector, however, is considered as 'real' because they directly engage in commodity production; products created for exchange on the market (Elliot & Mandell, 1995:9). Marxist feminism locates the root of female oppression in the introduction of private property and according to this explanation the means of production is owned privately, or by few persons, and these owners are mostly male (Mannathoko, 1992). Marxist feminism argues that in order for liberation for women to be achieved, women need to join the paid labour force on an equal basis to men and that ultimately this will lead to communism and a classless society. Marxist feminism holds that liberation for women can only be achieved in a classless society and the main precondition for women's liberation is a socialist revolution whereby the means of production become the property of society as a whole (Rowbotham 1992: 130).

What I find most valuable in this theory is that it facilitates an understanding of how the institution of family is connected to capitalism; how women's domestic work is undervalued and not considered 'real work' and how women are assigned to the most

thankless and/or low paid jobs. Furthermore Marxist feminist theory helps us recognise that regardless of their paid labour commitments in capitalist societies, women remain responsible for the household management, childcare and general well-being of the family and this speaks particularly to the ways in which women perceive their agency or autonomy limited or threatened by these 'responsibilities'. However, there are still shortcomings with Marxist feminism in that, as Rowbotham (1992: 141) notes, it focused on the concerns of middle class western women in capitalist societies and although Marxist feminists are committed to the emancipation of women in their analysis, their arguments were not directed toward the relations between men and women; they were aimed at understanding power relations built around class and gender failing for instance to take power inequalities built around race into account.

Recognising the shortcomings of liberal feminism and Marxist feminism, socialist feminism came to examine women's disempowerment and agency from a social and economic perspective. Socialist feminists like Sheila Rowbotham, Evelyn Reed, Clara Fraser and Marlene Dixon criticised the liberal feminist emphasis on political and legal rights, and the Marxist feminism for putting too much emphasis on the economic origins of gender inequality, recognising that disempowerment of women occurs in pre-capitalist and socialist systems (Rowbotham, 1992: 129). But while early Socialist feminists have advanced theoretical boundaries in analysing the ways class and gender relations intersect, they too have been criticised for not taking race into account.

When clarifying the origins of women's oppressions, Socialist feminists argue that 'sexism presides over the creation of a class society in the institution of a kinship that enforced exogamy and used women as interfamilial exchange to consolidate extrafamilial ties' (Elliot & Mandell, 1995:12). They recommend studying the problem of women's disempowerment in different classes and from different racial groups, refusing the argument that all women are disempowered or oppressed the same way. It is for this reason that Socialist feminists later incorporated concerns such as ethnicity and race alongside class and in their gender analysis. They argue that both the institution of gender and class-based society must be eradicated for women to establish freely the conditions of their own lives. However, like Marxist feminists, socialist feminists have been subjected to criticism. For example, Radical feminism, among other feminist critiques, argues that the socialist ideology of separate spheres for women and men does not apply to diverse family forms: immigrant families, split-family households, working-class families, gay and lesbian families, and single-parent households (Elliot & Mandell, 1995:13).

The central argument of most Radical feminists like Kate Millet, Germaine Greer and Shulamith Firestone, is that women's oppression is the most fundamental form of disempowerment and that it is a universal phenomenon (Mannathoko 1992: 75). They argue that historically women were the first disempowered group and that women's oppression exists in every society. Radical feminists claim that what oppresses women is not what oppresses men and they consider patriarchy to be the root cause of the most serious social problems. Furthermore they argue that "a special form of life called

patriarchy through which men appropriated all superior social roles”, keeps women in subordinate and exploited positions (Elliot & Mandell, 1995:14). For this reason some radical feminists such as Germaine Greer advocated separatism (a separation of male and female in society and culture). Paying particular attention to the oppression that goes on within the home, radical feminists believe that before race and class, the primary oppression of women is sexism. Radical feminists are associated with the phrase, ‘the personal is political’ and argue that any analysis which concerns women, must interrogate all social relations defining women’s subordinate status, rather than focusing particularly on women’s oppression stemming from their work in the family and economy. Furthermore, they argue that all men participate in or benefit from women’s oppression and only the elimination of patriarchy and the destruction of male control will liberate women. In other words, the socialising agents such as family, church, education and the media justify and reinforce women’s subordination to men with the result that most women internalise a sense of inferiority to men (Mannathoko 1992: 76). Radical feminists also argue that in a patriarchal system, men control women’s sexuality and that this is manifested through pornography, rape, sexual harassment and restrictive contraception.

In addition to this, unlike liberal Marxist and social feminists, radical feminists argue that the masculinised state is an instrument ensuring male control of women’s sexuality and that women are unlikely to overcome their disempowerment through state intervention (Elliot & Mandell, 1995:16). However, radical feminists do come under critique when accused of essentialism, romanticism, ethnocentrism and ahistoricism (Elliot & Mandell,

1995:17). It can be argued that they return us to a conservative notion that there are inherent differences between the sexes and that they hold an essentialist view that understands men as naturally more aggressive and women as naturally more passive. But at the same time radical feminists understand that there is no universal common experience shared by women all over the world as the term 'woman' has different meanings for different communities living in different corners of the world (Lerner 1993: 238).

The popular positions discussed above, although presenting different foci, all tend to argue that women's primary struggle for power and agency, is one against Patriarchy and/or Capitalist Patriarchal practices. In addition to this, 'women' are often articulated as a victimized homogenous group based on the idea that women share a consciousness rooted in the notion that they are disempowered and oppressed as the 'second sex' (Kemp, Madlala & Moodley, 1995)

Thus, authors like Etter-Lewis (1991) and Lewis (1996) claim that western feminism has until the early 1980s, tended to universalise conceptions of femininity and gender as a whole since 'traditional' feminist analysis has emerged out of Western and Eurocentric contexts and has been uncritically used to analyse the situation of black South African women. 'Under the universalistic notions of sisterhood', feminism in South Africa has until recently leaned towards 'othering' black, working class women and in consequence most African women have distanced themselves from Western feminist thought on the basis that it does not provide a meaningful analysis of Black South African women's

experience of disempowerment (Lewis: 1996, 93). Though more recent work considers the complex ways in which women challenge patriarchal power imbalances, Western feminist studies appear to have traditionally tended to be concerned with the structural conditions that produce or reproduce the dominated, passive, submissive and voiceless female subject (Saadawi: 1997, Butler: 1999, McClintock: 1995). It follows that the focus and political project of feminist writing has tended to pay less attention to the unintended effects of patriarchal institutions on women's agency and empowerment. Contemporary South African society seems to find itself concerned mainly with the negative impacts of patriarchy on women resulting in a number of stereotypes regarding patriarchal practices based on religious hierarchies, structures and beliefs.



However, the world over, critiques have grown out of the widespread concern about the exclusion of women of colour from feminist scholarship and the misinterpretation of their experiences. In the mid to late 1980s the works of, for example, Chandra Mohanty, Bell Hooks, Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua were articulating the importance of race, class and nation in terms of women's everyday experiences with gender. These authors challenged the idea that to be a feminist requires adopting an ideology and political agenda defined mainly by middle class European and American women, whose race, class and education influenced the scope and breadth of their political ideas. Speaking simultaneously from within and against both women's liberation movements and anti-racist movements, Dill and Zinn (1996) have insisted on the need to challenge systems of domination not merely as gendered subjects but as women whose lives are

affected by their location in multiple hierarchies (eg. colour, class, etc.). Scholars like Dill and Zinn (1996) examine the ways in which difference and diversity infuses their contemporary feminist studies. Their analysis draws on a conceptual framework that they refer to as 'multiracial feminism' and this perspective proves to be an attempt to go beyond a mere recognition of diversity and difference among women to examine structures of domination, specifically the importance of race, in understanding the social construction of gender (Dill & Zinn, 1996).

More recently, scholars like Collins (2004) argue that the intellectual climate currently housing Black Feminist thought has also changed. Collins (2004: 67) claims that within black cultural studies in particular, critiques now stress how racial solidarity has far too often been constructed 'on the bedrock of racial authenticity and essentialism'. She continues that this has great implication for Black feminist praxis generally, and a black woman's standpoint situated in unjust power relations in particular (Collins 2004: 67). Collins (2004:69) points out that complex frameworks like intersectionality, problematises the entire process of identity construction based on race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, class, etc. It also highlights the hierarchical power relations of intersecting multiple subjectivities, from a range of perspectives especially when making assumptions about individualism. Additionally, she argues that when applied to groups, intersectionality becomes more difficult to conceptualise because groups do not operate as individuals do, thus intersectionality on the group level becomes more difficult to study, but that it is necessary to engage in this difficult task (Collins 2004: 70). Emerging out of all this feminist theorizing is the key understanding that race, class, ethnicity and

most importantly gender, are all constructs that interact with and co-construct each other. As this understanding underpins my analysis, I will return to it later. Next I discuss a key analytical lens that emerged out of this feminist theorising: gender.

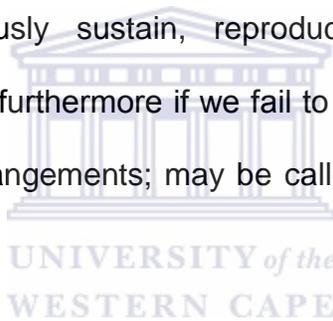
This Business of Gender

Lorber (2004) argues that most people find it hard to believe that gender is a social construct, something that is constantly created and recreated out of human interaction, out of social life and is the 'texture and order' of that social life. Earlier West and Zimmerman (1987) argued that gender, like culture, is a human production that depends on everyone constantly 'doing gender'. I agree with Lorber (2004) who says that gender is such a familiar part of daily life that it usually takes a deliberate disruption of our expectations of how women and men are supposed to act, to pay attention to how it is produced. For the individual, gender construction starts with assignment to a sex category on the basis of what the genitalia look like at birth. From there on through most of the individual's life, processes around gender norms and practices will constitute the social construction of that individual's gender. Therefore individuals are born sexed but not gendered and they have to be taught to do masculinity or femininity, as Simone de Beauvoir said:

One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman...; it is civilization
as a whole that produces this creature...which is described as
feminine.

(de Beauvoir 1953: 267)

I fully agree with Sandra Bem (1983) who claims that like race, gender is a powerful 'schema' that orders the cognitive world. Thus for human beings, there is no essential femaleness or maleness, masculinity or femininity, womanhood or manhood, but once gender is ascribed, the social order constructs and holds individuals to strongly gendered norms and expectations. As Lorber (2004) argues, individuals may vary on many of the components of gender and shift genders temporarily or permanently, but they must fit into the limited number of gender statuses their particular society recognises and in the process they recreate their society's version of women and men. As claimed by West and Zimmerman (1987: 46) who said that if we do gender appropriately, we simultaneously sustain, reproduce and render legitimate the institutional arrangements' and furthermore if we fail to 'do gender appropriately; we as individuals, not institutional arrangements; may be called to account for our character, motives and predispositions.



Thus I hold the position that gender, like race and religion are social constructs and it is this theoretical approach that underpins my study. Later in the literature review I will briefly discuss how all three have tended to be treated as essentialised categories by many writers. I also discuss how these subjectivities intersect with each other in complex and contradictory ways. The consideration of race, class, gender and other subjectivities that co-construct each other, or Intersectionality, is one of the prominent contemporary theoretical contributions made by scholars in the field of women's studies. But for now I shall discuss the ways in which I use and understand these terms.

A note on Race, Gender, Terminology and Theoretical Perspective

It is important to note that many of the terms used in this thesis are problematic to me as I hold that the division of people into biological groups differentiated by, for example, colour (race) or gender, to which we can attribute specific features, have no scientific validity. However, the categorisation of South Africans according to race is a legal and social fact, even in post-apartheid South Africa. Census 2001, for example, categorised South Africans as either 'White', 'Coloured', 'Asian' or 'Black African'. As Neville Alexander (2006) has recently pointed out, official forms still ask us to classify ourselves as Black, White, Coloured or Asian instead of asking us how we were classified in the days of apartheid. Therefore we need to recognize that for many, if not most South Africans Apartheid classifications still have resonance and relevance. These categories are in continuous use in everyday life, whether one is applying for a job, an identity document, a research grant, or filling in government documentation pertaining to skills training or employment equity. For this reason, I have not placed these terms in inverted commas. To avoid confusion, and despite my deep reservations, I will adhere broadly to the terms used in the Census and generally in public discourse. Thus 'Indian' is used to describe Muslims whose ancestors arrived from South Asia over a century ago; while Cape Malay, a heavily contested term, will refer to those of the Muslim faith who are part of the category 'Coloured' in the Census.

I also agree with Modood, Berthoud and Nazroo (2002:43) who state that the act of studying race groups does not automatically construct them, they are a part of the basic facts of society and their study is a well-established research field. The key is whether

one approaches 'race' and other forms of subjectivity with a critical eye. Modood *et al* (2002), furthermore point out that race groups are 'given' to us by society and represent an ongoing research stream. Thus, this thesis rejects racist and racial classification, while noting that "blackness, whiteness and colouredness exist, but they are cultural, historical and political identities" that are pervasive in South Africa (Erasmus, 2001:12). These terms litter our vocabulary and are the discursive tools with which we shape our fluctuating identities.

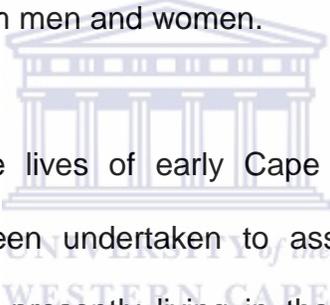
Islam in the Cape, 'Malayness' and Muslim Women

Like race and gender, religion and ethnicity are important signifiers of identity here in the Western Cape and have often been treated as uncontested and even essentialist categories. My understanding of 'Muslim' like race, is that it is a social construct intimately connected to time and place, and that there is no fixed essential thing that can be pinned down as Muslimness. It is important to point out that South Africa's Muslims are complex and sociologically diverse. Vahed and Jeppie (2005) say that in letters to newspapers and call-in programmes on radio stations, and also among many journalists and political commentators, South Africa's Muslims are largely viewed as a monolith. They continue by claiming that 'whether Muslims live in working class townships of Kwazulu-Natal, the Cape Flats in Cape Town or plush suburbs in Gauteng, that they turn daily towards Makkah in prayer seems to be sufficient to conclude that Muslims constitute a unitary bloc' (Vahed and Jeppie 2005: 252).

Muslims in South Africa are divided along lines of race, class, gender, ethnicity, language and beliefs, and it is highly simplistic to collapse them into a monolith on the basis of their religious affiliation. In addition to this there are multiple Islamic voices, traditions and identities which further divide (Roy, 1996: vii; Vahed and Jeppie, 2005). For example Jeppie (2001) points out how 'Malay' is a heavily contested term as in the South African context Malay refers to 'coloureds' of the Muslim faith, who until the twentieth century were referred to as 'Mohammedan'. He continues that Malay ethnic identity was constituted from the 1920s, largely as a result of folklorist Izak du Plessis, whose book *The Cape Malays* (1944), formally isolated coloured Muslims from the broader coloured community by presenting them almost as a distinct Malay race (Jeppie, 2001). This essentialist view of 'Malayness' is problematic as Adhikari (1989) has shown that 'Malay' identity was always open, and embraced individuals from diverse cultural and racial categories, including descendants of slaves from South and South-East Asia, Mozambique, Arabs and Khoisan.

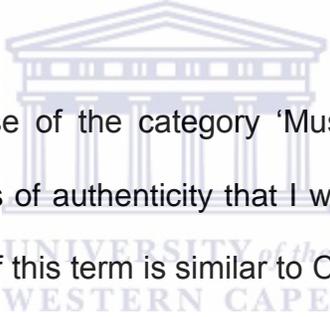
In addition to this, Wasserman and Jacobs (2003:26) point out that Islam is made up of a diverse range of competing elements which produce specific and hybridised Muslim identities. For example, Malay Muslims in the Western Cape often have more in common with non-Muslims than Indian Muslims. Working-class Muslims in the economically depressed Cape Flats, for example, share common experiences with their Christian neighbours around issues of poverty, drugs and gangs, which differ from the experiences of wealthier Indian Muslims living in other parts of the city (Wasserman and Jacobs 2003:26).

My perception is therefore that Muslims in the Cape Town Metropole are diverse and that there is no single fixed Muslim identity. Muslim identity is mediated by such factors as race, gender, class, age, ethnicity, education, language, sexuality and given that the focus of this study is to explore Muslim women's understandings of empowerment and disempowerment, it is important to be aware of these kinds of socially constructed identities and the ways in which they might shape the women's experiences. For example, the above mentioned factors which mediate Muslim identity would have a direct influence on negotiations around rights, obligations and expectations about appropriate behaviour for Muslim men and women.



Very little is known about the lives of early Cape Muslim women and very few contemporary studies have been undertaken to assess the particular needs and experiences of Muslim women presently living in the Cape (Davids, 2004; Van der Spuy, 1996). Van der Spuy (1996) has argued that most colonial histories dealing with Muslim communities in South Africa are inclined to uncritically use the normative view of the division of people along race, geographical origin and class lines, silencing the decisively gendered nature of colonialism and the patriarchal constitution of most of the cultures represented at the Cape. An example of this is the depictions of the lives of Muslim women living in Cape Town under apartheid and Muslim patriarchies that depict them as invisible or powerless, and is informed by the lens through which the subject is observed (Davids, 2004; Tayob, 1999).

As an example Davids (2004: 29, 30) points out a recent research project, *Religion, Culture, and Identity in Democratic South Africa* funded by the South African Netherlands Projects for Alternative Development (SANPAD), and a subsequent edition of the Annual Review of Islam in South Africa which provided a platform which produced papers on gendered Muslim identities (Abdullah, 2003; Davids, 2003, Hassim, 2003; Tayob, 2003). Also, Hendricks (2001:31) says that in the past gendered colonial historical literature is often recuperative, that is, bringing women into the narrative, and the explicit link between race and sex and the power relations which underpin these papers, are seldom focused upon.



Lastly, I am aware that my use of the category 'Muslim' opens me to a charge of reinforcing the reductive notions of authenticity that I want to move away from. Thus I wish it to be clear that my use of this term is similar to Chandra Mohanty's (1991) use of the term 'third world woman' to describe an analytical and political category useful in counter-hegemonic struggle. My vision of the Muslim woman is part of a strategy to identify and engage with local as well as global struggles and religious as well as non-religious resistance and this study then offers a notion of Muslim women's difference not as static or definitive but, rather, as a starting point for conversation and dialogue. Thus I agree with Khan (1998) who argues that we should accept the category Muslim as a starting point and problematise it in an attempt to recognise the fluidity of cultural expressions. Also certain terms used by the participants in my study defy translation. Afrikaans, Arabic and other expressions specific to South African culture and Islamic

terminology appear in italics in the body of the text, and appear alphabetised with a brief translation in the Glossary.

In the following chapter I underline the feminist framework that underpins my research process and explore the epistemological basis of my research. I also critically discuss literature on Muslim women and the ways Muslim women have been represented. Chapter three outlines the benefits and limits of the methodological framework and provides details of the women participating in this study. Chapter Four outline the methods and techniques employed during the research process and provide a discussion of the ethical considerations. This chapter also provided a reflexive space for discussion of my insider/outsider status and the ways in which this research process has come to be a journey of self-discovery. Chapter five and chapter six discuss the themes which emerged from the process of data analysis and attempts to shed light on the ways in which Muslim women locate themselves when negotiating power, freedom and agency in their lives. I end with a conclusion that draws together the multiple threads of my argument.

Chapter Two

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Writing on power

In this chapter I begin by exploring the concept of 'power'. Central to understanding women's empowerment/disempowerment is an understanding of what power is. Sociologists usually define power as the ability to impose one's will on others, even if those others resist in some way. The imposition need not involve coercion (force or threat of force); thus "power" in the sociological sense incorporates both physical power and political power (Crossley, 2005). Crossley (2005) describes power as in some ways more closely resembling what every day English-speakers call "influence" and he continues that generally, one could define power as the more or less unilateral ability (real or perceived) or potential to bring about significant change, usually in people's lives, through the actions of oneself or of others. This view of power is also echoed by Sullivan (2001) who says that the nature of power is an interpretation of evolution, used by individuals with the goal to let an individual evolve to the highest level of comfort 'he' can attain in 'his' social setting. Sullivan (2001) continues by claiming that the exercise of power seems endemic to humans as social and gregarious beings.

When taking a closer look at the operation of power Sullivan (2001) claims that power manifests itself in a relational manner, that one cannot meaningfully say that a particular social actor 'has power' without also specifying the other parties to the social relationship. He continues that power almost always operates reciprocally, but usually not equally reciprocally; to control others, one must have control over things that they

desire or need, but one can rarely exercise that control without a measure of reverse control - larger, smaller or equal - also existing (Sullivan, 2001). Because power operates both relationally and reciprocally, sociologists speak of the balance of power between parties to a relationship; all parties to all relationships have some power (Turner, 1996). The sociological examination of power concerns itself with determining and describing its relative strengths, equal or unequal, stable or subject to erratic change and more often than not sociologists examine relationships in which the parties have relatively equal or nearly equal power in terms of constraint rather than of power (Turner, 1996). Even in structuralist social theory, power appears as a process, an aspect to an ongoing social relationship, not as a fixed part of social structure.

When looking at the theories of power the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche underlies much 20th century analysis of power (Turner, 1996). Nietzsche disseminated ideas on the "will to power", which he saw as the domination of other humans as much as the exercise of control over one's environment (Turner, 1996). Some schools of psychology, notably those associated with Alfred Adler, place power dynamics at the core of their theory (where orthodox Freudians might place sexuality). Feminist analysis of patriarchy concentrates on issues of power; as power is central to feminist analysis; and Turner (1996) claims that some feminists distinguish "power-over" (influence on other people) from "power-to" (ability to perform).

One of the key views of the importance of power dynamics in human activity comes from the work of Michel Foucault, who has said that power is everywhere, because it

comes from everywhere (Danaher, 2000). Danaher (2000) describes Foucault's works as an analysis of the link between power and knowledge where he outlines a structure of covert power that works through people and discourse, rather than only on them. This view is important as it is seeing gender, race, class, religion, etc. as axis of power inequalities that is central to feminist and intersectional analysis. Danaher (2000) states that Foucault claims belief systems gain momentum (and hence power) as more people come to accept the particular views associated with that belief system as common knowledge, thus such belief systems define their figures of authority. Furthermore, within such a belief system or discourse, ideas crystallise as to what is right and what is wrong, what is normal and what is deviant; within a particular belief system certain views, thoughts or actions become accepted as truths (Danaher, 2000).

Thus these ideas, being considered undeniable 'truths' come to define a particular way of seeing the world and the particular way of life associated with such 'truths' becomes normalized (Danaher, 2000). This subtle form of power lacks rigidity and power itself lacks any concrete form, occurring as a locus of struggle; resistance through defiance, defines power and hence becomes possible through power (Danaher, 2000). Danaher (2000) furthermore states that without resistance, power is absent; still, in practice Foucault often seems to deny individuals this agency, which is contrasted with sovereignty (the old model of power as effective and unyielding).

One needs to be nominalistic, no doubt: power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the

name that one attributes to a complex strategic situation in a particular society.

(Foucault, 1990, pp.93)

Writing on Muslim Women

With the expansion of Women's Studies there started a burgeoning of scholarly work concerned with Muslim women. I have found that these scholarly works do address some of the experiences of Muslim women but few directly address the experiences of Muslim women in South Africa, let alone the Cape Metropole area. I have found that many of the texts I encountered were in-depth historical surveys exploring the context and content of laws, norms, and practices prevalent in Middle Eastern countries; and the many ways that women of different classes have accessed and used available resources to enhance and maintain their social and economic position through the ages. As I outline briefly below, these texts with their detailed studies appears to provide a definitive stage in a feminist analysis of Middle Eastern women and appear to denote the end of orientalist 'otherised' and ethnocentric approaches that marked earlier works.

For example Rozario (1996) describes Muslim women in Australia as being in a state of dilemma between loyalty to the *ummah* and the desire for gender equality. In an attempt at categorisation Rozario (1996), claims that Muslim women in western countries conform to two broad groups: outright rejection of Islam; or acceptance with Islamist elements. This construction of a unitary Muslim woman as caught up between the modernised west and the traditional east is a pervasive stereotype and Edross

(1997) notes that these stereotypes are often perpetuated by the limited literature on Muslim women by Muslim women.

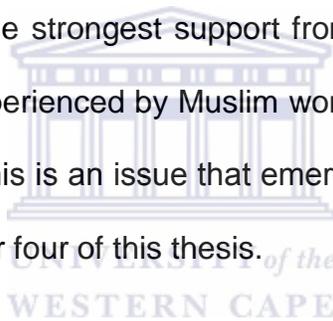
Rozario (1996) describes a minority of younger women that tend to reject Islamic teachings altogether and older, more traditional women who tend to strongly identify as Muslims. She describes the younger women viewing their rejection of traditional Islamic teachings as creating more choices and freedoms, while older women view the corruption of Islamic traditions as disempowering to Muslim women. Rozario (1996) continues that the older women criticise cultural problems, rather than Islamic problems, rejecting the notion that Islam limits women's agency. For me this simplistic dichotomising of Muslim women into those who 'accept Islam' and those who 'reject Islam', does not provide a suitably nuanced framework with which to accommodate the many possible ways in which the women might experience Islam and themselves within Islam. I do however, find the fact that Rozario (1996) attempts to explore the notion that the older Muslim women criticise gendered power inequalities as cultural problems rather than Islamic problems useful, as it informed my analysis of the relationship between culture and religion as identified and experienced by the women in my study. As I discuss in more detail in the later chapters, age proved to be an important signifier of understanding for the women involved in my study.

Rozario (1996) also argues that in most situations, Australian Muslim women unlike men are tasked with the symbolism of Islam (often expressed through dress) in addition to being carriers of a minority culture. She claims that the politics of communal identity and the identification of women as symbols of that identity and bearers of Muslim

culture shape the responses of Muslim women to Islam (Rozario, 1996). However Rozario (1996) does not explore the other factors such as class, or ethnicity, or race, which almost certainly shape the women's responses to and experiences of Islam; nor does she explore possible sites of resistance in women's daily lives. For example, I would have been interested in knowing whether women ever use dress as a site of resistance; or whether they might view the choice of wearing Islamic dress in a 'westernised' society as empowering? For instance, in a study conducted in the Indian community of Durban, Radhakrishnan (2008) found that the women enjoyed wearing the traditional Sari as opposed to Western dress as it reportedly gave expression to their support for a local political party and promoted what was understood as Indian-ness. Radhakrishnan (2008:6) also claims that the women in Durban felt they were 'clearly empowered' as they could make 'their voices heard' this way. Thus, in terms of my own questions around women's perceptions of empowerment, I would have been interested in how the women who follow more traditional styles of dress viewed themselves in terms of their own power. Do these women see the younger women who 'outright reject Islamist elements' as empowered, or do they see themselves as empowered for having made this choice? Moreover, Rozario (1996) fails to explore the 'generally younger' group of women's perception of themselves in terms of their empowerment, agency or perception of themselves or their own lives, whereas age seemed an important signifier of subjectivity amongst my participants.

Rozario (1996) also focuses on issues of Islamic identity and the relationships between Muslims and the 'host' community, that is, white Australians. Again Rozario reduces the 'host' community to a monolith of whiteness and excludes the many subjectivities that

mediate whiteness; such as gender, sexuality, class and age. Most of the participants in this study were either first or second generation Australians but felt alienated from the broader society partly because of their Islamic subjectivities, but what of their many other subjectivities? For example, how do the women feel about their national identity; does class affect their view of themselves and in which way do they feel 'part of the nation'? Some of the issues raised by the women included the perceived negative attitudes of white Australians toward Australian Muslims; the perceived negative media representations of Muslims and that gender rights for Muslim women were written into Islamic law (Rozario, 1996). More valuable to me, is the fact that she notes that the political position that garners the strongest support from Muslim women in Australia is one that identifies problems experienced by Muslim women as based in culture with the remedy in 'true' Islamic law. This is an issue that emerged strongly in my analysis, as I discuss in more detail in chapter four of this thesis.



Similarly Carolyn Moxley Rouses's (2004) study addresses issues relevant to Muslim women living outside the Middle Eastern countries. Rouse observed a Los Angeles County community of African American women who converted to Sunni Islam. After several hundreds of hours of interviews, attendance at Friday prayer services, women's gatherings and *Masjid* lectures, Rouse concludes that "these sisters challenge hegemonic discourse about race, gender, community and faith at the level of the everyday" (Rouse, 2004, p 11). Rouse (2004) demonstrates how these women render feminist interpretations of Islamic norms that might otherwise appear patriarchal and reveals the women of *Masjid* Ummah of Southern California as promoters of women's rights. Challenging the stereotypes that Muslim women are by definition oppressed

Rouse (2004) claims that the rhetoric of Muslim patriarchy may for example be deployed, not to make Muslim women submissive, but rather to instil in Muslim men a sense of responsibility. Since my research seeks in part to explore the extent to which Muslim women in Cape Town feel they have found ways of empowering themselves within the complex patriarchal structures of South African Islam, it was useful to me to engage with this study as Rouse finds that the Muslim women here use their interpretation of Islamic tenets as a means of asserting their rights. However the women participating in Rouse's study all converted to Islam and this inevitably brings into their 'brand' of Islam the legacies of the social contexts from which they emerged. Thus the manner in which they choose to deploy their understanding of *shariah* law will be mediated by their cultural understandings of women in Islam. In contrast all my participants were born into Islam here in the Western Cape.

As an anthropologist, Rouse (2004) also provides exceptional ethnographic detail which vividly illustrates how United States based Muslim women formulate notions of gender equity in Islam. I am aware, that South African women exist in entirely different contexts to these African American women, yet I find that Rouse's research and analysis speaks to certain aspects of my study. For example I do find that a recurring theme that arises in my data is that many of the women feel that since they have more access to literature on Islamic Law, translated *Hadiths* and the translated English *Quran*, they are able to empower themselves by knowing their Islamic rights. Unlike the participants in my study who are only in recent years gaining access to literature on Islam, the women in Rouse's (2004) study have had access literature on Islam from even before they took the decision to convert to Islam. This connection between Islamic literature and

knowing your gendered rights within Islam and empowerment among Muslim women is discussed in more detail later in chapter five of this thesis.

In another study around the question of how gender is currently constructed and mediated in relation to cultural and Islamic identities in Nampula City in Mozambique, Liazzat Bonate (2005) uses an intersectional analysis and says that gender is constructed through discourses on ethnic and regional cultural identities and through the discourses of Islamic law related to religious sources and their interpretations (Bonate, 2005). Bonate (2005) shows how the Muslim community of the Nampula City is not homogeneous; rather it comprises several communities which are diverse due to the origin of their population and their geographic orientations. At the same time, this diversity is also expressed economically as the Islamic Council and Ahl al-Sunna receive support from local and international Muslim businessmen and international Islamic organizations, while other local communities almost exclusively rely on contributions from the local communities who frequent their mosques (Bonate, 2005). She furthermore explains how the male leaders in the Ahl al-Sunna and Islamic Council would regard themselves as being more universalistic than their neighbours.

But whether this 'universalistic brand' of Islam applies to the women in their community or whether the economic support from Muslim businesses is gendered, is not clear to me as Bonate (2005) does not delve into issues of gender at the onset of her discussion. In my opinion, this proves to be a missed opportunity as asking questions with regard to the different standards for men and women in these multiple communities would have added another crucial layer to an already rich discussion. Later in her

discussion Bonate (2005) inserts gender into the discussion and the results are informative and insightful. For example, highlighting the rural urban divide, Bonate (2005: 22) finds that unlike rural Muslim women, Muslim women in the urban and multifaceted environment of a provincial capital, can choose from among the multiple Islamic authorities available, and follow the deliberations of their chosen authority as to how to behave 'appropriately' and how to be a 'true' Muslim woman. Bonate (2005) says that the sense of agency resulting from the choices available to these urban Muslim women creates an environment in which many Muslim women are proactive within their local communities running various projects and small businesses.

Bonate (2005) argues that the religious orientations of the Nampula City Muslims are far from uniform and that the divide between them is related to the acceptance of a local 'tradition' or culture; and of Sufism as part of the religious identity. More importantly she says that the situation of a Muslim woman with respect to the discourse of Islamic law varies according to her own 'native' culture and region history, as well as to what 'brand' of Islam she chooses to belong to (Bonate, 2005: 17). I find this notion of women having a choice interesting as it speaks to agency and power; however it raises the question of how much choice we as Muslim women really have? What are the limitations and can women overcome the restrictions of 'native' culture and region history? One sees evidence of these limitations when Bonate (2005) describes the women's discussions of the notions of Islamic marriage and control of female sexuality *zina* (adultery). Bonate (2005) says that Islamic marriage and control of female sexuality *zina* is conceived of differently by the Muslim women relying on 'local traditions' and by the Ahl al-Sunna and Islamic Council members. The first group

(relying on local traditions) were inclined to consider sex outside of marriage, were it consented or rape, as first and foremost a violation of the principles of social norms and parental authority and they would ask for the consent of the girl to marry the one with whom she committed *zina* (Bonate, 2005: 17).

On the other hand the second group of participants (Ahl al-Sunna and Islamic Council members) considered that a girl should be forcefully married to a man with whom she has committed *zina* (if consented) and furthermore going beyond *zina* by raping a woman was far beyond the limits established by God, thus, a woman in this situation was not guilty and should not be punished, let alone marry her rapist, while a man who 'trespassed all possible limits' should be severely punished, at least according to statutory laws (Bonate, 2005: 17). It appears that the women participating in Bonate's study related a lot of what would be regarded as the accepted norm in their community, in other words, they articulated what would for them be regarded as common sense. This however exposes what Foucault would say are the hegemonic discourses revealing the axes of power. For example heterosexual practices are privileged and same sex practices are marginalised within this hetero-normative framework. I would also have been interested in what the women thought about these cultural practices or whether they have a different view on how the community should proceed with regard to rape, *zina*, adultery or forced marriages. For certainly within this hetero-normative framework certain heterosexual practices (marriage) are privileged while other heterosexual practices (adultery, rape) are marginalised. Though Bonate acknowledges that the women's agency is limited, she does not explore the ways in which these limitations are perceived by the women participating in her study. She also

fails to ask a number of significant questions such as whether the women always agree with the cultural practices or ruling of the leaders of their communities; are there any points of resistance to these 'norms' and what kinds of strategies do they employ to empower themselves within their daily realities? Also to what degree do the women perceive themselves as 'choosing' their 'brand' of Islam? Moreover Bonate (2005) does not provide clarity on whether there are any women on the board of the Islamic Council, or whether there are any women in leadership positions in their communities.

Closer to Home

In her Master's thesis, '*Muslim Women in Cape Town: A feminist narrative analysis*', Leila Davids aims to contribute toward the theorizing around Muslim women in South Africa. According to Davids (2004: 5), the general literature on Islam in South Africa is severely limited around the roles and life experiences of Muslim women and the historical approach to the subject taken by most researchers has tended to 'sideline identity issues, particularly the fluidity of culture and the position of women'. Davids (2004: 5) says that in general, male historical figures from outside the Cape, like *Sheikh Yusuf* and *Tuan Guru* are credited with instigating and consolidating Islam in the Cape in the nineteenth century and that this dismisses the contributions of women in the 'unfolding' and 'proliferation' of the religion in this part of the world. She continues by claiming that women like *Saartjie van die Kaap* and *Cissie Gool*, have not received similar historical, cultural or religious status as Muslims, even though they played a significant role in the development of Islam and Islamic communities in the Cape (Davids, 2004). In many ways such women challenged stereotypical ideas about the good Muslim woman; perhaps this explains why they have been marginalized?

Dauids (2004) attempts to move away from limiting and totalising theories while at the same time remaining mindful of the oppressive and liberating aspects of women's lives by presenting an historical overview and theoretical background on Islam and Muslim women in Africa; and simultaneously providing a gendered approach to historical Islam at the Cape. It was this theoretical background on Islam and Muslim women in Africa that I found particularly useful as certain aspects of my questions relating to identity and empowerment are touched on. For example, Dauids (2004) cites Magot Badran's (1995) work on the negotiations of gender identity in colonial Egypt as an example of how African Muslim societies outside South Africa are examining the intersecting power relationships between gender, religion and politics with specific reference to the colonial experience. Dauids (2004) claims that a vacuum exists on this subject in South African academia and that by examining the historical accounts of Cape Muslim women's lives and representations of Muslim slave women by colonialists, current academic work can contribute to the recovery of women's multiple and varied experiences (Dauids 2004:6). More importantly Dauids (2004) claims that feminist analysis of historical evidence and cultural practice should explore the myths of the passive, subservient Muslim woman; focus on the gendered nature of their realities; and acknowledge that these women's positions in society have been contested and that their lives have been sites of resistance (Dauids 2004:6). What's more, she claims that such an analysis would allow for the development of a localised understanding of religion and culture as fraught with disconnections and reconnections that could challenge the stereotypical idea of all Muslim women as 'either passive recipients of culture or peripheral players without

recourse or resistance in a marginalised community'(Davids 2004:6,7). In terms of my own work Davids raises valuable questions as to the supposedly unchanging nature of social practice through the examination of marriages as political and cultural tools. Davids also raises questions about the leadership roles that women played and their social and economic power which speaks in many ways to what the women participating in my study view as 'Cape Muslim tradition'.

Davids also (2004:8) cites Van der Spuy who states that women slaves and settler women are routinely and implicitly written about as heterosexual, passive beings whose main purpose at the Cape was to supply children, domestic labour and satiate the sexual appetites of men. She continues by claiming that for women marriage and conversion provided terrain for resistance since Islam was attractive to marginalized people as a tool for resistance to the dominant, enslaving culture; and conversion to Islam had positive implications for both slave and slave owner (Davids 2004:8). This speaks to Rouse's (2004) work with African American females who convert to Islam as discussed earlier in this chapter and furthermore, this notion of women accessing social and economic power through marriage is not unique as Bouthaina Shaaban (1988:30) tells of young Syrian women who actively seek to marry 'older, rich Saudi men'. Shaaban (1988:31) says that the women participating in her study claim that 'the important thing for the woman is to secure her rights before getting married; she should make the man buy her a flat and put a large sum of money into her bank account'. These Muslim women view their right to *mehr* Islam gives them as a strategy to access economic power when married. The women also appear to look down on and pity the

women who have married the local Syrian men and describe these women as 'ill-used slaves' since the women have not chosen to use their right to *mehr* as strategy to empower themselves (Shaaban, 1988:31).

With regard to my question on Muslim women's perceptions of empowerment I draw heavily on Davids (2004) whose thesis provides a useful framework that situates local women's personal experiences as indicative of the multiple possible positionings of Muslim women as mothers, wives, daughters, social subjects, etc. Furthermore, Davids also takes into account the patriarchal discourses specific to Muslim women in Cape Town and locates those discourses in the wider social context emphasizing class differences and racialism; while also recognizing how their everyday lives, like those of all individuals, are constituted through intersecting discursive, material, and social formations (Dwyer, 1999). However, though useful, I feel as though individual women's voices are not present in this paper as Davids (2004) deals primarily with texts and since my thesis seeks to explore women's perception in the Cape today, Davids work does not adequately address my questions. She does however provide a discursive context within which I can start to think about the important axes of power and hegemonic discourses within which my participants are located. For example none of my participants make any mention of sexuality and the ways in which heterosexuality is the unspoken norm, the 'common sense' terrain that locates the women within particular axes of power.

Another paper that explores Islam in the Cape is that of Muhammed Haron (2008), whose paper '*Religious Practices: Preaching and women Preachers*' outlines the roles women played in developing the Muslim community in the Cape since early nineteenth century. He starts his paper by explaining how in the early nineteenth century Saartjie van die Kaap provided an important example of a women religious leader in South Africa and works his way through to how Muslim women's religious leadership has continued to expand during the post 1994 democratic era. Though I found this text useful, I did find Haron's (2008) paper patronizing and condescending toward women. For example, Haron (2008) talks about how women made an indelible mark on religious education and continues by explaining how 'a fair number' of women 'gained their religious knowledge from local *sheikhs* and *mawlanas* (he explains in an aside that *sheikhs* and *mawlanas* are 'learned religious leaders'). What Haron (2008) overlooks is the gender of the *sheikhs* and *mawlanas*. The title *mawlana* is one which is reserved for men in the Islamic community and up until 1995 there were no female '*shaykhas*' in Cape town. In fact, later in this paper Haron mentions that Cape Town's '*Shaykha Mymoena* is the first South African woman graduate from *Al-Azhar* university in Cape Town' but does not think it relevant in terms of how women's access to an Islamic education is 'filtered' through the men in their communities. Though Haron (2008) notes the accomplishments of a number of Muslim women from local *khalifas/apas* to Najma Moosa who teaches Muslim personal law at the University of the Western Cape and has written extensively, he overlooks the day to day struggles of the ordinary Muslim women who live in South Africa. Furthermore, he writes uncritically failing to mention the various challenges and hurdles Muslim women in Islamic leadership in South Africa

face. However, while there are problems with this paper as outlined above I did find this paper useful as a historical reference and drew on it extensively in my discussion on Muslim women and education in chapter four later in this thesis.

Another paper providing an interesting look at Islam at the Cape is Gabiba Baderoon's '*North-North-East: Gender and new framings of Islam in South Africa*'. Baderoon (2005: 2) discusses three recent South African works in theater, art and poetry that engage with the 'tropes' through which Islam has been historically visible in South Africa. Of particular interest to me was her discussion of the play 'At Her Feet' written by Nadia Davids, first performed in 1999. Baderoon (2005) states that in this work there is an engagement with the local and the transnational, the present and the past, the individual and the collective and that it shows the fractures and repressions of such images in works that manifest the variety and complexity of Muslim life. 'At Her Feet' is a one woman play set in contemporary South Africa that features the interlocking monologues of six Muslim female characters. According to Baderoon (2005:5), this form may appear to be a paradoxical mechanism through which to articulate the complexity and multiplicity of Muslim women's perspectives in South Africa. She cites Davids to explain how the use of the artifice of one woman playing six different characters, precisely shows the shifting, intersecting nature of identity and points to the intersecting subjectivities that make lived experiences as a Muslim women so varied (Baderoon, 2005). Baderoon (2005:6) quotes Davids as stating that she inscribed different characters on one body to show just how multifaceted, hybrid and complex the lived experience of Muslim women's lives can be. Since my study is located within a social

constructionist paradigm and how Muslim women in Cape Town construct their social realities is important to my question, I found Baderoon's (2005) discussion of this play useful in that she attempts to draw connections between religion with other vectors of subjectivity such as 'race', 'gender' and 'class'. Furthermore Baderoon explores how the ideology of apartheid 'mapped' race onto religion, 'so that terms like 'Malay' and 'Indian' recall the complexities of religious identities (Baderoon 2005:7). Baderoon also (2005:7) notes that the word 'Islam' is 'erroneously assumed to imply exceptionalism and erase the similarities between Muslims and other communities', including its 'intensely patriarchal character' in the Cape.

Baderoon (2005: 6, 12) also says that Davids explores the relations between race, politics and religion, and how these intersect to produce a South African Muslim identity by taking familiar themes associated with Islam, such as veiling, cooking, burial, patriarchal men and suffering women 'in unexpected directions', using the 'familiar' to 'subvert expectations and unsettle the entrenched images into which Muslim women have been fixed'. For example Baderoon (2005: 10) says that the play unsettles a claim to reveal secrets by an 'authentic' insider and uses Sara's (a character in the play) perspective on the veil to reflect on the perceptions and expectations of others:

[T]he world has gone a bit of veil crazy. Behind the veil. At the drop of a veil. To veil or not to veil. And I wonder sometimes why, with my love of fabric, and texture, colour and beauty, with my collection of scarves that I drape around my waist, or wrap like a bandana on my head, or loop through my belt holes, or throw around my shoulders I wonder if I don't wear it just because I don't like

what it says. Or maybe it's because I don't want you looking at me like you look at them.

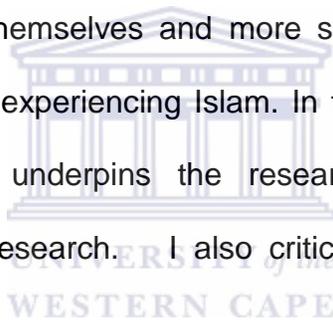
Baderoon (2005:10) says that in this speech the beauty and pleasure of scarves is explored alongside the acknowledgement that as a Muslim woman, Sara is affected by the way she is seen when she wears a scarf. Another perspective on the scarf is explored when Baderoon (2005) discusses the character Tahira who presents a resonant account of being told, in the aftermath of September 11, by her employer at the travel agency where she works that she cannot wear her scarf to work:

Basically, at the end of it he said I could either take off my scarf or go to work somewhere else... You know, I have worn a scarf since I was sixteen... So, now I'm left holding my scarf in one hand, and unemployment in the other. I think about going out into the world with my head uncovered. I think about being at work, about people not being scared to buy plane tickets from me.

Baderoon (2005) says that the secrets revealed by the characters in these scenes, are about the way the perceptions of others affect Muslim women, rather than the essential truth about the reasons they wear the veil. Finally she states that the play 'At Her Feet' enters the space of the symbolic and subverts the litany of stereotypes of Islam by writing into view the multiplicity and contradictions of Muslim women's perspectives about themselves and events in the rest of the world (Baderoon, 2005).

Much of the literature discussed elaborates on what it means to negotiate the discursive determinations of Muslim female identity in different parts of the world. Rozario and

Rouse shed light on the ways in which Muslim women negotiate identity living outside of Middle Eastern [Muslim] countries, while Bonate explores the ways in which the constructions of gender is mediated in relation to cultural and Islamic identities in Mozambique. As it is my intention for this study to contribute to the destabilisation of monolithic assumptions of Muslim women specifically in the Western Cape, I found these studies useful in that it highlighted the multiple ways in which Muslim women construct, co-construct and negotiate their identities. Though there has been research exploring the ways in which Muslim women have empowered themselves within patriarchal contexts, there still remain many questions around the ways in which Muslim South African women locate themselves and more so how Muslim women in Cape Town locate themselves when experiencing Islam. In the chapter to follow I underline the feminist framework that underpins the research process and explore the epistemological basis of this research. I also critically also provide details of the research participants.



Chapter Three

Methodology

A Case For a Feminist Method

Over the last few decades feminist modes of inquiry have gained momentum as feminist social researchers have promoted the practice of what is known as 'feminist research'. In particular, this research has focused on women's experiences and attempts to correct both the invisibility and distortion of female experience in ways relevant to ending women's unequal social position (Lather, 1988:571). Although important to note that studies of men and masculinities were also emerging out of feminine analysis, see for example Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 1996; Jeffords, 1989 and Silverman, 1992. However there is a great debate as to what exactly constitutes feminist research and what distinguishes this mode of inquiry if anything from conventional research processes (Fonow & Cook, 2005). While this debate has not been resolved, there are several themes which distinguish feminist research from other modes of inquiry and contemporary scholars such as Fonow & Cook (2005), who attempt to plot some commonalities.

Over two decades ago Sandra Harding (1987) asked: "Is There a Distinctive Feminist Method of Enquiry?" In answering her own question she distinguished between epistemology "a theory of knowledge", methodology "a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed" and method "a technique for...gathering evidence" (Harding, 1987:2-3). More recently Fonow & Cook (2005) describe these early feminists' writing on methodology as focused mostly on epistemological issues and their

relationship to the conduct of inquiry and assert that epistemology was seen as the general framework or theory for specifying the generation of knowledge (Fonow & Cook, 2005). They furthermore claim that this writing challenged androcentric knowledge production by asking concerned macro-level philosophical questions such as, what is knowledge; who can know and by what means; and how do we recognize, validate, and evaluate knowledge claims (Fonow & Cook, 2005)?

Over a decade ago, Antony and Witt (1993) pointed out that that the ontological and epistemological discussion about research expanded and continued to be fruitful and important to the way feminists theorized about the production of knowledge. In addition to this they state that from early on, feminists challenged the artificial separation of reason (mind) and emotion (body), and they came to view emotion as both a legitimate source of knowledge and a product of culture that is as open to analysis as any other culturally inscribed phenomenon (Antony & Witt, 1993). They continue that the significance and legitimacy of emotions as a topic of inquiry, as a source of theoretical insight, and as a signal of rupture in social relations is now well established in feminist academic writing (Antony & Witt, 1993). Besides greater willingness to include subjectivities and subjective states in knowledge production is a move towards what has been termed 'strong objectivity' (Harding, 1992). This willingness represents an overt challenge to positivistic ideas about the validity of subjectivities in the generation of knowledge. Examples of this can be seen in claims made by scholars like Maynard (1994), who state that feminist research focuses on women's and men's experiences of the world and acknowledges the legitimacy of women's and men's understanding of

their experiences. She takes care to caution that feminist research cannot focus on the experiential level alone and says that it must go beyond citing experience in order to make connections which might not be visible from the purely experiential level (Maynard, 1994: 23).

In essence, feminist modes of inquiry have an unequivocal commitment to women and therefore aim to shed light on and challenge the structures which cause disempowerment and inequality. Kelly, Burton & Reagon (1994) support this view when they argue that feminism not only provides a framework within which one can understand the disempowerment of women, it also enables one to actively challenge it.

In her book, *'Feminist Methods in Social Research'*, Shulamit Reinharz (1992) offers an almost encyclopaedic overview of feminist methods in the social sciences by presenting a comprehensive view of feminist methods with illustrations from diverse feminist studies. Reinharz (1992) identifies ten features that appear consistently in efforts by feminist scholars to distinguish how their research methods differ from traditional approaches. These include the assertion that a feminist approach “aims to create social change that challenges power inequalities”, “strives to represent human diversity” and “attempts to develop special relations with the people studied in interactive research” (Reinharz, 1992:240). However as Naples (2003) points out in her critique, Reinharz does not attend to the theoretical underpinnings of the research methods she chronicles, nor does she distinguish between the epistemologies that are implicated in the specific methods. For example, what counts as desirable ‘social change’; how

different feminist theoretical perspectives inform the application of different methods; how different perspectives influence the strategies considered effective for representing 'human diversity'?

In attempting to address some of these questions Naples (2003) does present a number of the empirical solutions she found to the dilemmas posed by the critiques of social research. More notably she highlights that feminist scholars have consistently raised questions that suggest that if researchers fail to explore how their personal, professional and structural positions frame social scientific investigations, they will inevitably reproduce dominant gender, race and class biases (Naples, 2003).

In light of the above arguments one can note that one common thread cutting across 'feminist variations' is the focus on gender, women's, and men's positions; in other words a critical focus on unequal power relationships and how to minimize or challenge them. Furthermore, since feminist studies deals with women's subordinate place in society; and because subordination, or gender inequality is always mediated by such factors as race, class and sexuality contemporary feminist research is inherently research that problematises inequality on multiple fronts. For example, studies that focus on men can also be feminist if a central aim is about exploring the ways in which men are able to hold onto their gender privileges. Therefore feminist methodology can be described as methodologies that confront and problematise unequal power relationships at multiple levels, between researcher and participant, between men and women and between all other identities that mediate access to power. Therefore we

find that a strong trend in feminist studies is to treat women as central subjects in an investigation (Millen, 1997). However if we are to take into account the nature of the critique Naples makes of Reinharz's overview, it is clear that not all researchers employ the feminist methods I argue for; methods which are marked by the presence of a specific set of questions and considerations around the important connections between epistemologies, methodologies and research methods.

At this point I wish return to Fonow & Cook's (2005) attempt to plot some commonalities revealed in their analysis of feminist approaches to social science research in women's studies; which they articulated as guiding principles of feminist methodology. They highlight five considerations I consider central to a Feminist Method. First, the necessity of continuously and reflexively attending to the significance of gender and gender asymmetry as a basic feature of all social life, including the conduct of research; second, the centrality of consciousness-raising or debunking as a specific methodological tool and as a general orientation or way of seeing; third, challenging the norm of objectivity that assumes that the subject and object of research can be separated from each other and that personal and/or grounded experiences are unscientific; fourth, concern for the ethical implications of feminist research and recognition of the exploitation of women as objects of knowledge; and finally, emphasis on the empowerment of women and transformation of patriarchal social institutions through research and research results (Fonow & Cook 2005). The above suggests that the production of knowledge under the umbrella of feminism has been driven by a unique epistemology premised on the

centrality of the gendered subject and more recently the increased insistence that all forms of subjectivity matter.

Contemporary feminist theorising suggests that one is never simply a woman, and employs an intersectional analysis to argue that all forms of inequality need to be challenged. Subjectivities along the lines of race and then gender and then religion etc. co-construct each other. One is always a black woman, or a white middle class woman rather than simply a woman, and that these subjectivities are not simply additive, for example race and class and gender, but co-constitute each other. It is important at this point to re-iterate that earlier I stated that there is no one feminist research methodology agreed upon but that, nonetheless across varieties of feminist research there are explicit points of intersection (Denzin & Lincoln; 1998). Furthermore, following Harding (1987); Fonow & Cook (2005); and Antony & Witt, (1993), I wish to assert that the specific methods we choose and how we employ those methods are profoundly shaped by our epistemological stance and our own subjectivities. For example as a coloured Muslim woman living in Cape Town, I found that the insider status I perceived myself to have, affected my choice of whether or not to do a qualitative, feminist study which included research tools such as focus group discussions and one on one semi structured interviews. Thus as I discuss in more detail later in the chapter, it is key to note that as scholars, our epistemological assumptions also influence how we define our roles as researchers, what we consider as ethical research practices; and how we interpret and implement informed consent or ensure the confidentiality of our research participants.

Qualitative vs. Quantitative research

According to Mama (1995), epistemological choices in the research encounter have much bearing on the methodology employed. Quantitative research is characterised by the requirements of 'science', by the need for 'objectivity' and 'data' gathered by supposedly objective interviewers (Pascal, 1991). In contrast the development of qualitative research results from challenges given to scientists to explain behaviours that defy measurement, which led to an intense interest in seeking other modes of studying particularly human phenomena. A culture, for example, is a social need or set of practices, an important part of human phenomena and according to Pascal (1991), the importance of culture is more meaningful if studied through interviews. Thus one could say that qualitative research developed out of a critique of quantitative methodologies and out of this critique has developed a feminist methodology which challenges mainstream thinking.

Mies (1991) argues that feminist researchers have recognised the need to develop research methodologies that are consistent with feminist values. Feminists critique some of the features of the quantitative model, disapproving of the method's hierarchical processes of knowledge production and the distance between the researcher and the participants during the data gathering process. Similarly Pascal (1991) argues that a feminist methodology requires that the myth of distance between the researcher and participants be discarded and instead calls for the need to acknowledge the involvement of the researcher and the researcher's subjectivities, as an important part of the research process in order to ensure that marginalised groups

and women in particular have a 'voice' within the production of knowledge, and to bring women into the research process.

For this study the overriding framework will be a qualitative framework underscored by a feminist political project. The position I have taken in this thesis is that subjectivities and knowledges are situated and contextual. As Denzin & Lincoln, (1994) argue, qualitative methods rely heavily on verbal expressions and written expressions as well as foreground the meanings given to them by the participants. These expressions are viewed as windows into the inner life of the participant and therefore individuals who decide to participate must be given space to relate their experiences to which they assign meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). More so, Pascal (1991) suggests that qualitative research strategies lead to a richer and more complex understanding of the subjective experience of individuals and their social contexts aiming to gain a more in-depth understanding of the particular phenomenon being studied.

Consequently for me the rationale behind using a qualitative methodological framework is firmly grounded in the belief that qualitative methods allow me to better explore the everyday world of my research participants, which in turn will produce research which is grounded in their experience (Coffey & Pilcher, 1996). This research methodology values the subjective and helps prioritise personal meanings; or as Millen (1993) states when he says that a crucial element of this research method has often been to 'grasp the experiences, understanding and lives of women themselves as seen from their own perspective'; which is precisely what my research aims to do.

While qualitative research methods are often placed as an opposing methodological paradigm to positivist and quantitative methods of research, dichotomous distinctions are often shallow interpretations of difference (Davids, 2004). Quantitative and qualitative methods can be used simultaneously as is suggested by Corbin and Strauss (1990), who state that quantitative and qualitative research methods can be used effectively in the same research project, as researchers tend to place their emphasis on one form or another. They continue that qualitative data can be used to clarify quantitatively derived findings; or that demographic findings could be presented in a quantitative way; or some form of quantitative data can be used to partially validate one's qualitative analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) note that the term qualitative research 'means different things to different people' and Punch (1998) prefers to conceptualise qualitative methodologies as an umbrella term encompassing changing and contested methodologies and research practices, with multiple and multidimensional paradigms. Bannister *et al* (1994), argue that within the social sciences and humanities disciplines, psychology has only recently turned to qualitative research as a valid and reliable method of enquiry. This notion is supported by Henwood and Pigeon (1994), who state that until the 1980s most academic psychological research had a distinctly empiricist flavour and prioritised the use of quantification and measurement alongside experimental-type methods of investigation. Qualitative methods were initially unwelcome in the social sciences, debased as being unscientific, not academically rigorous, politically motivated and biased by that political motivation (Jayaratne and Stewart, 1991).

In contrast quantitative research tends to be seen as apolitical; ahistoric and scientific; reproducible, verifiable, however it is argued that these methods represent a hierarchical form of knowing (Maynard, 1994), whereas qualitative research is more appropriate for research that aims to decrease power inequalities (Millen, 1997:10). However it is important to note that Maynard (1994) does state that it is not easy to reduce power dynamics that are likely to be present in research and it is unlikely that they can be eradicated completely. However, in contrast, quantitative research often reinforces power inequalities and hierarchies because it is constructed in terms of testing theories and making predictions in a supposedly objective, value-free manner where the researcher is assumed to be detached from both the participants and the research process. In addition to this, I agree with Denzin and Lincoln (1998, 8-10) who say that quantitative studies produce supposedly objective data, where the inquiry is purported to be within a value-free framework. They continue by arguing that the quantitative study often engenders a science that silences too many voices and emphasizes measurement or analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Thus it follows that since I wanted to explore individual women's perceptions, a quantitative methodology was not suitable for this study.

Qualitative research is an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and sometimes counter-disciplinary process that crosscuts the humanities, social and physical sciences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:27). Emphasis is placed on the political nature of the research and on the intimate relationship between researcher and the participant. In particular, feminist qualitative research focuses on women's experiences and attempts to "correct both the

invisibility and distortion of female experience in ways relevant to ending women's unequal social position" (Lather, 1991:66). Denzin and Lincoln (1998) describe qualitative research as characterised by the collection of data in a mutually accepted setting and indicate that there are a number of challenges which have to be considered for legitimate and successful qualitative research. For example, validity and reliability could be described as key challenges of qualitative research, given that there is a break from traditional 'scientific' methods of data collection and analysis (Malterud, 2001).

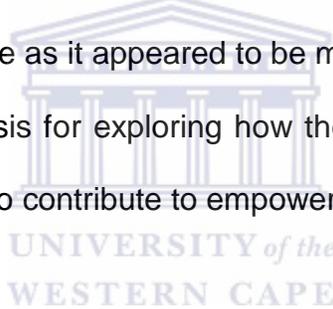
I agree with Dingwell and Miller (1997:3) who point out that qualitative research constitutes the methodological investigation of "socially organised settings". A study such as mine, exploring the perceptions of individuals in a specific community would thus benefit from a qualitative method in that communities are usually 'organised' in such a manner where individuals relate to each other in particular ways. Perceptions, attitudes, feelings and views are then contextualised in accordance with the social realities which are constructed and exist as a result of 'being part' of a particular community.

Lastly it is important to note that the separation of chapters into a literature review of theory, method and analysis, seems in opposition to the epistemological options chosen for qualitative research, but that practicality necessitates the almost random division of these chapters for lucidity of focus and compliance to thesis structure. Though the early part of this chapter outlines the degree to which this study relies on qualitative theories of knowledge production I wished to engage with some of the main debates between

research scientists and social researchers which occur around the issue of quantitative vs. qualitative methods (Kelly, Burton & Reagon, 1994; De la Rey 1999).

The Social Constructionist Perspective

Both feminist and social constructionist perspectives begin from the same premise in that they highlight how knowledge is local and particular to people and places, and is therefore subject to change. They argue that what is social is not premised on any original or biological disposition, but rather all that is social is constructed (Burman, 1999). The feminist qualitative methodology I employ in this study is located within a social constructionist perspective as it appeared to be most suitable in terms of its ability to acknowledge providing a basis for exploring how the women in this study construct their realities, while attempting to contribute to empowerment and transformation.



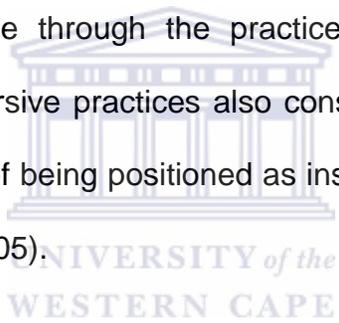
Social constructionists believe that the world at large is a product of social processes and that it is people who form structures of meaning, rules for living, morals and norms (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999). Nightingale and Cromby (1999) continue that these constructions shape personal existence, all that is interpersonal; and also intimate relationships. In other words the central notion is that all people, via engaging with each other, produce knowledge which is then taken to be truth about the world. In addition to this, social constructionism inherently allows for differences and often conflicting beliefs, as it foregrounds the social production of knowledges being produced, when they are produced. Therefore, there is no one 'type' of social constructionism, but rather a way of seeing the world that allows for complexity and difference.

Tindall (1994: 157) points out that completely valid research as representative of an 'ultimate truth' is impossible when working within a feminist paradigm which posits that all knowledge is socially constructed. He continues by saying that we must recognize that all research is constructed, that no knowledge is certain, whatever the claims, but is rather a particular understanding in process, and that different understandings, different ways of knowing exist (Tindall, 1994: 157). It is for this particular reason that I did not want to work with a pre-conceptualised notion of empowerment, but rather let it emerge during the course of the research and why it is crucial to locate my research participants in a particular geographic, cultural and religious milieu.

I agree with Bloor (1997:39), who says that 'testing' findings of studies conducted within a social constructionist paradigm cannot possibly render the same results since all research findings are shaped by the circumstances of their production. Perceptions, attitudes, feelings and views are thus contextualized in accordance with the social realities which are constructed and exist as a result of living in a particular community (Bannister *et al*, 1994). Furthermore there is an inevitable historical and sociocultural dimension to this construction as we do not construct our interpretations in isolation but against the backdrop of shared understandings, practices, language, and so forth (Schwandt, 2000: 197).

Language and discourse is central to the social constructionist thinking, as the world is understood to be primarily constructed through discourse. Ideas are agreed upon or

discarded via the process of social consensus and never through observation of any objective 'facts'. Ideas appear to be facts owing to a well-developed and shared convention, which is language (Harre, 1999). Furthermore language is used to construct various 'facts' about reality, but these so-called 'facts' are continually subject to the possibility of change, as language and meaning changes and therefore understandings of what constitutes reality is subject to change too (Harre, 1999). Or rather as claimed by Foucault (1990) who says that truth, morality, and meaning are created through discourse. It makes no sense to talk about knowledge or the objects of knowledge outside discursive practices, since what can appear as knowledge to us is only knowable or made visible through the practices we inhabit, use, know with (Foucault, 2005). These discursive practices also constitute our identities as knowing subjects and the subjectivities of being positioned as insiders or outsiders of knowledge and truth regimes (Foucault, 2005).



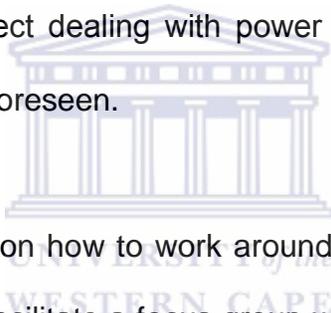
Burman (1999) believes that the link between social constructionist theory and feminist theory is the idea that knowledges are local and situated amongst people. Foucault (2005) says that every age has a dominant group of discursive elements that people live in unconsciously and since discourse joins power and knowledge, power follows from our casual acceptance of the 'reality' with which we are presented. For Foucault, truth, morality, and meaning are created through discourse and it is through discourse (through language and knowledge) that our 'truths' are created. Thus there are therefore no objective 'facts', but rather knowledges that can be adapted in many different ways to serve different purposes. Consequently, this perspective holds that all

knowledge is historical, cultural, geographical, and above all, powerful, as knowledge determines what ideas and practices are created, by whom the knowledge is produced, and for what purpose the knowledge is constructed. This perspective is essential

Research participants

While all women experience patriarchy, the limitations of a research based Masters compelled me to limit my group of participants and therefore I chose to restrict my participants to women who were at least older than eighteen years, as working with minors creates very particular ethical challenges and dilemmas. Even though the aim of this study was to gain insight into the perceptions of a group of Muslim women living here in the Western Cape, I did not limit my participants to Muslim women who were born in this region, nor did I intend to limit my research to exclude women who converted to Islam. I did however limit the participants to Muslim women who have lived in the Western Cape for at least the past fifteen years. Initially I intended to limit my participants to Muslim women living in one specific suburb, but after facing a number of challenges, which I discuss later in this chapter, I decided to interview participants from any urban working class suburb in the Western Cape. However this factor did introduce a number of additional questions that underline the importance of an intersectional analysis. For example, do Muslim women living in low income areas in the Western Cape see Muslim women living in more affluent areas as empowered? What are the ways in which Muslim women living in middle class suburbs negotiate power and how do the ways in which they co-construct power relationships in their homes differ from women living in low income areas.

Initially my aim was to approach the local women's committee at the Mosque in the urban working class area where I grew up and request time for a presentation where I would explain to the women what my research would entail and request that any women wishing to participate could contact me. However my early appeals were unsuccessful and I was constantly referred to a later date. I then approached one of the female elders of the community and asked for her assistance and guidance with regards to time with the women. After a few days she contacted me to inform me that the women, on the advice of the chairman of the mosque's committee (male), did not wish to participate in the study as a feminist project dealing with power could be potentially 'unislamic'. This was not a challenge I had foreseen.



However while I was reflecting on how to work around this problem I was approached by a colleague to conduct and facilitate a focus group with a group of Muslim women off campus for a study on women and care-giving. For me emotionally and psychologically this worked to my benefit as it provided me with a space to interact with potential participants around a topic which was not as close to me. Furthermore it provided me with a different way to approach possible participants and I was curious to see if the women would respond more positively toward this topic. I then approached one of the women from the same community who runs a community based project which services the elderly in the community. I explained to her what it was I required and she offered to approach a number of ladies working with her, as well as ladies from her weekly *Hadj*

classes. All of the women who were asked agreed to participate in the study on women and care.

With the permission of my colleague and the group of women, I 'tagged on' some of the key questions which informed my research topic as all of the women participating in this focus group met my criteria in that they were all Muslim, over eighteen and living in urban working class and middle class areas in Cape Town. After two focus groups on the primary topic of women and care, I developed a comfortable working relationship with the women. At the end of the second focus group and with the consent of the women, I took time to share the details of my study on Muslim women and their perceptions of empowerment. I shared why I thought it was important for a study of this nature to be conducted and spoke about my ethical considerations explaining that I would maintain anonymity by changing all the names of the participants and keeping all the tapes and transcripts private and safe. I also took time to explain the informed consent form I had brought along and also explained to the women that they could at any time freely choose to withdraw from the study at no penalty to themselves.

Sixteen of the women agreed to participate in another focus group on my topic explaining that they "had gotten used to working with me" and when I later asked some of the women why they agreed to participate, some of the answers included comments like, "We know you now and we want to help", "I feel comfortable talking to you", "I think it's time for women to wake up". I randomly divided the women into two groups for two separate focus groups and in addition to this I also informed the women that they were

free to bring along a friend or family member who would be interested in participating in the focus group sessions. The response by the women was positive in that after having participated in the previous two focus groups, the women were comfortable and eager to participate. Later I approached some of these women for one on one interviews and also asked these women to comment on why they thought the women I previously approached did not want to participate in my research. So altogether I held two focus groups involving 8 women each and followed this with 8 semi-structured, in depth interviews.

Details of Participants

Name	Age	Marital Status	No. of children	Occupation	Community engagement	Participated in:
Wisaal	32	Divorced	One	Medical Technician		Focus Grp 1, 2 & Interview
Mariam	49	Married	Two	Manages a Foot Clinic for Diabetics		Focus Grp 1, 2 & Interview
Hoodah	30	Married	Two	IT manager	Acting secretary of the Muslim women's	Focus Grp 1, 2 & Interview
Yumna	35	Divorced	Three	Lecturer at a school of development	Part time caregiver to a number of elderly members of her community	Focus Grp 1, 2 & Interview
Shamiela	47	Married	Two	Social auxiliary worker at a non-government organisation	Volunteer counsellor	Focus Grp 1, 2 & Interview
Shafieka	48	Divorced	Two	Teacher	Free Maths classes to local children	Focus Grp 2 & Interview
Tahiera	45	Married	Two	Personal Assistant	Runs a feeding scheme	Focus Grp 1 & Interview
Tougheeda	37	Divorced, married	Three	Owens an Interior Decorating company		Focus Grp 1, 2 & Interview
Leila	42	Married	One	None	Volunteers at local clinic	Focus Grp 1 & 2
Faika	49	Divorced	Four	Doctor's Receptionist		Focus Grp 1

Nuriah	22	Single	None	University Student	Volunteers at ISWA	Focus Grp 1& 2
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*All of the names of the women who participated in this study have been changed.

The chapter which follows outlines the methodology and techniques employed during the process of this research. Mover the benefits and limitations of the chosen techniques are discussed as more light is shed on some of the challenges encountered during the research process.



Chapter Four

Method and research procedures

Focus groups

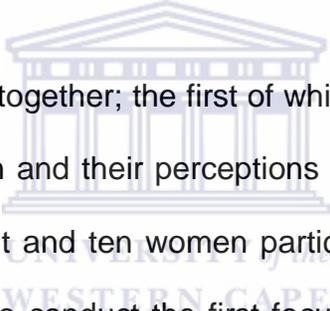
Obtaining agreement that the women would participate in my research, I felt that the women would be more comfortable with exploring Muslim women and empowerment in a discussion with a familiar format. Thus I decided to first have a focus group discussion which could inform my one on one interviews which were to follow later. Focus group discussions (sometimes called group interviews), are conducted to obtain specific types of information from clearly defined sets of individuals (Steward & Shamdasani 1990: 51). This means that individuals, who are invited to participate in a focus group, must be able and willing to provide the desired information and must be representative of the population of interest (Steward & Shamdasani 1990: 51). I was aware that this type of research instrument had its disadvantages, such as group dynamics that may inhibit individual expression, or the possible domination of the group by one participant present, but as discussed below felt that the advantages outweighed the disadvantages.

Earlier when facilitating the focus group discussion on Muslim women and care, I found that many of the women did not speak at all as one or two individuals often dominated the discussion. In an attempt to create a space where all the women could participate freely, I decided to not invite the participants whom I thought dominated too large a part of the discussion when facilitating the second focus group discussion on Muslim women and empowerment. Though the second focus group ran smoothly and had all of the

women participating, it had new challenges, such as the difficulty one faces when unpicking the various voices speaking. It was for this reason I initially intended to use the focus group discussion on my topic primarily to inform subsequent in depth one on one interviews. I intended for the focus group discussion to inform the questions I would develop for the one on one semi-structured interviews as well as use it as an opportunity to invite a number of the women to participate in the one on one interviews which were to take place in the weeks to follow.

Despite their disadvantages I found that using focus groups as a method of research was an excellent way of getting in depth detailed responses to my research questions. I find myself in full agreement with Potgieter (1997) who states that while focus groups are notoriously difficult to manage because of the multiple and competing voices, they are simultaneously extraordinarily rich in data generation. Furthermore as a research instrument, I found that focus group discussions have the ability to facilitate the expression of many opinions and comments. Unlike the one on one semi-structured interviews I conducted later on, I found that the women who participated in the focus group discussions were more confident in engaging with the subject of empowerment. The group dynamic and the social nature of the focus group discussions created a space where women were more willing to engage with every question that was posed by me and other participants. In the chapters following I discuss the possible reasons why the focus groups proved to be more fruitful in terms of data generation. I also discuss why I thought semi-structured one on one interviews would be more data rich.

Several researchers such as Krueger (cited in Babbie 2002:300), believe that a focus group discussion is a socially oriented research method that captures real-life data in a social environment. I agree fully and found that the focus group discussions were a way of encouraging the women to build on each other's views, expressing opposing or similar experiences, thoughts and feelings within clearly defined parameters. Aside from the fact that this method of data collection provided a window into the cultural and social experience of the group, I also found that the focus groups provided a space where women appeared to engage very comfortably with the topic I opened for discussion.



I conducted two focus groups altogether; the first of which I was employed to do as part of a research project on women and their perceptions of care giving. Each of the two focus groups had between eight and ten women participating. As mentioned earlier I was seconded by a colleague to conduct the first focus group with a group of Muslim women off campus where I 'tagged on' some of the key questions which informed my research topic. The second focus group was conducted with eight of the previous group of women, this time focusing solely on my research topic. At the beginning of my sessions with the focus groups I welcomed each participant and thanked them for being available for the study, I introduced myself and explained the purpose of the study and the meeting to ensure there was no confusion. I then continued by addressing questions of ethics by circulating an informed consent in which I made clear that their participation was voluntary, guaranteed confidentiality and reminded them that they could withdraw at any time during the research. A programme was drawn up and

explained and time was negotiated in order for the participants to articulate their concerns. Furthermore the participants were asked if they were comfortable with the tape recorder and I explained how it would be used in the session. I explained that I would be making notes in the session in order to keep track of what was said and by whom it was being said and asked whether the participants would be comfortable with this. I also encouraged the participants to feel free to express themselves in their own language as I explained that I am completely fluent in both English and Afrikaans. During the process I attempted to maintain an awareness of the fact that group discussions of this nature often get noisy and it can be difficult later on to work out who was saying what (Bannister *et al.*: 1994). Thus during the focus groups I constantly took notes taking care to note who was speaking when key points were raised. Taking all the challenges into account I started with focus groups as I thought it the best way for me to establish what my participants saw as the key issues which I thought would be useful for when I was conducting more in depth one on one interviews later on. However I found that though the focus groups produced the desired results and highlighted key issues, the one on one interviews did not provide a space where women were willing to engage with these issues comfortably.

My experience supports Fontana and Frey's (2000:652) observation when they state that data obtained from focus groups is often more 'authentic' or closer to the essential meanings of the participants than data elicited by other methods such as one on one interviews. In focus groups, the individual is not a study in isolation, but within a social context, which is relatively 'naturalistic' (Fontana and Frey, 2000:652). Though the

social contexts of the focus groups as mentioned earlier had their challenges, they did however provide an opportunity to examine how people engage in generating meaning, how opinions are formed, expressed and sometimes modified within the discussion and debate with each other (Wilkinson, 1999:227). I found that as the interactions between the participants increased and the interaction between myself and the participants decreased, the focus group provided a space where I could tap into the social processes and everyday interchanges which were key in creating an environment where participants could play a more significant role in shaping the research results.

Semi-structured interviews

Greef (2002:292) defines qualitative interviews as attempts to understand the world from the participant's point of view, to unfold the meanings of people's experiences and to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations. Furthermore Wood & Kroger (2000) state that the semi-structured, one on one interview is flexible and open-ended in character and offers possibilities for qualitative depth. According to Silverman (1993) human service providers, mass media and researchers use interviewing increasingly to generate information. Furthermore, it is found that for more systematic forms of information collection, ninety percent of all social investigations use interviews in complex ways which quantitative research methods may not provide (Bannister *et al.*, 1994). Another important step in a study is generating an interview schedule; and for the purposes of this study a semi-structured interview schedule was developed out of the issues raised in the focus group discussions. Research suggests that a semi-structured interview could be used to explore those areas where the researcher

perceives gaps, contradictions and difficulties and initially I felt that considering the 'difficult' nature of my topic; semi-structured interviews would provide me with the flexibility to explore any gaps and contradictions that emerged through the focus group discussions (Bannister *et al*, 1994). Though I intended to ask specific questions, I felt I would be more free to probe answers and explore related or additional issues arising from the focus group discussions.

Fontana & Frey (2000) claim that given its qualitative nature; the semi-structured interview provides a greater breadth of data than the other types. I chose to deepen the data collected through the focus groups by conducting eight in depth, face to face, semi-structured interviews with women who had participated in the three focus groups I held. Brown and Canter (1985) warn that the intimate nature of the face-to-face interview involves a great deal of intensive personnel interaction, which in turn might lead to increased bias. Moreover May (1997) argues that it may be that accounts are related inaccurately and that these may have been related in a context that was not considered at the time. It is also suggested that the researcher's presence in the interview brings along with it interpersonal issues which are distinctly part of qualitative research and involves a building of trust, establishing rapport, respecting norms of reciprocity and observing ethical considerations (Janesick, 1994).

Despite the limitations of this method, I aimed to remain constantly aware of the issues mentioned above and as proposed by Tindell (1994: 151) kept a reflexive journal in which I explored why I chose this particular topic, who I am, how I felt during the research, as well as other events and processes that might have affected the research

process. I discuss this in more detail later in this chapter. In addition to this I anticipated that the semi-structured interview schedule I developed out of the focus group discussion would serve as a general guideline to the interview process as I intended for it to encourage the interview to remain focused and flowing. I am in agreement with Patton (1990) who states that the interview guide ensures that basically the same information is obtained from a number of people by covering the same material. She describes the interview schedule as a thematic guide which probes and invites expansion on issues raised.

At the onset of my research and after the focus group discussions proved to be so data rich, I expected the semi-structured interviews to be extremely fruitful in terms of data collection. Also the rapport I shared with some of the ladies from their participation in the focus groups encouraged and stimulated a truly collaborative event. However I did not anticipate some of the women's discomfort with specific topics discussed later in this chapter, or many of the women's unwillingness to participate in the one on one interview process. Many of the women who freely participated in the focus group discussions were less willing to participate in the one on one semi structured interviews; I discuss this in more detail later in this chapter.

I conducted hour long, semi-structured interviews with eight women who agreed to participate, where I asked questions about decision making capacity, agency, and the limitations of agency and explored many of the themes that emerged out of the focus group discussions. In addition to this, further exploring the above mentioned themes

lead me to ask a number of questions addressing how access to power is mediated; how power shifts according to social location; how working outside the home shape power relationships inside the home? The one on one semi-structured interviews gave priority to the participant's perceptions rather than my own and in addition, this approach allowed the participants a certain freedom to dictate the interview proceedings, counteracting in some way the power relations prevalent in the research process. For example, one participant insisted that the interview be conducted at the Women's and Gender studies department's resource centre and furthermore insisted that the door be locked so as to prevent anyone 'walking in' and seeing her participate in this study. In essence this approach allowed for the breaking down of power unequal relations and encouraged a more equal relationship between myself as the researcher and the participants. I believe that it was precisely this 'human relationship' that afforded the space for participants to tell me when they were uncomfortable or that they no longer wished to participate in the study. I tape-recorded these interviews and took notes in shorthand which proved to be very useful later on during analysis. I transcribed these interviews later on, leaving space in the margins to for comments on mood, feelings and body language as this became key to my engagement with the question of why it was that some of the women appeared to be uncomfortable with some of my questions in a one on one interview situation.

Reflexivity

Bannister *et al* (1994) states that qualitative methodologies insist that researchers acknowledge their role in the research process as discussed in the previous chapter.

This is termed reflexivity and has been characterized as the most distinctive aspect of qualitative research, particularly as an alternative method of validation (Tindall, 1994). Thus the issue of reflexivity required of me as a researcher to explore my personal and social investment in this study; and lead me to face the reality of my own biases when it came to the subject of empowerment. For example I often found myself unable to emerge from the cloud of hegemonic discourses on power and Muslim women.

Bannister *et al* (1994) argue that reflexivity is used as a critique of objectivity, and that the conscious use of a critical subjectivity is considered a reflexive way of clarifying the conditions under which the research and knowledge was produced. Reflexivity attempts to uncover deeply seated but poorly recognized views on issues central to the research and Tindell (1994: 151) proposes that over the course of the research, a reflexive journal be kept in which the researcher explores why she chose a particular topic, how she felt, and anything else that affected the processes of the research. It was through the process of keeping a journal that I found myself able in a sense to map my personal journey of self-discovery. For me the process of self reflection revealed in a sense the schizophrenic nature of the location from which I found myself writing this thesis. Bannister *et al* (1994) argue that part of being reflexive requires a conscious awareness of the unequal power relations inherent in the research process and that researchers should constantly be aware of the dynamics that are set up in their data gathering processes and attend to those in an effective manner. Thus the issue of reflexivity required of me as a researcher to explore my personal and social investment

in this study and as I discuss next, I was faced with the reality of my own biases around power, agency and autonomy.

As a Muslim woman I could relate to many of the locations from which these particular women negotiate power, while as a feminist scholar with a familiarity with theorizing around patriarchy, and furthermore as a woman rooted in a western culture, I found myself at times unable to emerge from the cloud of hegemonic discourses around Muslim women and oppression. I was faced with the fact that I had imbibed the notion that all Muslim women are oppressed. On the one hand intellectually I knew otherwise, but in terms of my daily lived reality, I 'knew' differently. Moreover often during the research process I would find myself swamped by hegemonic narratives around Muslim women which are raised in a non-Muslim, predominantly Christian society where Christianity is the default and western values dominate; and what is understood as 'liberated' is seen from a white western feminist perspective. It is important to note that I am aware that my attempts at unpacking these narratives are only partial, but that for me as a feminist scholar it is at least a start. Bannister *et al* (1994) say that with reflexivity it is accepted that the researchers own background and life experience influences the process of research and data gathering; and the reflexive nature of the researcher must be acknowledged as it gives meaning to the richness of the process and the product. In this way the researcher does not become 'detached' from the participant and related information, but becomes part of the active meaning –making work.

Being Muslim I shared association with the group of women participating in this study and therefore qualified as an 'insider'. From the offset of this research I considered myself ideally positioned in that I have an understanding of the Malay and Indian culture as well as the Muslim religion. I am a Coloured, Malay, Muslim woman in my late thirties who lived most of my life as part of the community where I originally intended to conduct this research. I did however not take into account the characteristics that might come to make me an outsider; neither did I consider the fact that the women would have reservations about participating in this study. I naively assumed that having insider status would automatically stand me in good stead with the women in the community. Additionally the reflexive nature of my research approach in many ways highlighted for me a number of the ways in which I felt like an outsider. An example of a space where I felt like an outsider was when it came to issues around dress, particularly the wearing of the *hijab*. I found the issue of *hijab* to be extremely confusing and thus I chose to not write about it in the chapters where I discuss the women's views, as I felt that this analytical space better accommodated this discussion.

Apart from me, all of the women participating in this study wore the *hijab* in some way or the other. It is important to note that there are a number of ways of wearing *hijab*, or rather that there are particular degrees of *hijab*. Many Muslim women who wear *hijab* may choose to wear long loose dresses which do not cling to their body shape, as well as scarves covering all their hair. Some women, often younger women who wear *hijab* choose to wear pants with longer blouses or 'tops' which reach at least mid-thigh with scarves which cover all of their hair. Other women would have no reservations about

wearing pants and hip length shirts or t-shirts with a scarf worn in a manner which does not cover all of their hair, while others still prefer to wear loose dresses but wear scarves which do not cover all of their hair, etc. I choose to rarely if ever wear *hijab*, even though I always have a scarf around my neck. I realized early in on in my encounters with the women that my discomfort around the issue of dress was purely about my own views of power and its relationship to dress. I found this to be significant as it brought me face to face with my own biases around the ways in which power is inscribed on the body and over the course of this research my views around the issue of *hijab* changed radically as I came to see the ways in which issues around the wearing of *hijab* mattered more to me than it did to the women participating in this research.

In an attempt to explore what wearing the *hijab* said to me about power, I wore *hijab* for more than a week. For the sake of brevity let me start by saying that at the onset of my research I held the stereotypical view that women who wore the *hijab* were denied the right to their own physical freedom by their partners, families and religion. However during the course of the research I experienced a number of confusing and difficult emotions in my attempts to unravel the relationship that exists between agency, power and the ways in which these of Muslim women wore their *hijab*. When speaking about *hijab*, many of the women said they chose to wear *hijab* and that it makes them “feel beautiful” and “powerful”. Wisaal said that she often felt that she was “treated with more respect by men and women, Muslim and non-Muslim” because of the way she was dressed [in *hijab*]. Hoodah, Mariam and Yumna made similar claims and Tahira said she felt beautiful wearing *hijab*.

Listening to the women speak about *hijab* I felt almost envy at the certainty and subdued passion they displayed while discussing *hijab*. I came to see that my discomfort was rooted in my belief that wearing *hijab* was oppressive. I had, in other words, taken on the understandings of liberation that authors such as Lewis, Thorntin Dill, etc have critiqued. In an attempt to understand or perhaps experience some of what the women were describing, I decided to start wearing *hijab*. This decision was accompanied by an internal dialogue that continued for days and I prepared a number of stock answers to the questions and comments I was expecting from family members, colleagues and friends, I felt as if I had to defend my decision and wished to be prepared. “I’m doing it to show support for all the women in the world who do not have a choice in wearing *hijab*”, the activist Zulfa. “I wear *hijab* for love of *Allah*”; the religious Zulfa. “I wear *hijab* because I want to challenge the notion that the way in which I choose to embody myself can be appropriated by academics that choose to view me as oppressed and subordinated. I am not a cause dammit!” the academic Zulfa. Throughout the week I wore *hijab* I found myself being greeted by other Muslim people who ordinarily would not have noticed me. Doors were opened for me, I was given first privilege at shop counters and almost every conversation struck with me started with “*Salaam*”, [peace]. However I did find during the course of the week that most professionals spoke me as if I was uneducated and it often surprised people when I spoke and it became obvious I have an extensive vocabulary I was not afraid use. For example when my father was taken ill and I accompanied him to hospital, every almost every member of the medical staff treated me as if they assumed I would not

understand what they were saying. Often after I had responded to them, they asked, “are you in the medical profession?”

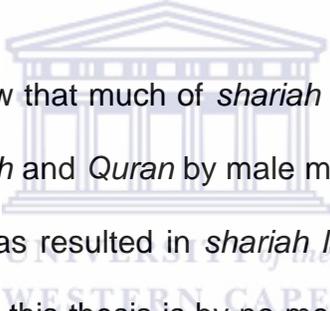
Instead of creating more clarity around the issue of *hijab* and its relationship to power, wearing the *hijab* created more disjuncture and confusion. I did not feel more beautiful, I did however feel more respected. I did not feel more spiritual or powerful, I did however feel part of a larger community and in some ways I did feel a sense of returning home in a way that I have not felt in a very long time. Moreover the women participating in this study greeted my attempts at wearing the *hijab* with humor, sharing of stories and while offering of much advice I found a shift in my ‘insider-status’ taking place. In her exploration of ‘insider-status’ and ‘outsider-status’ standpoints of the researcher, Beoku-Betts (1994) states that an advantage of insider-status is that participants are more likely to trust me and share their experiences more openly. However, Beoku-Betts (1994) also points out that this close relationship can be problematic as a relationship as an insider is based on a process of negotiation rather than granted immediately on the basis of ascribed status. Other dynamics such as marital status, cultural and racial backgrounds also differentiate us and will have to be negotiated before true insider-status is possible as these dynamics could impact on issues of power in the research process (Bannister *et al*: 1994). More recently offering a critique of the concept of insider/outsider status, Engh (2010) argues that the insider/outsider binary perpetuates the structuralist notion of the subject having a fixed and static identity. She continues that this notion is refuted by postmodern approaches and cites Mama as saying that in order to see the subject as a whole, one needs to

think of subjectivities as being a dynamic process during which individuals takes up and change positions in and through discourses (Engh, 2010). The idea of a researcher being either an 'insider' or 'outsider' becomes theoretically and practically impossible in this view; and rather one should reflect rather on moments of 'recognition' as well as moments of 'dissonance' (Engh, 2010).

In order to moderate the effects of a number of these dynamic moments of dissonance or recognition, where my status as either 'insider' or 'outsider' was startling clear or slippery and vague, I kept a journal to reflect on these moments in an attempt to respect the fluidity of my 'position' in terms of the 'sameness' or differences I share with my participants. For example the earlier discussion on the *hijab* during the focus groups and one on one semi structured interviews. I did not anticipate feeling 'different' or 'disadvantaged' because of not wearing the *hijab*, but there were a number of moments where I felt like an outsider. I was also aware that my relationship as an insider had its disadvantages as it could create 'blindness by the researcher' because of the closeness with the participants (Beoku-Betts 1994). Beoku- Betts (1994) says that this blindness can be problematic as the researcher assumes an in depth knowledge of the participant that is incorrect.

Thus I reflected on the process with great rigor and tried to remain aware that I did not have true insight into the lived experiences of my participants as I was located differently just as each of the participants are uniquely located in terms of their individual everyday lived realities. Furthermore as I conducted more of the interviews I came to

accept that this was especially true in my case as I began to learn that having insider/outsider status did present certain important dilemmas. Looking back I realize that the perceptions I had of me as having so much in common with my participants were romanticized and exaggerated. Later as my research progressed I came to see how the fact that I had moved away from the community after my divorce more than twelve years ago, returned to university to continue my studies and joined a pan African feminist activist group had shaped my view of the world in profound ways. For example I realized how I no longer accepted my previously held views on what constituted a 'good' Muslim woman.



I had also come to hold the view that much of *shariah law* has been distilled through a process of interpreting the *hadith* and *Quran* by male members of the *ulama*. Moreover this interpretation in my view has resulted in *shariah law* often being mobilized to the benefit of Muslim men. Though this thesis is by no means a discussion of *shariah law*, in chapter six I briefly outline the *shariah laws* around divorce and women's access to annulment in order to shed light on the women's discussion. All of the women participating in this study held the view that *shariah law* is unquestionably divine and the 'word of God'.

Additionally I came to see how labels were arbitrary as these labels could be assigned to any of the participants, but would not reflect the fact that we all inhabited what it meant to be Coloured, Malay, Muslim and women, differently. I was also increasingly conscious of the class and other differences (divorce, motherhood, age, etc.) between

myself and my participants. Throughout the research process I thus attempted to critically reflect on my experiences and to assess the ways in which my insider knowledge was limited by my positionality, and how this in turn shaped the process of my research. Particularly during the process of data analysis, I was persistently reminded of how my experiences have affected my choices and I found it useful to reflect on the difficulty I experienced when dealing with some of the choices many of the women participating in the study regarded as empowering.

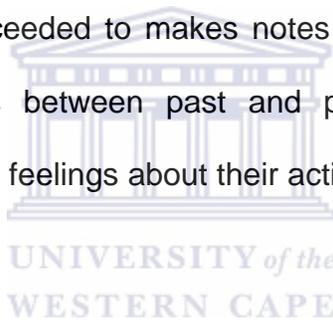
On the other hand being Muslim and having been raised in a community similar to that of many of the women participating in the study did have its advantages for me as a researcher in that I was able understand many of the local linguistic references to everyday objects, experiences and practices in the daily life of a Muslim living at the Cape. For example when the women spoke of things like *saber*, *maningal* and *muslah*, I understood what they were speaking of without having to be told. In a number of ways I could relate to the women's experiences of growing up in a Cape Muslim community and understood many aspects of their experiences as daughters of women raised in a Cape Town Muslim community as many of their experiences resonated with my own experience of growing up in a Muslim community in the Cape. It is important for me to note that as a personal experience this study was difficult in that highlighted for me the many ways in which I have changed and in a sense 'left home and my community'. I have however attempted to remain committed to my negotiation with research ethics and epistemological concerns such as the fluidity of my position.

Qualitative Thematic Analysis

Having outlined the key aspects of data collection, I now move on to discuss how I analysed my data. Bannister *et al* (1994:54) stresses the fact that the production of the interview transcript is part of the research process and they define qualitative thematic analysis as a coherent way of organising or reading the interview transcript in relation to specific research questions. It is also important to note that the process of qualitative analysis is selective and subjective therefore two researchers can identify different themes and come up with different interpretations of the same data, which is one of the reasons reflexivity is so important (Bannister *et al*, 1994; Ulin, Robinson, Toley & McNeill, 2002). I recorded the focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews with a cassette recorder and later I transcribed these recordings verbatim. Though I found this process to be extremely time consuming, it proved to be useful as it provided me an opportunity to do a close reading of the raw data. Once I had completed the transcriptions, I reread the transcripts of the focus groups and semi structured interviews alongside my notes. This 'kicked off' the process of deeper analysis and using a qualitative thematic approach I revisited the transcripts a number of times to identify important themes. In line with Smith's (1995) approach I used the margins to identify emerging themes which I highlighted in different coloured pens. It is important to note that themes qualify as statements or issues that emerge repeatedly throughout raw data and though they may appear to be in contrast to the topic and can appear randomly, they may still hold analytical importance in terms of answering key questions. I then coded the transcripts by inserting line numbers as an identifier of instances of appearance of specific themes (Smith, 1995). Using the computer's cut and paste

facility, I generated a new sheet with the main theme heading and inserted all the participants' relevant quotes and corresponding identifiers. As suggested by Smith (1995), I essentially created a master list per theme, which allowed me to analyse the broad themes in sub-themes.

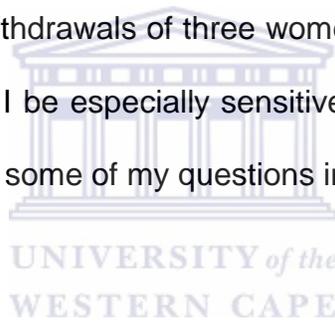
By using qualitative thematic analysis the themes were organised in ways which allowed me to explore each thematic area searching for the core meaning of the thought and behaviours described by the participants. During this process I constantly revisited the notes I made during the focus group discussions and interview process as well as my journal entries. I also proceeded to make notes while rereading the transcripts, seeking to make connections between past and present taking special note of participants reactions, activities, feelings about their activities, metaphors and facts (Ulin *et al*, 2002).



Ethical Considerations

According to Haworth (1996) ethical considerations encompass the essential principle that the investigation should be considered from the standpoint of all participants and any threat to participants' psychological well-being should be eliminated. Taking this into account I tried to anticipate any ethical problems that might arise and prepared an informed consent form containing three key issues for the women participating in the focus group discussions. I went through the consent form and explained the key issues to participants before they agreed to participate in the focus group discussions and made clear that firstly participation was voluntary; secondly that they could withdraw at

any point during the process; and thirdly that I could guarantee confidentiality by making sure that I would be the only one to deal with the raw data generated by the focus group discussions. For the one on one semi-structured interviews I drew up a similar consent form to which I added the fourth aspect dealing with anonymity. Before starting the interviews I would make sure that the participants was comfortable with the venue and I went through the consent form explaining that I would ensure anonymity by changing all the names of the women participating in the interviews when writing up my research. Lastly, I explained to participants that they could at any time freely choose to withdraw from the study at no penalty to themselves. After conducting the first two interviews and experiencing the subsequent withdrawals of three women from the study, I realised that it was of great importance that I be especially sensitive to the fact that Muslim women did not appear comfortable with some of my questions in an interview setting.



After I gained the participant's signature and permission and after I determined that the participant was comfortable with participating in my study, I proceeded with logistical planning of dates and location. I constantly sought to ensure that the focus group discussions and follow up interviews took place in locations that suited my participants and in which they felt comfortable and safe. At the commencement of the focus group discussions and subsequent interviews, I asked permission to tape record the proceedings and to take notes, explaining that it was for the purpose of my analysis. In addition to this I personally convened, co-ordinated and conducted the focus group discussions and interviews in either English or Afrikaans or on most occasions both. At the onset of this study I expected that dual languages during this process would be

used as I was fully aware that English may not be the mother tongue of all participants and I found that during the focus group discussions participants often switched between English and Afrikaans. I am fully bilingual and so questions of translation did not prove too problematic. Another consideration for the use of both English and Afrikaans was that it facilitated comprehension, rapport and interpersonal dynamics in the focus group discussions and allowed participants to express themselves more fluently and freely. After doing all this I obtained rich data that I discuss over the chapters which follow.

Conclusion

In this chapter I located this study within a feminist research methodological framework that is driven by goals which aim to reduce power imbalances between researcher and participants. The merits and critiques of my chosen methods of data collection are discussed, as are strategies such as reflexivity which aim to reduce the bias in my process of knowledge production. Additionally, this chapter provided a description of this study's aims and objectives, an outline of the participants, as well as a description of the processes of dealing with raw data and qualitative thematic analysis. Lastly, this chapter focuses on reflexivity issues and ethical issues so as to at all time respect the rights of the participants throughout the research process. In the following chapter I present and discuss my analysis. I begin with a discussion that attempts to define patriarchy then move on to explore the women's essentialist understandings of sex and gender and the ways in which their understandings reinforce their view of their roles as mothers, wives and members of their communities. I then move on to discuss some of the ways in which education shapes their perceptions of agency, power and

empowerment, attempting to shed light of the multiple positions from which these Muslim women negotiate agency.



Chapter Five

Discussion

In this chapter I attempt to define patriarchy explore the women's understandings of patriarchy and the ways in which the women's views of what constitutes a 'good Muslim woman' and a good Muslim man, is shaped by their essentialist views of women's and men's gender roles. I attempt to unpack the relationship between patriarchal and essentialist discourses and explore the women's awareness of the ways in which their essentialist views shape their choices within the domestic sphere. I go on to look at their understandings of *shariah* law and the ways in which they negotiate power from a location which is mediated by their essentialist views and the ways in which *shariah* law limits Muslim women and men's freedoms and authority. Lastly I discuss the ways in which the women view spiritual leadership in the domestic and public spheres and explore the ways in which the women rationalise the limits to their agency in terms of spiritual leadership.

Defining Patriarchy

At the onset of this discussion it is important to note that the term patriarchy is complex and contested. Sparrow (2006) cites Rakoczy (2004) who defines patriarchy as an ideology or way of thinking, feeling and organizing human society that legally, politically, socially and religiously enforces male dominance and power, although it is important to recognise that not all men hold power equally. Sparrow (2006) also argues that in contemporary South Africa culture, society and religious institutions – including Islam and the Christian church- are all structured on this principle, but that, as Bozzoli (1983)

notes, versions of patriarchy are culturally and historically specific. Similarly Moghadam (2004) says that the Muslim (like the Christian) family has long been established as a patriarchal unit.

Walby, (1990:20) who defines patriarchy as a system of social structure and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women, identifies five areas where patriarchy is practiced in Western societies: through patriarchal modes of reproduction within the household, patriarchal relations in paid work, patriarchal relations in the state, patriarchal relations in sexuality; and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions. Walby (1990) argues that although the five structures have an impact on each other they are relatively independent. Though useful, Walby's (1990) definition does not recognize that patriarchy inscribes men's obligations as well as women's.

Similarly Weedon (1997:22), who uses the term patriarchy to refer to "power relations in which women's interests are subordinated to the interests of men" also fails to address the ways in which patriarchy inscribes men's obligations and duties as breadwinners, fathers and leaders. She claims that these power relations take many forms, from the gender division of labour that privileges the work done by men and the "social organization of procreation" that subordinates the work of women, to the culturally and historically specific internalized norms of femininity and masculinity by which we all live (Weedon 1997:22). However she does not look at the ways in which patriarchy creates 'unfreedoms' for men, or the ways in which men are burdened as breadwinners, fathers and leaders.

All in all one can infer that there is no single definition or practice of patriarchy and that many attempts made to define patriarchy overlook the ways in which patriarchy might adversely affect men's lives. Nevertheless, whatever term one uses, male dominance; patriarchy or male supremacy; all refer to male power over women and other men, or the social subordination of women as well as other men. It is however important to note that this dominance is culturally and historically specific and mediated by other subjectivities such as class, race, etc. In other words patriarchy does not mean that all men are powerful, or that all women are powerless, but only that the most dominant roles in most sectors of society are held predominantly by men, and the least commanding roles are held predominantly by women.

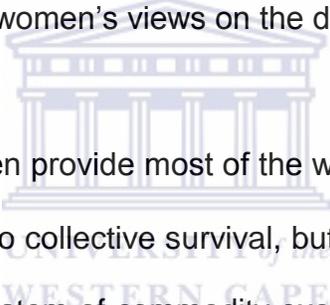
It is Hennesy's (2000) discussion of patriarchy which I find most useful for the purpose of my discussion of the women's perceptions of patriarchy and its relationship to their empowerment. Hennesy (2000) notes, that patriarchy is a politically urgent concept because it allows us to analyse and explain social hierarchies by which gender, sexuality and their articulations are organized. He also explains that patriarchy is a variable and historical social totality in that its particular forms for organising social relations, such as work, citizenship, reproduction, ownership, pleasure and identity, have had a persistent effect on hetero-gendered structures in dominance while at the same time these structures vary and are themselves sites of social struggle (Hennesy, 2000). It is these 'sites of social struggle' and the ways in which the women in my study have come to use these 'sites' as platforms on which to negotiate their power which

interests me. It is also central to the argument I make about the ways in which this particular group of Muslim women rationalize their power or in some instances, their powerlessness. It is also these 'sites of social struggle' which shed light on the location from which these particular Muslim women negotiate power, showing how in many instances Muslim women's freedoms and unfreedoms are not so different from non-Muslim women's.

On Patriarchy and Identity Politics

Living in Cape Town and having been born and/or raised in Muslim communities during the Apartheid era in South Africa, the women participating in this study share similar experiences. However the way they spoke about themselves in the focus groups and interviews revealed similarities as well as differences in their position on negotiating their identity. A unifying feature of their discourses was a multiplicity of, sometimes conflicting, at other times overlapping, identities. Echoing Ali (2005, 516) who draws on Barth, I should reiterate here that identities are produced not only through self-ascription, but also through ascription by others. Thus the women's discourse on how others see them, in addition to how they identify themselves, contributes to their location, construction and negotiation of identity. Ali (2005) reminds us that women's identities should not be understood as a prepackaged set of religious, ethnic, national and other identities. Quite the opposite, multiplicity highlights the diversity of their life experiences, social subjectivities, and the way those identities are performed.

Since this research is primarily a feminist project, I was curious to explore the ways in which hegemonic patriarchal discourses impacted and shaped the women's construction and negotiation of agency within this framework. Primarily the women all understood my questions around patriarchy and male authority to be an unspoken critique of the choices they make in their own lives, a critique of what they saw as a women's 'natural' role in relation to the domestic sphere. They associated patriarchy, or rather the ways patriarchy influences their everyday lives with what they saw as the 'natural' and 'traditional' roles women have been expected to follow within their homes. Clearly essentialist and patriarchal discourses overlapped and were in many ways interwoven when it came to the women's views on the domestic sphere.



Hennesy (2000) says that women provide most of the world's socially necessary labour, that is labour that is necessary to collective survival, but much of it is rendered invisible, both in and outside the value system of commodity exchange, not least of all to women themselves. Moreover Hennesy (2000) explains that the contradiction between the material realities that shape individual lives and our ways of experiencing them (feeling we are 'good' women for the unpaid work we do, blaming ourselves when we fail to juggle the pressures to compete and serve, etc.) are inevitable in capitalism because patriarchal capitalism relies on and continually reproduces ways of knowing and feeling that conceal the exploitative human relations that accumulation of profit requires. Moreover Jeenah (2005) says that the identities of Muslim women and men are constituted through different relationships with the public and private spheres, she claims that patriarchy forms a barrier between these two spheres that feminist practice

attempts to break down by attempting to dislodge the notion of Muslim women being primarily associated with the private sphere.

Jeenah (2005) explains that in the west, Muslim women are defined primarily in relation to their location within the private sphere, in other words roles defined in terms of their family and that they are primarily invisibilised in the public sphere. However contrary to the western definitions Jeenah (2005) speaks of, many of the women participating in my study hold positions of authority outside the home even though they accept the gendered allocation of duties inside the home as natural. In fact similar to Sparrow's (2006) findings among Christian women in Cape Town, many of the women in my study view their work outside their homes as an extension of their roles as caregivers and value the ways in which this social identity is profoundly influenced by their essentialist beliefs about gender, tradition and caring. This is evident in Hoodah's claim that she never turns away anyone who needs help even though sometimes she gets irritated and thinks "can't so and so see I am busy, but then I usually help because that's the kind of women I am. I can't help but care." For Hoodah caring is part of her 'nature' and when she cares, she is doing what comes 'naturally' to her and she believes it says something about the 'kind of women' she sees herself to be.

Also Hoodah, like many of the women participating in this study, reject liberal western ideas around what constitutes a visibly liberated, modern and empowered Muslim woman. This became evident when Hoodah explained that just because she "chooses to be the type of woman" that takes care of her husband and children it does not mean

that she is “*outyds*, abused or oppressed”. Rejecting western hegemonic narratives of liberation which construct Muslim women as oppressed, Hoodah defends her position by clarifying that she sees herself as a “strong woman”, “a good mother”, “a good Muslim” and that “other non-Muslim women always think they know what’s best for us Muslim women”.

Hoodah’s multi-faceted description of herself as a ‘strong woman’, “a good mother” and a “good Muslim” highlights the hybrid nature of a Muslim woman’s identity. Thus for me the concept of intersectionality serves as a useful theoretical platform for analysis as it is based on a holistic and comprehensive approach to a social phenomenon such as the politics of identity and though McCall (2005) points out a variety of approaches associated with intersectionality, I however will employ the concept in its basic sense. In her early writing Collins (1998) explains that rather than examining gender, race, class and nation as distinctive social hierarchies, intersectionality examines how they mutually construct each other. Listening to Hoodah, ambiguity about how she identified herself and the way others perceive her is complicated by the fact that, despite what she thinks ‘other non-Muslim women’ think of her, she considers herself to be a ‘strong’woman’. Ultimately at the heart of the concept of intersectionality is the politics of power and oppression and certainly as Collins (1998) points out, gender, race, class, or other systems of oppression mutually construct one another and should not be examined individually. One certainly sees evidence of such a complex mutual construction when exploring the relationship and mutual construction of patriarchal and essentialist discourses in the women’s everyday lives.

Negotiating Patriarchal Landscapes with Essentialist narratives

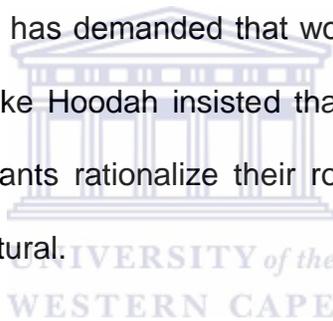
Sparrow (2006) describes essentialism as the 'idea' that human beings are defined by biological 'essences' that make them what they are: e.g. women are biologically different from men; and that because these differences are rooted in human reproductive biology they are unchallengeable (Sparrow, 2006; Klinger, 2002). Many of the women participating in this study certainly held the view that men and women were fundamentally different, however what was interesting was that at the same time these essentialist ideas were being unsettled by the women, suggesting that some of the dilemmas Rozario (1996) observed of Muslim women in Australia had salience for Muslim women in Cape Town. For example though the women felt that 'there is a reason why *Allah* made women more emotional and passionate' they still often challenged the gendered roles resulting from this view. Moreover the women would rationalise their acceptance of prescribed gender roles by seeing it as an 'easy choice' since they are, in their view, naturally predisposed to it 'anyway'. Moreover they view their natural predisposition to such nurturing work as a divinely ordained.

Rakoczy (2005) says that patriarchy has demanded that women 'naturally' assume the role of carer and nurturer. Many of the women in this study have indeed taken on the role of primary care-givers in their homes as they see this as a gendered allocation of duty by nature and thus by God. For example Wisaal explains that her daughter had to stay with her after the divorce, "*ya Allah* can you imagine Ahmed [her ex-husband] having to learn how to take care of Leila [their daughter]. I mean for us as mothers it's like instinct; we know how to take care of our children". Like Wisaal all the women in my

study see men as 'naturally' unable to care for their children reinforcing Rouse's (2004) observation that in negotiating gender roles, Muslim women view men as having other/particular burdens and obligations under Islam. Rouse (2004) also argues that though Islam encourages Muslim women to be 'obedient' to their husbands, the aim of Muslim patriarchy is not to make women submissive. In fact Bandstad (2004) points out that *shariah law* places no obligation on women to be the primary caregivers within their homes. During the focus group discussions I mentioned this to the participants in an attempt to unsettle the essentialist notion of women as primary caregivers. The women's response was to defend their essentialist views of women's 'natural' roles as carers strengthening Rakoczy's (2005) earlier claims around what patriarchy 'demands' of women. Hoodah, a married mother of two, who works as a legal secretary responded, "sometimes when I get home late from work and I see that Shuaib [her husband] bought food and tried to get the kids ready for bed, then I feel so sorry for him because you can see that men are not made for children and housework". Most of the women had responses similar to Hoodah's, attempting to show me how men were not 'created' to be 'naturally' caring and nurturing.

Like Hoodah, in response to my questions around patriarchy, men's authority and women's agency, many of the participants felt they needed to defend their position as caregivers within the household and the community. Tougheeda said that she thought it was what made "women special" and that most men "don't like women who act like men". Shariefa made a similar point when she explained that "for most of us women taking care of our families are what make us women and I think it's attractive in a

woman". Smith (1979) says that regardless of their degree of liberation, Muslim women prize and retain their modesty and femininity. For many of these women caring is tied into their ideas about femininity and what more is that many of the women reject western critiques of the ways in which Muslim women locate themselves in the domestic sphere. For example, Wisaal who agreed Shariefa's comments, said that often she felt like "non-Muslim people always have this perception that the only time a Muslim women is empowered is when she walks around *kaalkop* and refuses to take care of her family because she has a smart job and earns a lot of money". Wisaal like Hoodah also explained that she chooses her role as caregiver. When I pointed out the fact that it could be argued that patriarchy has demanded that women 'naturally' assume the role of carer and nurturer, Wisaal like Hoodah insisted that making the choice makes the difference. Both these participants rationalize their roles as carers and nurturers by constructing their choices as natural.



According to Jeenah (2005) various institutions within any particular society 'participate' and 'impose' patriarchal images and beliefs about the role and place of both men and women. Religious institutions, for instance, have been influential in justifying women's place in the private sphere with primarily mothering and nurturing roles (Jeenah, 2005). More importantly, patriarchal ideology has deliberately produced a myth that motherhood is the only identity that is essentially designed for women resulting in an idealization of motherhood which confines women to their role as nurturers. Like Hoodah and Wisaal, many of the women in this study see themselves as 'choosing'

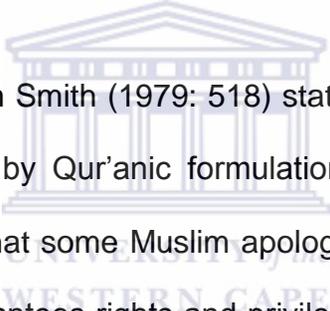
their roles as nurturers believing that the effects of patriarchy on this aspect of their lives is minimal precisely because of the fact that they see themselves as having a choice.

I wish to argue that these particular women's essentialist ideas around gender roles is as a result of the particular location from which they co-construct what constitutes a 'good Muslim woman' and in doing so reinforcing their ideas of what constitutes 'a good Muslim man'. Furthermore it is with this shifting of their focus from what constitutes a 'good Muslim woman', to what constitutes a 'good Muslim man' that the women show that their religious identities are quite salient and quite meaningful to them and that they value this identity enough to maintain it in their daily lives.

On *Shariah* and Negotiating Freedom

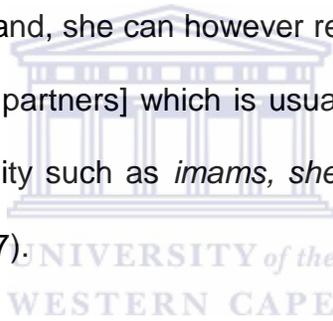
When asked how they felt about the view held by many that the *shariah* limits women's agency in that it grants men patriarchal authority over women, the father over his daughter, the brother over his sister and ultimately the husband over his wife, the women had a number of interesting responses (Jeenah and Shaikh, 2000). Many felt that I was "looking at it the wrong way". Shariefa said that "its not that they have authority over us, it's rather that they have to look after us". Shariefa also explained that "it's not as simple as my husband is just in charge or something", she continued that he "actually has to take care of me and the children; and that's not just money and a roof and so on. It's also other stuff like emotionally, psychologically and so on". Shariefa's comments perfectly illustrate Rouses (2004) claim that the rhetoric of patriarchy may be deployed, not to make women submissive, but rather to instill in men a sense of

responsibility. Rouse (2004) argues that as scholars we need to ask Muslim women if and how patriarchy is relevant in their daily lives and bear in mind that while popular ideas, such as patriarchy, have material force, ideas by themselves have much less power than cultural practice and that cultural practice is reinforced by the beliefs and views of Muslim women. However it is not just the women's views of their 'natural' disposition to caring that shape their 'choices' as caregivers. Though implicit an underlining narrative in the women's essentialist views of divine laws and women's natures was evident. For example the women often spoke of how "allah created us to be..."; "*Allah* made us women very..." or "there's a reason why *Allah* says...".



In her article on women in Islam Smith (1979: 518) states that one must never assume that women in Islam [at least by Qur'anic formulation] are denied equal rights and responsibilities and continues that some Muslim apologists would even say that part of the glory of Islam is that it guarantees rights and privileges for women despite the 'fact' that they by nature have certain 'deficiencies'. The women who participated in my study all shared [albeit with contradictions] this view of women as being essentially "emotional", "naturally more nurturing" and "naturally more caring"; and more importantly saw the Islamic *shariah* as perfectly accommodating of their 'natures'. One of the participants very vocal on this point was Mariam, who runs two community projects, one working with the elderly and another providing counsel for families of teenagers living with addiction. She said that, "I see all the time the difference between men and women...never mind the age, the women are always a little bit more unreasonable and difficult. I think maybe it's just the way *Allah* made us."

Reinforcing Smith's (1979) claim, Mariam's comment illustrates how like many of the women participating in this study, she sees it as acceptable or a given that women are going to be 'more difficult' than men and more importantly she sees it as a divine 'fact'. When she made this statement during one of the focus group sessions all the women present agreed and it sparked an immediate response, for example Tahira felt, "that's difficult. Thank *Allah* women can't give a *talaq* (divorce) otherwise we will have a higher divorce rate." Here Tahira refers to the laws which govern divorce in Islam. According to Islamic law, only men have the right to *talaq* (divorce) their wives for a number of stipulated reasons (Al-Qaradawi, 1997). If a women wishes to leave the marriage she cannot *talaq* (divorce) her husband, she can however request a *faskh* [a dissolution of a marriage agreed upon by both partners] which is usually presided over by the Muslim judiciaries in her local community such as *imams*, *sheikhs*, *mawlanas* or *muftis* [all of whom are men] (Mohadjer, 2007).



It is important to note that in both instances of *talaq* and *faskh*, it is stipulated by Islamic law that a process of counseling is put into place where attempts at reconciliation are encouraged by the *Ulama* (Mohadjer, 2007). However anecdotal evidence suggests that often a lack of resources or education leads to these processes failing dismally resulting in men commencing with divorce without counsel and women's applications for *faskh* taking up to two years. In fact Amien (2006) describes the *ulama* in Cape Town as headed by conservative male clergy whose decisions reflect a traditional, male-centered understanding of *shariah*, which results in discriminatory treatment that negatively impacts women. She says for example that women are often simply

informed that their husbands have issued *talaq* against them, and members of the *ulama* tend to confirm the *talaqs* without consulting the wives (Amien, 2006).

Gabru (2004) also notes that in South Africa the non-recognition of Islamic marriages still today has the effect that a person married in terms of *Shariah* law only, has no right to approach a court of law for a decree of divorce. She continues that Muslim clerics fail to resolve marital conflicts, failing to enforce financial duties of Muslim men toward their Islamic spouses and though some Islamic institutions in South Africa have internal mechanisms to conclude a *faskh* (and have executed such terminations), there has been no consensus on format and procedure (Gabru, 2004). In fact Amien (2006) says it appears that few women apply for *faskh* because the process can be time consuming, difficult, expensive, and sometimes humiliating.

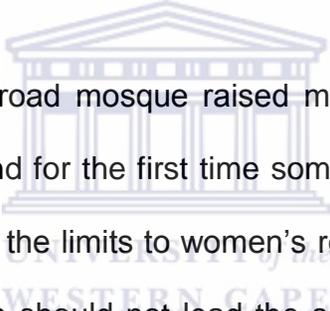
Consequently women's agency in exiting a marriage is clearly limited, whereas men appear to have better access to the institutional resources needed to end their marriages (Babru, 2004; Amien, 2006). It was thus surprising to me that many of the women agreed with Tahira when she made her comment "Thank *Allah* women can't give a *talaq*" as I assumed this would open up a dialogue on the many challenges women face when wanting to exit a marriage, yet they saw women's 'emotional' and 'unreasonable nature' as justification for the limit to women's agency around the issue of divorce. Moreover the women appeared to view "saving a marriage" of greater importance and many of the comments which followed supported the views of the 'deficiencies' in "women's natures" the women had been discussing earlier. Hoodah

said that sometimes when she listened to her friends complain about their husbands she could not help but think to herself that they (her friends) “are being typically female”, Shamila agreed and added that in her view “men are not like that” and it is almost as if women “are too intense or hormonal and take everything personally” and that “men and women balance each other out”. Tougheeda also agreed and said “this is why women don’t always make good leaders” and one of the women added “see there is a reason why Allah says that a woman can’t lead the *salaah*”. Clearly essentialist narratives shape the ways in which these particular women negotiate their ideas around agency and the limits to their agency. However the area around the issue of spiritual leadership and particularly the leading of *salaah*, is filled with ambiguity.

Muslim Women, Spiritual Leadership and *Salaah*

The above mentioned ambiguity is for example evident when one notes that Tougheeda’s statement about women not being able to lead the *salaah*, was not received without resistance as not all the participants felt the same way about women having the right to take leading religious roles such as leading the *salaah*. Globally as well as in Cape Town it was broadly accepted that women in Islam cannot lead a mixed-gender congregation in *salaah* even though the *Quran* does not say anything directly prohibiting women from leading a mixed-gender congregation in *salaah* (Abdullah, 2008). Much debate exists among Muslim scholars around the issue of a women’s right to lead the *salaah* and the general consensus among them is that women are only permitted to lead other women in *salaah* (Al-Qaradawi, 1997). A woman may only lead a mixed-gender congregation in *salaah* inside her household and only under special

circumstances like when the males who are present are unable to lead due to lack of knowledge of how to recite the necessary prayers (Al-Qaradawi, 1997). It is also generally agreed that a women may never lead the Friday prayers, nor give the *khutbah* (Al-Qaradawi, 1997). However in August 1994 Prof. Amina Wadud broke with accepted tradition and became the first Muslim woman in the world to lead a mixed gender congregation in Friday prayers in the Claremont road mosque in Cape Town (Abdullah, 2008). Not only did Prof. Wadud lead the Friday prayers, she also gave the *khutbah* to the congregation. Subsequently amidst much protest Prof. Wadud went on to lead the Friday prayers in New York in 2005 and in the UK in 2008 (Abdullah, 2008).



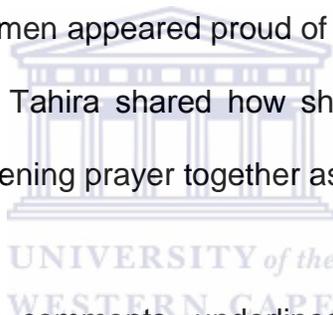
The incident in the Claremont road mosque raised many questions around women's agency in leading the *salaah* and for the first time some Muslim women in Cape Town started to ask questions around the limits to women's roles as religious leaders. When Tougheeda insisted that women should not lead the *salaah*, Wisaal remembered how she questioned her father about her not being able to lead the *salaah*, "I asked is *Allah* going to punish me for leading the *salaah*? My husband couldn't recite the *Quran*, he only embraced Islam a few weeks before that and I liked letting him hear me recite". Wisaal continued and explained that she felt like on the one hand "Islam tells me I am equal to a man and then on the other hand I am not good enough to lead the *salaah*". However, though Wisaal explicitly challenged the gendered nature of this Islamic premise, she simultaneously reinforced an essentialist notion of gender when she referred to herself as not "good enough" and later also explained that "I understand that *Allah* know's best and maybe its just that vain female part of me that liked to show off

and recite for my husband...I mean I should be reciting for *Allah*, I mean I know my *salaah* is for *Allah*.”

Mariam whose husband also embraced Islam shortly before they got married agreed with Wisaal on the issue of *salaah* and said “I don’t want to question *Allah*’s wisdom, but if we are equal to men then why do they have the power to lead a basic thing like *salaah*?” Listening to the women many of their ideas resonated with me as I also have often grappled with similar questions around my right to lead the daily prayers, and so I asked the women if they felt that not being able to lead the *salaah* was about power. For a few minutes all the women in the room fell silent until Hoodah offered an explanation and said that “Perhaps *Allah* uses the *salaah* as a starting point to train men to lead their families, you know first *salaah* then other things”.

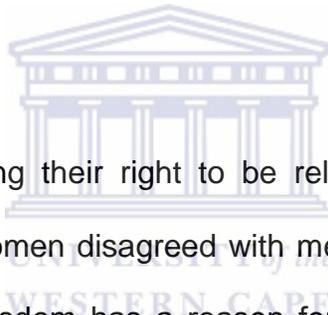
Many of the women agreed and the conversation shifted from the limits to women’s agency on this issue, to the ways in which men are burdened with learning early on about their responsibilities as leaders, husbands, fathers and brothers. Here again the women would rationalise their location in terms of power by shifting their focus from the limitations of their agency to the burdens and responsibilities of their husbands and fathers. I would say that this illustrates what Mahmoud (2005, 6) argues when she says that women often resist the dominant male order by subverting the hegemonic meanings of cultural practices and redeploying them for their own interests and agendas.

Here was a perfect example of the way in which the women 'shifted their gaze' from the limits set on them as Muslim women to the burdens placed on Muslim men and in doing so reducing their feelings of powerlessness around their lack of agency in this particular instance. Like the women in Rouse's (2004) study, the women in my study's cultural practice is greatly informed by the belief that the laws regulating their lifestyle practices are in fact divine laws. Moreover the women in this study all followed the rationale that this authority granted to men by *Allah*, was not primarily about limiting women's authority or agency but rather about the responsibility placed on men to provide for their families, take care of their families and "guide their families along a righteous path". In fact I found that many of the women appeared proud of the ways in which men embrace this responsibility, for example Tahira shared how she "loves the way" her husband makes sure they perform the evening prayer together as a family.



One can see how Tahira's comments underlines Chachi's (1989) claim that romanticized 'traditionalism' is often employed to prevent the reinscription of [patriarchal] familial and kinship structures when she also shared how it reminded her of when she was child and her father "always lead us in the *mahrieb salaah*. No matter what we were doing we knew we had to be ready for *mahrieb* or my father would be upset". Rouse (2004) says that when it comes to prayer rituals in Islam, people often view the faith as a performance: the performance of the submission of women to men and the submission of the community to God. She continues that the theology that gives rise to these performances, however, is extremely complex, at times contradictory, and always subject to interpretation (Rouse, 2000). This complexity is

underlined by Tahira who said that her husband, like her father, was “taking the responsibility of seeing to his family’s spiritual welfare” made her proud and fed into Tahira’s ideas of what constitutes a ‘good Muslim man’. I asked Taahira what they did when her husband was not there to lead them in prayer and she explained that a woman was not permitted to lead the *salaah* (Jeenah and Shaikh, 2000), but that in keeping with her “husband’s tradition, me and the children perform *salaah* together”. She also explained that “Later when my son got older, he would stand in front when his father wasn’t there” reinforcing the idea of the ‘good Muslim man’ as Tahira’s son at a young age already is learning about the qualities and responsibilities involved in being a good Muslim man.



When I pointed out that limiting their right to be religious leaders, appeared unfair toward women, many of the women disagreed with me stating that it was *Allah*’s laws and that “*Allah* in his divine wisdom has a reason for it being so”. When describing performing prayer with her sons, Shafieka a single mother, said that “When they were small I always stood next to them, now that they are grown men, I am proud that they can lead me in *salaah*, it means I did something right”. Ironically Shafieka sees her success in reproducing sons who are ‘good Muslim men’ as a sign of success, a sign that she is a ‘good Muslim mother and woman’. The women call on traditional practices around patriarchal family/kinship ties to legitimise their choices and moreover the women see the rules that limit them from leading prayer as *Allah*’s will or even “*Allah*’s wisdom”, rather than patriarchal practice. They do not question that “wisdom”, nor do they question that their view of God/*Allah* is male. Rather the women view this as an

extension of their perception that they are to “be seen to” or “taken care of” by the men in their lives. For the women being “taken care of” is not just limited to the spiritual realm of their lives, it extends into every aspect of their lives including their material lives as discussed in the chapter which follows.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented a number of definitions of patriarchy. I have attempted to unpack the ways in which patriarchy shapes and impacts identity politics and discussed the women’s views of patriarchy and the ways in which they understand how it does or does not affect their lives. I have explored the ways in which these particular women refute the idea that patriarchy has demanded that women ‘naturally’ assume the role of carer and nurturer and explored the ways in which the women’s essentialist views inform and impacts their negotiation of the everyday patriarchal landscapes of their lives. I have argued that these Muslim women acknowledge that Islam and *shariah* limits their freedom but that instead of focusing on the ways in which Islam limits their authority and agency, the women negotiate power by being aware of the roles they play in the reproduction of ‘good Muslim men’ who are able to carry the financial and spiritual burdens Islam places on men.

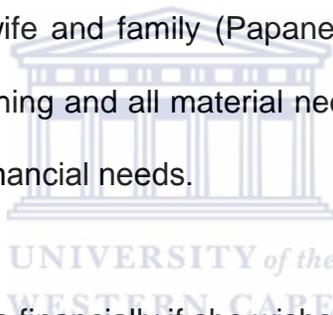
Chapter Six

In the previous chapter I discussed the ways in which the women's essentialist views shaped and influenced the ways in which they negotiated and chose their locations within the domestic sphere. I also looked at the ways in which their essentialist ideas shaped their rationalizations of power, freedoms and unfreedoms with regard to *shariah* law. I explored the women's awareness of the limits to their agency and authority as spiritual leaders and discussed the ways in which they locate an aspect of their power in their ability to raise sons and daughters who become 'good Muslim men and women'. Unlike the previous chapter where much hinged on a discussion of the women's essentialist ideas, this chapter seeks to take into account Grillot's (1995) point when she says that an essentialist outlook assumes that the experience of being a member of the group under discussion is a stable one, one with a clear meaning. Grillot (1995) reminds us of the intersectionality of identity construction and warns that essentialist ideas are not constant through time, space, different historical, social, political and personal contexts. Taking this into account this chapter seeks to explore the ways in which these particular women are located differently in terms of their ages and the historical and political contexts in which their ideas around power and agency were shaped.

On Muslim Women Money, Finance and Negotiating Power

In the previous chapter I shed light on the ways in which the women viewed being "taken care of" in spiritual realm of their lives; however this notion also extends into many other aspects of their lives such as the material and financial. From the onset of

the discussion on money and power, it became clear that the women participating in this study viewed their autonomy and authority within the household mostly in relation to their husband's ability to live up to his economic responsibilities as a Muslim man. The women focused on the multiple ways in which their 'duties' as wives are shaped by their Muslim men who are bound by *shariah* to their responsibilities as husbands, fathers and breadwinners. Moreover the women discussed at length their views on the ways in which their husbands are burdened by *shariah* laws around finance within marriage and all through the discussion the women's tone varied from deeply sympathetic to matter of fact. According to *shariah* law, it is a husband's duty to take full responsibility for the care and maintenance of his wife and family (Papanek & Schwede, 1988). He must provide a safe home, food, clothing and all material needs and in fact, Muslim men are responsible for all his family's financial needs.



A Muslim woman may contribute financially if she wishes [for example, purchase food or clothing], but she is under no obligation to do so and even after divorce, the financial responsibility of the family remains with the Muslim man (Papanek & Schwede, 1988). Also Nageeb (2004) says that *shariah* law is clear that in a marriage any money or property owned by women is theirs to keep, and they are not obliged to share it. Similarly, in marriage, a woman's salary is hers and cannot be appropriated by her husband unless she consents (Nageeb 2004). However I did find that the women were divided over a woman's right to 'her own' money and a husband's financial responsibility toward his family, in terms of what they saw as 'acceptable' or 'realistic'. There appeared to be a clear divide between the views held by older women versus younger

women. Older women felt they were more “realistic” in their expectations of their husbands’ abilities to “keep the family financially afloat”, whereas younger women appeared to take it as a given that their husbands knew going into the marriage, what their financial responsibilities would be and would have to make provisions for it as part of the marriage contract. Though both older and younger women were aware of their right “to be taken care of”, the ways in which they engaged with or deployed this knowledge differed, as I discuss next.

The older participants, who saw themselves as more sympathetic toward their men, shared that they felt that “being a good wife is also about compassion and compromise”. When asked about authority in the household, the women appeared aware of the limits to their agency in terms of making household decisions around a number of things such as money, education, travel plans, large purchases, but insisted that such decision making was an encumbrance rather than emancipatory, adding that “at least we don’t have the burden of being the breadwinner”. The women clearly express an awareness to the limits of their decision making power, but rationalise this by framing such decision making as burdensome for men remaining conscious of what they view as men’s burdens. An essentialist narrative of themselves as caring in nature underpins the older women’s rationalisations around power and authority in the domestic sphere. For example during the interview Mariam reminded me a number of times that even though women “don’t have to pay for anything in the house”, a “good woman” cares when she sees her husband worrying about “money and stuff”. Tahira also shared how she

always “secretly puts by money for the groceries” without her husbands knowledge because she “cares about his feelings getting hurt” if he should “know the truth”.

Many of the older women displayed a keen understanding of the limits to their husband’s ability to provide comfortably for their families. These limits are directly linked to the legacies of apartheid as well as to contemporary economic challenges around unemployment, as Ridd (1994) explains that for the Muslim Cape coloureds few employment opportunities beyond its boundaries were open to men and women, and it was not *shariah* law but apartheid law that restricted people’s lives. She continues that in the 1970s coloured men and women considered themselves privileged if they had completed their primary schooling with only a tiny elite ever reaching any of the professions such as teachers, nurses, draftsmen, etc. (Ridd, 1994). Lack of education further reduced job opportunities and, for many years, work had been restricted by the government’s policy of job reservation.

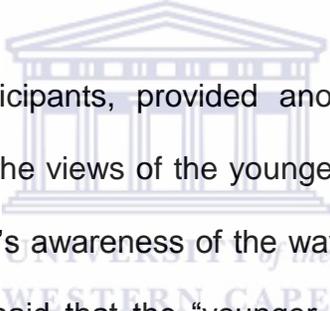
None of the older participants’ husbands have tertiary qualifications and many worked and still work as artisans in the building trade. In fact two of the older women’s husbands only had access to primary education. Mariam’s husband has his own plumbing business, which he inherited from his father; Tougheedah’s husband is a bricklayer and Tahira’s husband owns a small construction company. All of these men, as reported by the participants, were “forced to leave school and help their parents work to support the family “because those days coloureds weren’t going to study anyway”. Thus it became clear that for the older women, their financial freedom within the

marriage was mediated by the fact that their husbands as coloured Muslim men often could not support their families without the assistance of their wives. As I show next this phenomenon also reinforced the notion of the 'good Muslim wife who helps her husband'.

Unlike the older women the younger participants reported that they felt "more free" to do whatever they with their money as "it's ours and *shariah* makes men's responsibilities clear". Continued discussion of Muslim men's responsibilities further revealed that the younger women and the older women also differed around the issue of *mehr/maskavi*. Sikand (1997) explains that when a Muslim marriage is to be solemnised, the groom promises to pay the bride a certain sum which is specified in the marriage-contract and this sum is called *mehr/maskavi* in Arabic. He continues that *mehr/maskavi* is a Qur'anic right, the sole right of the wife and that the husband can have no claim over it once the marriage is consummated (Sikand, 1997). During the discussion of *mehr/maskavi*, it appeared that the older women did not think it appropriate asking for substantial amounts of money as *mehr/maskavi*.

Mariam states it clearly when she says, "we knew everyone was struggling like us, if you wanted to keep you uppity then ask for a fortune, but chances are your boyfriend would not be able to afford it". She continued that "today girls ask for property, Kruger Rands, or huge amounts of money" and that "they don't care, the guy and his family must just make a plan, like it's their problem". When listening to Mariam talk about the issue of *mehr/maskavi* it exposes an underlying generational conflict over ideologies of

the 'good woman' as the older women see the younger women demanding financial security as being seen as unnecessarily 'greedy'. The younger women however made it very clear that they had been "taught that *mehr/maskavi* is a meant to be a woman's security or nest egg". Here clearly one sees how the differing socio economic and historical contexts in which these women have been raised highlights the diversity of their life experiences, social identities and the way those identities are performed. Furthermore these differences impacts the ways in which they shape their agency as the older women's views on what constitutes a 'good Muslim woman or wife' differs from the younger womens views on what constitutes a 'good Muslim woman and wife'.



Tahira, one of the older participants, provided another perspective which further highlighted the divide between the views of the younger and older women participating in this study and on the women's awareness of the ways in which their agency around finance is curtailed when she said that the "younger generation" should not take for granted the fact that "they don't just learn Islam from their parents". She continued that "they can access the *Quran* and *hadith* anywhere and this affects what they decide to do with their money". When I asked Tahira to give examples in order to 'shed more light' on what she meant, Tahira explained that as young women growing up during the 1970s they were taught to always think they "must help" their husbands and that "our money must go into the house". Crompton (2003) states that gender systems are instantiated through the development of institutions such as family systems, employment regimes, and national cultures. Thus in line with the cultural role assignments, which in a sense 'predates' the participants, the older women participating

in this study see their men as having to be the breadwinners, or rather the economic providers, in the family.

However this is not to say that this view is not without ambiguity as many of the women play a significant role in their family's economic survival while simultaneously seeing their husbands as the primary economic providers. Strengthening what Rakoczy's (2005) argues when he says that patriarchy demands that women embrace the role of the nurturer, it appears that for the participants, as discussed earlier in this chapter, being a 'good mother' and 'good woman' is tied in with their 'natural' roles as carers. This role as carer extends in so far as the women colluding in presenting their men as good men even when their men cannot provide. In her article '*Social construction of masculinity on the racial and gendered margins of Cape Town*', Elaine Salo (2006:168) explains that men who seek employment in Cape Town, find themselves up against the structural constraints, such as their lack of the requisite cultural or educational capital that prevents them from obtaining work. She continues that at the same time, there is the cultural expectation that men in their roles as breadwinners should provide a regular income to support their families (Salo, 2006: 168). Thus in many ways one could say that it is about the awful truth of men's own failures to provide in the apartheid context, but be that as it may, the older women seem to take on the burden of creating a version of reality whereby they present themselves as financially dependent wives and their husbands as breadwinners when in fact the truth is far more complicated. The older women are heavily invested in co-constructing the patriarchy in which they are embedded.

However the location from which the older women co-construct patriarchy, sits at an intersection where the multiplicity of the women's identities as wives, daughters, mother, etc. constantly shifts, overlaps, challenges and ultimately colludes. Malhotra and Maher (2007) argue that women's control of household decisions is conditioned by the larger social context and this was evident when Tahira shared how she thought that the older women were similar to their mothers in that they would not question their husbands when it came to money and financial decisions with regard to the family, even when those decisions created stress or financial anxiety for them (the wives). She explained that she like her mother and peers assumed that this was what "Islam expected of me as a wife". She said that she "only learned later" in her life that according to Islam and *shariah* law a husband has to take full responsibility for the household's financial needs; and "when he takes a wife, he has to keep her in a fashion she is accustomed to or better". Tahira continued "he can't put her into any situation when she is used to living a certain way in her parents house".

When I asked how this translated into reality, Tahira shared how "from the time when after my first child was born, times were tough and I always put all my money into the house, I thought I didn't have a choice". She continues by explaining how after her husband's construction company started growing she still continued to "put all her money into the house and the children as if it's just supposed to be that way". However reinforcing Rouse's (2004) claim that Muslim women deploy the rhetoric of patriarchy to instill in men a sense of responsibility, she continued that today "things are different"

and that she makes it clear to her husband that she does not have put “a cent of my money into the house”. However when I asked if she does financially contribute toward household bills, Tahira exclaimed “Yes, but now it’s a choice” and explained that she “does buy things for the house and the children” because “he already pays for everything so I feel I can help”. Thapan (2003) says that while it has the potential to provide security, fulfillment, and identity to women, marriage is also a context within which many of them find their opportunities limited.

For Tahira gaining knowledge about her rights as a Muslim wife and her husband’s responsibilities as a Muslim husband caused a shift in the way she viewed her financial contributions to the household bills. In the past Tahira felt the limitations Thapan (2003) describes, feeling she had no choice in what she did with her money. Listening to Tahira, her frustration and anger was evident in the angry pitch of her voice and the agitated way she gesticulated when she spoke. However when Tahira went on to describe the way in which she rationalises spending her money today, she appeared more calm and even joked about how she “is the strength behind” her husband. Clearly Tahira was still spending her money in the household and viewing her income as a supplementary income to her husband’s, but in shifting the focus away from what she thought she had to do, to what she now ‘knows’ her husband has to do, has altered the location from which Tahira rationalizes her autonomy. That she view’s herself as strong as is evident by her comment, “I’m like the strength behind my husband”.

A similar rationalisation occurs with another older participant Tougheeda, who also shared her frustration with how her husband “makes decisions”, but she often lives with “the stress of making ends meet”. Malhotra and Mather (2007) who found that there are important differences in both the nature and determinants of the financial as opposed to the social and organizational dimension of power in households, say that women who control one of these aspects of family decisions do not necessarily control the other. This is apparent with Tougheeda who explained that in her view, men often make decisions about how to spend money in the household, but have “no idea what things really cost because they don’t work with the bills and the buying of food and caring for kids”. She also explained how even though Islam says that a husband has no claim to his wife’s money, that “today it’s not that simple, life is too expensive”. Tougheeda shared how she always knew that “Islamically her husband is bound to be the breadwinner” but that she has always felt sorry for him and felt “I have to pitch in and help him”. She continued and said that “I actually don’t mind, it makes me feel like his partner, his equal”

Like Tahira, Tougheeda’s apparent focus on her husbands burdens as a Muslim man and her ‘freedom’ to choose how to spend her money has created a sense of power and agency for her. Many of the women shared this view and though some of the women continued to criticize men for “not always living up to their responsibility”, the women still insisted that “it’s different when we now know our rights”. Shafaat (1984) explains Islamic law says that though both parties have the equal responsibility to provide physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual happiness to each other, men generally

have the added responsibility to provide for the economic needs of the wife. Shafaat (1984) also says that equality of rights can only be asserted on the assumption of equality of responsibility and that this principle sometimes works in favour of women. For example, as mothers, women give much more to children than do men as fathers and so Islam recognizes greater rights of mothers over children than of fathers except in the realms of economic considerations where fathers bear full responsibility (Shafaat, 1984). Shafaat (1984) underlines the fact that though these women do not have the degree of freedom to make financial decisions inside the household, they also do not have the burden of the family's financial health.

Though for many of the women, men's "responsibilities" encompasses a number of things such as keeping the family safe from harm, leading the family prayers and providing spiritual guidance, primarily the women take it to mean financial responsibility for the family. Mariam made it clear, "I remind my husband that it's his duty to see to the house and I don't have to put my money into the house if I don't want to". Tahira told how after she became aware of her rights as a Muslim woman, she "sat down" with her husband and reminded him "politely" that "Islamically" it was his duty to provide for his family. In contrast to the older women, the younger women seemed to take their agency around money and family finance more as a given. Unlike the older women who explained a process whereby they came to realise they can choose how to spend their money, the younger women's lack of participated in this particular discussion underlined how changing social contexts shape understandings. This was further

underlined by the younger women's claims that to them it was always clear that it is "my money, my choice".

On Younger Muslim Women's Negotiations of Money and Power

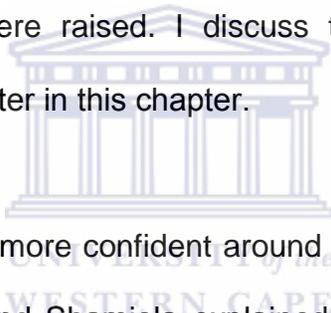
Though the younger women's views of what constitutes a 'good Muslim wife' differed from the older women, I found that their discussion of money, power and patriarchy was similarly framed within a paradigm where their focus was almost entirely on the ways in which Muslim men and their divinely ordained financial responsibility toward their families. Malhotra and Mather (2007) say that educated women are more likely to be capable of making decisions, and assert themselves while their capabilities and sense of self-worth and self-confidence are more likely to command respect in domestic negotiations (Malhotra & Mather, 2007). Thus it was not surprising that unlike the older women who viewed their contributions as supplementing their husband's incomes, the younger women appeared to view their contributions as optional and enabling them to have more influence over household decisions.

Much of the younger women's attitudes toward gender, *shariah* law and household finance appears to have been shaped by the fact that unlike the older women who came to learn what *shariah* says about the financial responsibilities of a man, late in their lives and through alternate measures like the Muslim radio and evening classes on *shariah*, the younger women appeared to have learnt at a much younger age that Islam has clear rules regarding the financial duties, obligations and responsibilities of men and women within a marriage. Surprisingly, regardless of their age, the ideas many of the

women had about who owned what money and who had the right to spend their money were similar or even the same. For example, for the younger women the gendered social norm was that married Muslim men have the primary responsibility of the family's financial well-being and Muslim women's money by *shariah* law was rightfully hers to do with as she pleases as discussed earlier in this chapter, yet the younger women's money would also primarily be spent on the household's financial needs. However what differed for these women was the way in which they rationalised their household spending.

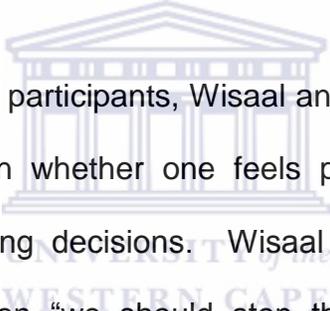
The older women viewed their spending as “helping” their husbands, a quality they viewed as an extension of themselves as nurturers and expected of a “good Muslim wife”. Cornwall (2002) explains that discourses on love and money in intimate relationships in capitalist societies, counterpose the spending of money as an expression of love, with a pursuit of money or a love of money that displaces husbands and turns good wives into bad women. On the other hand the younger women saw how money is spent as a choice less weighted by issues around what constitutes a ‘good wife’ as is made evident by Wisaal who said that she always did anything with her money and continued that her ex-husband never told her how to spend it. She continued that she “liked to spend it on my house and my daughter, it gave me pleasure”. Unlike the younger women, many of the older women did not feel like they had a choice in the matter as they strove toward an ideal notion of ‘the good supportive wife’ and in contrast many of the younger women did not view women who assert their Islamic right to their own money as ‘bad wives’, rather they appear to view it as a given.

For example Hoodah, one of the younger participants explained how “the subject of money is clear-cut; we all know Islam’s sorted it out for us by making rules about who has to take responsibility for what”. Hoodah appeared to take it for granted that most Muslim women and men knew that *shariah* states that the husband has to bear full financial responsibility for the economic needs of his family and that “there need not be any problems”. Also Hoodah appeared to take for granted that men are in positions which make it possible for them to take full financial responsibility for the economic needs of the family. Hoodah’s assumptions about men’s ability to access jobs which would allow for financial security, is indicative of the socio historic context in which many of the younger participants were raised. I discuss the implications of this on the women’s access to education later in this chapter.



The younger women appeared more confident around articulating a desire for financial security in fact both Hoodah and Shamiela explained how they made sure that their *mehr/maskavi* was substantial enough to secure them in the event of “anything happening” in their marriages. Shamiela shared that “unlike my older sisters, who were scared to choose their *maskavi* wisely, I am a woman of means; I made sure my *maskavi* would change my life”. This notion of women accessing social and economic power through the money/wealth that marriage confers, is not unique as Shaaban (1988:30) tells of young Syrian women who actively seek to marry “older, rich Saudi men’. Shaaban (1988:31) says that the younger women participating in her study claimed that “the important thing for the woman is to secure her rights before getting married”, whereas the older women were willing to accept “smaller, more modest

sums”. Similarly among the younger women participating in this study, the idea that the *mehr/maskavi* that comes along with marriage, could provide the opportunity to acquire long term financial security was more acceptable. The older women did not share this view and when questioned about their *mehr/maskavi*, most of the older women claim not to remember or refused to answer. Mariam said when she was younger, they did not have a choice and had “to bear in mind that coloured men were limited in their jobs and limited in the amount of money they had”. She continued that “today it’s different, there’s more wealth around and younger women have more choices in what they going to ask for.”



Furthermore two of the younger participants, Wisaal and Shamiela both felt that money does play an important part in whether one feels powerful or has autonomy and authority in making life changing decisions. Wisaal said “that denying this fact is hypocritical” and that as women “we should stop thinking that because money is important to us, we are greedy or bad”. Wisaal’s statement brings to light an interesting perspective of how women are supposed to be motivated to work for love, not for money. De Vault (1991), who illustrates women's attempts to think of housework as nurturance and love rather than work, says that if women see acceptable reasons for the unequal division of household labour, they will not view it as unfair. To many of the women unpaid household labour is seen as part of being a mother and a wife and cannot be viewed as equal to the financial burdens men bear. The women recognise that they “do not have to” but rather emphasise that for a number of reasons “they choose to” take responsibility for the unpaid household and reproductive labour. The

women also view this choice as easy or rather 'natural' since they see housework as nurturance (De Vault, 1991). Moreover the women acknowledge that their perceptions of the limits and uses of their notions of 'choice' differ and are shaped by the different levels of access to education [secular and Islamic] they had. It is around this particular subject of education where the impacts of the effects of apartheid in shaping the women's social identities and subjectivities are visible.

Muslim women and Education (Secular and Islamic)

Majid (1998) claims that through the centuries historical circumstances have often worked to the disfavour of Muslim women and that predominant traditions of male authority have made it difficult for women to avail themselves of the rights guaranteed by the *Quran*. However, she does continue that in the last century a number of reforms have taken place leading to improved opportunities for education and in general to greater emancipation of women (Majid, 1998). Examples of such reforms in the South African context are noted by Muhammed Haron (2008) who says that though women's religious leadership in the South African Muslim community was evident during the apartheid era (1948-94), it only really gained momentum since 1994 in the democratic period. Haron (2008) describes Muslim women at the Cape as having a history of making 'an indelible mark on religious education' as a fair number of them 'gained their religious knowledge from local *sheikhs* and *mawlanas*'. Though Haron (2008) includes a little aside explaining that both the terms '*sheikhs*' and '*mawlanas*' refer to religious leaders, he takes for granted the fact that all *sheikhs* and *mawlanas* before 1994 and the vast majority today were and are male. The significance of this becomes important

in my discussion to follow as the ways in which limited access to education [secular and Islamic] has impacted the older and younger women's identity construction differently in a multitude of ways.

Education and Changing Socio Economic Contexts

When addressing the ways in which education shapes the women's social identities, many of the women participating in this study display a keen awareness of the limits each generation of Muslim women living in Cape Town have had to education. Many of the women's responses highlighted the ways in which previous generations of Muslim women in the Cape had limited access to spaces where they could gain knowledge about Islam and their rights as Muslim women. In fact these women view their broader access to knowledge about Islam and Shariah Law as a key factor in their perception of themselves as "being more empowered" compared to their mothers and grandmothers.

In 1958, in Cape Town, the issue of Islamic education for Muslim women divided the *ulama* and Davids (2004) reports that much to the consternation of the majority of the Muslim clergy *Imam* Abdullah Haron, a progressive Muslim leader, started teaching a women's Islamic class on Wednesday nights. During focus group sessions and one on one interviews many of the women made clear, that in the past, Muslim women in Cape Town did not have access to Mosques, many *madrassahs*, Islamic schools, Friday prayers, lectures or extra classes on *Shariah* or Islam. In fact Shell in Davids (2004:19) provides 'concrete' historical evidence that Muslim girls attended state-sponsored

schools where they were educated in secular and Christian teachings; and Muslim boys attended private Muslim schools once they reached puberty.

In an attempt to unpack why it was that previous generations of women did not have access to the mosques and many of the *madrassahs*, I shared with the women the fact that my memory and experience was that most *khalifas* teaching us as children were women. This sparked a number of responses by the women especially those participating in the focus groups. Shafieka explained, “Yes, but it wasn’t like now. Now you can learn about Islam and your rights and stuff, then it was only the basics like how to *bacha* and how to keep yourself clean and stuff”. Shamiela laughs and agrees “Yes, yes, we were like parrots, *alif, baa, taa*” and Yumna adds “and like *khalifa* and my *Oemie* said, if you’re a girl keep quiet and know your place”. The women’s views confirm Davids (2004) claim that until recently in the Cape many Muslim women were sidelined from religious education and suggests that in the past much of the education of Muslim women in Arabic-Afrikaans was an instruction on literacy, duties, dress codes and cooking.

This is clearly reflected in this study where the older women described their childhood memories of *madrassah* as being an institutional tool to teach Muslim boys and girls the ‘basics’ of how to recite the Quran, hadith, which prayers to recite before eating, sleeping etc. and general teachings around cleanliness and etiquette. Furthermore they describe the *madrassahs* as segregated and clearly gendered. For example Shafieka remembers, “I always thought why do the boys get to practice the *athaan* and some of

the longer *do'aahs* and we don't?" Following this Shafieka explained how she later came to understand that it was because boys were 'working toward' making the *athaan* at their local mosque and that she understood how "a man always has to lead his family in *salaah* so it's important that he know the *do'aahs* in Arabic". Clearly the notion of the "burdened Muslim man" was shaped early in the lives these older women and it is these ideas around the Muslim men which impacted and shaped the ways in which the older women came to view the "good Muslim wife" as helping and protecting her husband.

The older women's narratives around their childhood memories of their Islamic education are littered with stories evoking sympathy for young Muslim boys who are being prepared to become "good Muslim men". For example Mariam relayed the story of how her father would always have her brothers stay on the prayer mat after evening prayer so that he could listen to them recite the *athaan*, she laughingly shared "I was glad I didn't have that worry of having to practice to *athaan* for all to hear...shame my youngest brother always looked like he wanted to cry." Two of the other women relayed similar stories of their brothers preparing to pray publicly, either to lead the prayers or perform the call to prayer and in both instances the stories were met with a chorus of sympathetic responses.

The women also explained that in the past Muslim boys and girls attended most *madrasahs* together and that as they grew older the boys had to attend daily prayers at the mosque as well as Friday prayers with their fathers, while the girls stayed home with their mothers. Listening to the women talk about their male siblings' responsibilities it was clear that the women view the responsibilities Muslim men are tasked with as a

burden and a chore. Moreover as the discussion continued the younger women confirmed that things “are pretty much the same for Muslim boys”, but that for Muslim girls, things have changed. They continued that in more recent years there has been a ‘distinct’ change as Wisaal claims that, “Nowadays every mosque has a women’s section and week nights when they have lectures, women and men can attend”. Hoodah also explains that unlike when she was a child, she now accompanies her husband to Friday prayers. In fact most of the women participating in this study say they attend Friday prayers with or without their spouses. More over the younger women were critical of the fact that the parts of the mosques assigned to female worshippers are always “upstairs”, “in the back” and “hidden away like out of sight, like we would disrupt the men”. Tayob (1995) says that in an attempt to articulate a relevant Islam the Muslim youth movement (MYM), the first national South African Muslim organisation, made an effort to include women and black people in the organisation. Multiple approaches to addressing existing discrepancies were employed and included a plan to increase women’s accessibility to Islamic practices and literature; as well as prioritising the issue of women’s access to mosques (Tayob, 1995). Tayob (1995) also reports that though mosque sites became regarded as centres for inclusivity, prayer facilities for women were, however, separate from the prayer space for men.

Exhibiting a critical awareness of how the physical position of the spaces provided for them at mosques indicated a ‘second class citizenship’ or rather an unfreedom the younger women commented and joked during focus group sessions that “perhaps they [the men] are trying to protect themselves from us”. Also Wisaal joked when talking

about having to go down the side of her local mosques to the women's entrance in the back, "maybe they think we're so beautiful that when the men see us they'll go crazy". Hoodah replied "or they probably think we'll try to take over the mosque". The older women however, appeared to be less critical of the spaces allocated to women and in unpacking their views on the subject, it became clear that this was another way in which apartheid impacted the Muslim women's freedom to access education.

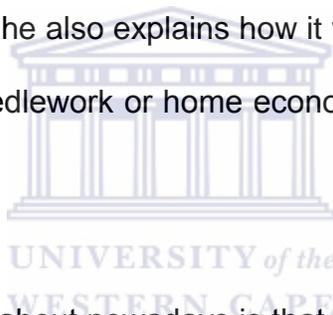
Muslim Women's Access to Mosques and Schools; and the Legacy of Apartheid

Fariid Esack (1987) notes that the 1950s and 1960s were decades of community upheaval in the Western Cape because of the tightening grip of apartheid through for instance the Group Areas Act (1957) and forced removals. When speculating on why it was that in past years women had limited access to mosques and other educational resources it was clear that the legacy of Apartheid had made its mark on Cape Town's Muslim community. With *Imam* Haron's death in detention in 1969 and the *uluma's* silent response, pockets within the South African *ummah* felt betrayed and began the search for a more meaningful Islam that could have more resonance with the anti-apartheid struggle (Esack, 1987; Omar, 1987). Mariam one of the older women, remembers, "You know in the past we helped to fight for freedom in this country." She continues by explaining how there were fewer mosques and because a lot of "the political talks were happening at the mosques too, the women were told to stay at home "cause it's dangerous". She remembers how often when her father would return home after *mahrib salaah* "him and my uncle and some of the other men would always sit and talk about politics and stuff that had happened with the students and stuff".

According to Dadoo (2003), Muslims played a significant role in the anti-apartheid struggle and one sees evidence of this when listening to some of the women's childhood memories. Shamiela another older participant shared that she thought that because of Apartheid "black and coloured people weren't allowed to meet in big groups so it wasn't possible to have like *hadj* classes or lectures and classes on the *dien*." She continued that in contrast today it is very common, "*Ya Allah* today you can attend a lecture or a class at different mosques every day of the week". Many of the women have memories of being told that "it's safer for women at home" and in addition to this Hoodah remembers helping her mother make food for students who were "being hidden in the mosque because the police was looking for them". When listening to the women discuss their childhood memories of their local mosques, it becomes clear that democracy in South Africa has changed the way in which Muslim women relate to and interact with their local mosques and in a similar way the women's memories of the secular schools to which they had access reveals the legacy of apartheid. For example, the older participants appear to see a clear difference in their access to educational resources in a post-apartheid South Africa.

Shafieka reports how when she was a child most of the coloured girls (Muslim and Christian) in her community only attended primary school and were then sent to find jobs to assist the family financially. Shafieka continues that most of the Muslim girls, including her, ended up "working in factories or shops". Salo (2007) explains that in the regional economy of the Western Cape, women were considered to be the favoured

employees in the feminised textile, canning and leather industries thus Shafieka's comments held salience for many of the older women. Shafieka felt that in the "New South Africa" young people can "be anything they want to be" and "have a choice in the matter and that gives them power". Most of the women echoed Shafieka's sentiments. Exhibiting an awareness of the ways in which education can create more freedoms, Wisaal said that when she looks at her mother and her aunties that she feels sorry for them as they did not have the opportunities she had and that she has more say in her life because her "education gives me more choices". She explained how her mother and aunts had no choice but to attend local coloured schools where their subjects excluded maths and science. She also explains how it was compulsory for the coloured girls to do subjects such as needlework or home economics, "as if they were preparing them for housework only".



Yumna felt that "the good thing about nowadays is that my kids can go to any school if I can afford it. Back in the day our parents had little choice". The women also understand that the limitations of their education was not as a result of their faith, rather as a result of their race as is evident in this statement by Shafieka, "you know back then it wasn't a Muslim thing, it was mostly a coloured, black or white thing!" Clearly Yumna and Shafieka like many of the women knew that the ways in which they are able to negotiate power in their lives is clearly impacted by the quality of education they have had access to. Moreover the women were aware of the many levels on which Apartheid limited their choices as coloured Muslim women and recognised that the changing

historical socio-economic context will impact lives of young Muslim women today differently.

The Rise of the Islamic School and Muslim Women's Subjectivity

Mariam commented that back in the early 1970's, "When I started high school there were no Muslim schools, whereas today I have a pick of Muslim schools for my daughter". Indeed Dadoo (2003) reports that back in 2003, aside from the 408 educational institutes that exist in South Africa, there are numerous Islamic colleges, Muslim private schools, Islamic centres, Islamic Libraries and colleges of Islamic sciences. Most of the women participating in the study reported that their own children, both girls and boys were all either currently enrolled or graduated from Islamic schools. When asked why they chose to enrol their children in Islamic schools, many of the women explained that it was 'easier and 'less stressful' if your child gets their education "all in one". I came to understand that the women felt it is "tougher" for children when their secular education is separated from their Islamic education. They explained that the child would have to attend school during the early part of the day and *madrassah* in the afternoon, filling the child's entire day with little time to spare for play, rest or chores. Many of the women felt that an Islamic school benefited their children in that it combined both secular and Islamic studies while providing an 'Islamic environment'. As Hoodah says "Now when they come from school one, two, three, it's all done". The women also appear to perceive the Islamic schools as providing a 'better education' for their children generally and specifically creating more choices for their daughters in that

their daughters' have a broader knowledge of the rights and responsibilities of both Muslim men and women.

Many of the women feel this will benefit their daughters as it will empower them in ways that they themselves were not empowered as young Muslim girls growing up in Cape Town. Shafieka said, "when we were kids we had to attend Christian schools and go to *madrasah* afterwards and at *madrasah* we didn't really learn about women's rights and men's responsibilities". She also explains that on days when they felt too tired they would be permitted to "skip" *madrasah* but not "Christian school" (Here I use the term as the participants use it. They make reference to secular school as Christian school) creating a sense that Islamic studies were not as big a priority, or as important as secular studies. Shafieka also added that when she told her Christian friends that she "still had to go to *madrasah* after school, they looked at her as if she was strange" which always had her feeling like an outsider.

Many of the women felt this way and when I asked about the significance of this many of the women explained that it created a sense that they "were different" to other learners or that they were more burdened than "Christian children" because they had to "attend two schools, Christian and Muslim". One gets a sense that many of the older women felt othered in the Christian schools they attended as many of them narrate stories of "being cross questioned by Christian friends" or "teachers asking things about Islam, as if we came from another planet but meanwhile we live in the same community". One of the women, Mariam reports that she often felt "different to

Christian girls, as if Muslim girls were not as free as them because of Islam". Many of the women agreed and Shamiela explained that "it was as if looking at my religion through my friends and school teacher's eyes made me feel like I was living an oppressed life, but I did not feel oppressed and I still don't". The women clearly felt the consequences of being part of a Muslim community embedded in a larger predominantly Christian community and many of the women recognised that negative stereotypes about Islam shaped how a large number of non Muslim community members viewed Muslim women's lives. Some of the women claimed that often feelings of disempowerment were created by non-Muslim women for them. Shamiela said "it's like they don't understand it or know it so it must be bad", Tougheeda said "like my mother's friend next door always telling her that she must stop being such a servant to my dad and not hearing my mother say that she likes taking care of my dad". Clearly Tougheedah's mother's resistance to her neighbour's view of servitude speaks to her agency in her role as wife and mother.

Many of the women had very strong views about the ways in which Muslim women's status in Islam is viewed by non-Muslims. Many of the women felt that often their lives as Muslim women are misjudged and feelings of disempowerment are created for them by "women who are not Muslim, or people with Western ideas, or white or even Christian people". Shamiela explained how she hated talking to women at work about Islam because "they already have their assumptions and sometimes they make me answer unnecessary questions that make me feel frustrated and powerless because I don't have the words to explain it from my perspective, like why I should have a *mahram*

when I travel?” She continued to explain that after conversations with her colleagues at work she always feels like she does not “know enough” about her religion in order to defend it. She says that she never gets to explain that she does make decisions about her own life and that she wishes had had the opportunity to go to an Islamic school so that she could have had the “tools to defend” herself and her “*dien*”. Clearly Shamiela is aware that the younger women who have had the benefit of an integrated secular and Islamic education are positioned more favourably in terms of their ability to defend their choices as Muslim women. Furthermore Shamiela’s statement that “the women at work make as if they don’t have to compromise in their lives, marriages and relationships because they belong to a specific church or something”, underlines the insight she and many of the women participating in this study, have of the similar limits and unfreedoms non-Muslim women share. The layered nature of this insight is also revealed in Mariam’s poignant and profound comment,

“I suppose it’s easy to judge Muslim women’s lives because we are an easy target, maybe our lives appear the way their [non-Muslim] lives feel”.

Mariam

Conclusion

This chapter explores the women’s views of the relationship between money, agency and authority and has attempted to unpack the ways in which the older and younger women participating in this study are located differently in terms of how they construct their ideas of what constitutes a ‘good Muslim wife’. I have also discussed the fact that

though these women's understandings of the relationship between money, agency and authority are complex and loaded with tensions and contradictions it appears that for these particular women education shapes and impacts the ways in which they view the limits to their freedom and authority. I have looked at the ways in which the legacy of apartheid has impacted Muslim women's access to schools and other spaces [mosques, *madrasahs*, etc.] where they could access secular and Islamic education. Lastly I have briefly discussed the ways in which Islamic schools which integrate secular and Islamic education, have influenced younger Muslim women's subjectivities.



Conclusion

This study has explored the understandings and perceptions of power, agency and empowerment, held by a group of Muslim women living in Cape Town in the Western Cape. In an attempt to contribute to a growing body of work which aims to unsettle hegemonic discourses which often position Muslim women primarily as oppressed victims, this study has aimed to shed light on the ways in which these particular Muslim women negotiate their subjectivities, construct and co-construct their identities across multiple localities from which they negotiate their power.

My research indicates that these Muslim women acknowledge Islam as a patriarchal institution but that instead of focusing on the ways in which Islamic *shariah* law limits their authority and agency; the women negotiate empowerment by fostering an awareness of the ways in which Islam limits men's agency and burdens Muslim men with their roles as leaders and providers. More importantly these women's understandings of these prescribed gender roles, is as Smith (1979) says, perfectly obvious and perfectly natural when speaking from within the perspective of Islam. This perspective is largely informed and sustained by the essentialist narratives the women employ when speaking of prescribed gender roles for Muslim women and men. The women's essentialist ideas around gender roles configures the particular locations from which they co-construct what constitutes a 'good Muslim woman' and in doing so reinforce their ideas of what constitutes 'a good Muslim man'. Thus it is clear that the women see the rights and obligations of men balanced with the rights and obligations of

the women. Moreover for these women, from within the Islamic perspective these gender roles are divinely-ordained and therefore a natural and right circumstance.

During the research process I came to fully agree with Chamas (2009), who reminded me that the concept of gender equality is multifaceted and that it is important to recognize the complexity and the ambiguous nature of gender equality because what women need and desire is inextricably linked to their culture, religion and economic class. In exploring the ways in which Islam shapes the women's constructions of their intersecting social identities it is evident that their religious identities are quite salient and quite meaningful to them and that they value this identity enough to maintain it in their daily lives. Moreover I would argue these particular women have a culturally-specific conception of what it means to be equal and that like many women in the Islamic world, these particular women define gender equality, and their desire to achieve it, in the contexts of their own lives.

What's more Chamas's (2009) argument that a reinterpretation of religious texts can bring about a shift in societal norms and can significantly alter the status of Muslim women in their communities holds salience for these women, as there is evidence of this 'shift' in the ways in which the older and younger women's historical contexts while growing up have located them differently in terms of how they construct their identities Muslim wives and mothers. For these particular women the co-construction of societal norms are shaped and underlined by the level of secular and Islamic education they had, and still have access to. Many of women display a keen awareness of the

multiple ways in which education and Islamic knowledge shapes the limits to their freedom, agency and authority in their everyday lives and the impact of apartheid is clearly visible in the older women's stories of their youth.

Evidence of the ways in which education and Islamic knowledge shape the women's views is especially to be found in the differing constructions of the relationships between money, freedom, authority and agency held by the older and younger women. Unlike the younger women who negotiate the relationship between money, power and authority from a position mediated by their rights according to *shariah* law, the older women's positions are largely mediated by their ideas around constructions of 'the good Muslim wife'. Moreover for the older women the negotiation of the relationship between money, agency and authority is laced with a tension between Islamic ideals and their personal realities as many of their husband's abilities to provide as 'good Muslim husbands' have been hampered by the fact that they were raised during the apartheid era.

Finally, Rouse (2004) reminds us that while popular ideas, such as patriarchy, have material force, ideas by themselves have much less power than cultural practice. More significantly, with respect to patriarchy, there are often significant disconnects between what men and women say, and what men and women do (Rouse, 2004). In other words there is 'official' gender ideology, and then there is 'practical' gender organization. Rouse (2004) says that for many non-Muslims, clothing, segregated spaces and prayer rituals define the practice of Islam and that the theology that gives

rise to these performances, is extremely complex and at times contradictory, and always subject to interpretation. More importantly Rouse (2004) shows that one needs to spend very little time among Muslim women to recognise that most Muslim women are not passive recipients of male authority. I conclude that this is particularly true of the women participating in my study who contrary to hegemonic stereotyping, maneuver within a set of almost 'concrete' constraints in multiple ways, constantly and actively negotiating and renegotiating power, agency and authority within their daily lives.



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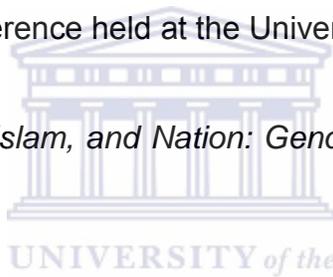
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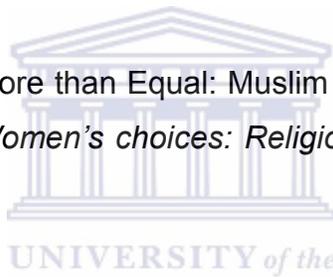
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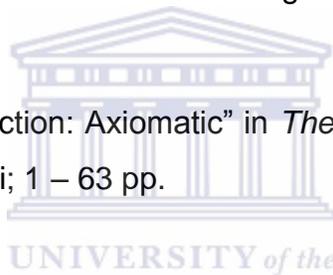
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INFORMED CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF RESEARCH: Perceptions of Empowerment: A study of Muslim women living in the greater Cape Town Metropole.

Have you been informed of the purpose of the Study? Yes/No

- Thesis in fulfillment of a Masters degree in Women's and Gender Studies at the University of the Western Cape.
- Data Collected to be published in the form of a thesis
- Some data may be used for publication
- All raw data to be handled by Zulfa Abrahams only

Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study? Yes/No

- At any time
- Without having to give a reason for withdrawing

Has there been any pressure exerted to participate in this study? Yes/No

Have you had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study? Yes/No

Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions? Yes/No

Have you received enough information about the study? Yes/No

Do you agree to take part in this study? Yes/No

Do you agree to the researcher using a tape recorder? Yes/No

I, the undersigned, consent to participation in the focus group facilitated by Zulfa Abrahams. I have not been unduly pressured into participating and I understand that I am free to withdraw at any stage. I understand that the raw data will be handled by Zulfa Abrahams only and that any names will be changed when the data is used in the thesis or any publications. The data will be published in a thesis as a requirement towards Ms Abrahams' Masters Degree in Women's and Gender Studies at the University of the Western Cape.

Signed _____ Date _____

(Please print name in Block Letters) _____

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I, the undersigned, consent to being interviewed by Zulfa Abrahams. I have not been unduly pressured into granting this interview and I understand that I am free to terminate the interview at any stage. I understand that any information will be treated with utmost confidentiality and that all names will be changed when the data is used in the thesis or any publications. The data will be published in a thesis as a requirement towards Ms Abrahams' Masters Degree in Women's and Gender Studies at the University of the Western Cape.

Signed _____ Date _____

(Please print name in Block Letters) _____

SEMI-STRUCTURED QUESTIONS

1. When we talk about power or empowerment what do you think of?
2. Do you think power and empowerment are the same thing?
3. In your view do women and men experience power in the same ways?
4. What do you think are some of the key influences on how power shifts in different contexts and relationships?
5. What do you think shapes the ways in which we view and experience power?
6. In your view how does being Muslim change or affect your access to power?
7. Do you think that power relationships in non-Muslim communities are very different?

