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RELIGION, GENDER AND CITIZENSHIP: A CASE STUDY OF CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM WOMEN IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 6

1 CITIZENSHIP, GENDER, AND RELIGIOUS REGIMES 1

1.1 Our research project 1
1.2 Citizenship and immigration regime 2
1.3 Gender regime 5
1.4 Religious regime 8
1.5 Demography: Religion and ethnicity 12
1.6 Chapter overview 13

2 RELIGION, GENDER, FEMINISM AND CITIZENSHIP 15

2.1 Introduction 15
2.2 Religion: A resource or barrier to women's citizenship? 15
2.3 Feminism and religion 17
2.4 Religion, gender and power 22
2.5 Gender, religion and citizenship 25
2.6 Religion, citizenship and identity 28
2.7 Religion and gender equality 31

3 RESEARCH METHODS 34

3.1 Introduction 34
3.2 How are issues of gender, feminism, religion, identity and citizenship talked about in our interviews? 34
3.3 Location of study 36
3.4 Research strategy 37
3.5 Overview of participating organisations in the UK 39
3.5.1 Brief history of religious institutions 40
3.6 Selection and Recruitment 41
3.7 Characteristics of Participants in the Study 43
3.8 Research ethics 44
3.9 In-depth interviews 44
3.10 Analysis of data 45
3.11 Limitations of the study 46
3.12 Insider/outsider problematic 47

4 ANALYSIS – IDENTITY 49

4.1 Introduction 49
4.2 How is the meaning of religion to identity represented in the interviews? 49
4.2.1 Participants' identity 49
4.2.2 Personal achievement: career and independence 49
4.2.3 Family Relations 50
4.2.4 Ethnicity and nationality 51
4.2.5 Against labelling 52
4.3 Importance of religion to identity 54
4.3.1 Rejection of the label 'religion' 54
4.3.2 Religion as a way of life 56

4.3.3 Conclusion 59

5 ANALYSIS - CITIZENSHIP 60

5.1 Introduction 60
5.2 How is citizenship talked about? 60
5.2.1 Understanding of citizenship 60
5.2.2 Legal and political citizenship 61
5.2.3 Community/belonging 64
5.2.4 Participation 66
5.3 Nationality discourse 67
5.3.1 British as a legal requirement 67
5.3.2 Cultural heritage 68
5.3.3 Race and religion 69
5.4 The British identity 70
5.4.1 Being English and/or British 70
5.4.2 Becoming British 72
5.4.3 Not British 72
5.5 Religious citizenship 74
5.5.1 Religious citizenship as prescriptive in both religions 74
5.5.2 Linkages between religion and citizenship 77
5.5.3 Conclusion 81
5.6 How Multiculturalism is talked about 82
5.6.1 Introduction 82
5.6.2 Discourse on multiculturalism 82
5.6.3 Different cultures and faiths 82
5.6.4 Accommodating the 'Other' 84
5.6.5 Politically correct 85
5.6.6 What Culture? 86
5.7 Relevance of multiculturalism 88
5.7.1 Multiculturalism as a religious principle: 'Heaven is multicultural' 88
5.7.2 Religion as a component of multiculturalism 89
5.7.3 Challenges of multiculturalism 91
5.7.4 Conclusion 93
5.8 Is religion represented as a resource or as a barrier (or both) to citizenship as practice? 93
5.8.1 Religion as a barrier? 94
5.8.2 Perceived barriers 94
5.8.3 Ethnicity as a barrier 96
5.8.4 Other barriers 97
5.9 Religion as a resource? 99
5.9.1 No advantages to participation 99
5.9.2 Advantages 99
5.9.3 Religion 100
5.9.4 Ethnicity and education as a resource 101
5.9.5 Education 102
5.9.6 Conclusion 103

6 ANALYSIS - GENDER EQUALITY 105

6.1 Introduction 105

6.2 How is gender equality and women rights talked about? 105
6.2.1 Gender equality as prescriptive gender relations based on the Qur'an 105
6.2.2 Gender equality as difference or sameness 109
6.2.3 Conclusion 116
6.3 How are feminism and the women's movement talked about? 118
6.3.1 Discourse on Feminism 118
6.3.2 Feminist as a label 124
6.3.3 Discourse on women's movement 128
6.3.4 Women's movement and faith 131
6.3.5 The women's movement and private life 137
6.3.6 Conclusion 142
6.4 How are gender relations practiced in the religious context 143
6.4.1 Motivation for adherence to religion 144
6.4.2 The converted 144
6.4.3 Socialised 145
6.4.4 Space as available and unavailable 146
6.5 Religious figures to admire 149
6.5.1 Admired Muslim Figures 150
6.5.2 Figures admired by Christian women 151
6.6 Practice of gender relations 152
6.6.1 Gender-mixed activities 153
6.6.2 Women-only activities 154
6.7 Changes in gender relations 157
6.8 Is religion represented as fixed, as flexible, or both? What aspects are talked about as fixed, or as flexible? 163
6.9 Conclusion 168
6.10 Muslim Women's Clothing 169
6.10.1 Religious motivation 169
6.10.2 Defence of the form of clothing 172
6.10.3 Conclusion 174

7 CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 176

7.1 Conclusions 176
7.2 Religion, identity and meaning 176
7.3 Citizenship 178
7.4 Gender equality, feminism, and the women's movement 181
7.5 Good practice and policy recommendations 185

REFERENCES 187

Appendices i

Appendix 1: Introductory Letter i
Appendix 2: Topic Guides iii
Appendix 3: Consent form xi

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1 CITIZENSHIP, GENDER, AND RELIGIOUS REGIMES

1.1 Our research project

The overall question to be addressed in FEMCIT is the relationship between the changing forms and practices of gendered citizenship in a multicultural Europe, and the demands and practices which have emerged from 'second wave' women's movements from the late 1960s and onwards. The religious arena, in the form of churches, mosques, temples, and other religious organisations, is one of the places in which gender relations are formed and negotiated. At the same time, the religious arena, including the gendered structures within it, provides spaces where women and men act as citizens. While religious organisations may sometimes produce barriers to or actively limit the practicing of equal citizenship for women and men, at other times they may offer formal and/or informal opportunities for more gender equal citizenship practices.

The aim of our Strand 2 research is to identify and assess how women's individual religious identities and practices within mainly organisational religious contexts may provide both resources and barriers to citizenship. Our project examines links between women's gendered citizenship and their gendered religious identity and practice through studying whether and how organised religion can provide women with a platform for exercising active citizenship.

In line with our focus in Strand 1, we investigate religious identities and practices among ethnic 'majority' and 'minority' women in different contexts, and in order to capture the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and religion we have included both Christian and Muslim women in our research. We ask whether and how women within Christian and Muslim faith traditions use their religious identities and practices to define and mark their identities as women and as citizens, and how religious organisations they participate in provide opportunities and/or constraints for their citizenship practice. We mainly approach these questions through organised or institutionalised religious life, as we are interested in whether and how women experience constraints and opportunities for active citizenship through their participation in organisational religious structures (churches and mosques). In order

to explore possible links between religious women, feminism, and the women's movement, one of the questions we ask is whether the interviewed women's personal religious faith and practice has been influenced by women's movements, and whether or not the women identify with feminism. Moreover, we seek to understand the extent to which they actively embrace or resist an agenda for gender equality.

Our Strand 2 research consists of qualitative case studies in three countries: Norway, Spain, and the United Kingdom. We have chosen these three countries because they offer distinct examples of citizenship/immigration, gender, and religious regimes (defined as current state policies towards citizenship/immigration, gender equality, and religion). The three countries have different emigration and immigration histories, and current and past policies on immigration, citizenship, faith and religious belief, are influenced by these varying historical and geographical contexts. Both Spain and the UK are EU member states, although with different affiliations to the treaty, and may thus directly influence, and in turn be influenced by, European legislation and policies.[1] Norway has chosen to affiliate with the EU as a member of the Extended Economic Area, and is, thus, indirectly influenced by EU policies and has less direct influence on the formulation and implementation of EU policies.

While our next aim is to develop a comparative analysis of our findings in the three countries, this working paper presents findings from one of our case studies, that of the United Kingdom.

1.2 Citizenship and immigration regime

Since 1927, with the Royal and Parliamentary Titles Act 1927[2], when the British Isles were reconstituted to recognise separation of southern Ireland, the country has been known as the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (the UK). The history of empire and post-colonial immigration has strongly influenced the UK and

[1] The UK became an EU-member state in 1973, while Spain joined the EU in 1986.
[2] http://www.statutelaw.gov.uk/content.aspx?LegType=All+Primary&PageNumber=84&NavFrom=2&parentActiveTextDocId=1080244&ActiveTextDocId=1080244&filesize=4238 [accessed March 29, 2010].

has, among other things, led to the formulation of strong anti-racist and anti-discrimination laws and policies. The most recent available figures, from the 2001 UK Census, show that ethnic minorities make up 4.6 million individuals or 7.9 per cent of the UK total population.[3]

A citizenship regime can be described as '… the institutional arrangements, rules and understandings that guide and shape concurrent policy decisions and expenditures of states, problem definitions by states and citizens, and claims making by citizens' (Jenson, 2000: 232). Saharso (2007) suggests citizenship regimes can be categorised into three models: the republican model, the ethno-cultural model, and the multicultural model. These models vary according to the rules they determine for access to citizenship, and in the extent to which they demonstrate a country's willingness to recognise religious and cultural diversity among its polity. The UK's model of citizenship is described as multicultural; a model which promotes cultural and religious diversity with relatively easy access to citizenship and recognition of cultural differences (Kılıc¸, Saharso, and Sauer, 2008). In this section we briefly present the institutional arrangements and rules covering citizenship in the UK.

There are four routes to the acquisition of citizenship in the UK: through descent, declaration, marriage, or adoption. UK law has always distinguished between natural born British citizens and those who acquire its citizenship. However, several laws have been enacted to review the immigration legislation since World War II, including the British Nationality Act 1948, the Commonwealth Immigration Act 1962, and the most recent law, the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act which was passed in 2009.[4]

Immigrants with legal residence status are entitled to apply for citizenship after five years of residence in the UK,[5] but since 2005 applicants must additionally pass either a 'Life in the UK' test requiring English language proficiency and substantive

[3] http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=273 [accessed January 29, 2010].
[4] http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2009/pdf/ukpga_20090011_en.pdf, [accessed January 29, 2010].
[5] If an individual is married to or a civil partner of a British citizen, he or she can apply for citizenship after three years of residence (http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/britishcitizenship/eligibility/ [accessed January 15, 2009].

knowledge about British history, politics, and culture, or an English for Speakers of Other Languages course, in order to become citizens. Statistics show that the main nationalities granted British citizenship in 2008 were Indian, Pakistani, Iraqi, Somali and Zimbabwean (Danzelman, 2009).

Victims of domestic violence with insecure immigration status were given the right to remain in the UK through government concessions in 1999 and 2002. The concessions were largely given due to pressure from Southall Black Sisters and other women's organisations. Despite the concessions, however, the 'no recourse to public funds rule' in effect denies an estimated 600 women per year access to safety because women's refuges cannot access public funding for housing costs on behalf of immigrant women with insecure immigration status (Amnesty International UK and Southall Black Sisters, 2008).

In 2009, the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act introduced a new policy of 'earned citizenship', and laid out three basic routes to citizenship for immigrants. The work route for highly skilled and skilled workers, the family route for individuals related to existing British citizens and permanent residents, and, finally, the protection route for refugees and migrants given humanitarian protection. The 2009 Act also outlines three stages migrants must go through before obtaining citizenship, from temporary residence to probationary citizenship to British citizenship or permanent residence. The Act also introduces 'Active citizenship', viewed as participation in the voluntary sector, which will speed up the application process significantly for individuals who volunteer to contribute to community activities.

The UK government recognises that citizenship encompasses much more than legal status,[6] it identifies that citizenship is also about what society and the state expects from individuals, how each individual can get involved in making the country better, and feeling a sense of belonging to the community in which they live. Responsibility for promoting and building citizenship runs across the government. The Ministry of Justice has responsibility for constitutional arrangements, the Home office has responsibility for the legal status of citizenship, the Department for Schools, Children

[6] http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/681624.pdf [accessed April 1, 2010].

and Families has responsibility for citizenship education, and the Department of Culture Media and Sport supports ways communities can come together and express their shared identity.

Further, the Border and Immigration Agency reviews how the process of becoming a citizen can enhance the integration of individual migrants into UK society. This includes consideration of issues such as the values that newcomers should be committed to, and how the country can help newcomers learn about such values. It is expected of newcomers to demonstrate their commitment to 'British values' and a 'British way of life'. As part of its contribution to promoting citizenship, the Department of Communities and Local Government encourages local authorities to build a sense of belonging in local communities and to help people cope with change and encourage them to play a part in improving their communities. This is to ensure the building of both community cohesion and community empowerment.[7]

In addition, the government has introduced other programmes such as 'Citizens' Day Framework',[8] which is to provide support for the celebration of local achievements, to build and renew community cohesion, and to develop greater local engagement. Moreover, the 'Action Plan for Community Empowerment: Building on Success',[9] published in 2007, sets out government plans to increase participation, collective action and engagement in democracy; change attitudes towards community empowerment; and improve the performance of public services and people's quality of life. In 2007 the government also produced a paper to parliament, 'Governance of Britain', which includes proposals on how the rights and responsibilities of the citizen can be upheld and enhanced.[10]

1.3 Gender regime

The UK has a strong record of prohibiting discrimination based on gender, but substantive measures to reduce gender inequality have largely been absent. In

[7] Ibid.
[8] http://www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk/lib_res_pdf/0733.pdf [accessed April 1, 2010].
[9] http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/actionplan.pdf [accessed April 1, 2010].
[10] http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm71/7170/7170.pdf [accessed April 1, 2010].

1995, the UK was classified by McBride Stetson and Mazur (1995) as a country with a gender policy machinery that enjoyed high influence on equal employment policies, but the policy machinery was considered as giving 'low access' to feminist groups (ibid.: 275). The relatively strong position of the then Equal Opportunities Commission was taken as an indicator of the high influence enjoyed by this specific gender policy machinery on equal employment policies.

Since 1997, with the election of the Labour Government, the gender policy machinery in the UK has developed significantly in terms of new institutions and wider access to feminist and women's groups. Today it could be argued that the various parts of the policy machinery in the UK is giving relatively high access to a small and stable number of women's organisations that actively seek to influence government policy (Nyhagen Predelli et al., 2008). The current gender machinery is, however, considered relatively weak in terms of government influence, and feminist and women's groups do not always think it worthwhile to direct their advocacy and lobbying efforts through institutions such as the Gender Equality Unit (previously named the Women and Equality Unit).

The UK has a varied landscape of women's organisations established on the basis of a number of different interests, including gender inequality, women's empowerment, environment, faith/religion, health, and sports. The first women's organisations established by ethnic minority women in the UK were formed in the 1970s, and included the Brixton Black Women's Group, Liverpool Black Sisters, Manchester Black Women's Co-operative, and the Muslim Ladies Circle.

Women's organisations experience an unequal distribution of government access and influence, depending on the type of women's organization (ethnic majority/ethnic minority) and the specific gender policy area. Minoritised women's organisations are almost exclusively being consulted on 'ethnic minority women's issues' related to gender violence, and are rarely consulted on other issues such as education, the labour market, etc. Majoritised women's organisations in the UK, however, seem to increasingly engage in 'ethnic minority women's issues', not only related to gender violence, but also related to the labour market and political participation (the primary example being the Fawcett Society). Both government and women's organisations

are in the process of implementing more intersectional approaches to inequality, where not only gender, but also race/ethnicity and other inequalities are analysed and included in political claims-making.

A significant development towards an intersectional approach to inequality by government took place with the establishment of the *Equality and Human Rights* Commission, which includes gender, sexual orientation, race, disability, religion and belief, and age in its remit. Moreover, the *Government Equalities Office* is leading the government's overall strategy on equality with a lead role for policies related to the equality strands of gender and sexuality (other major equality strands include disability, age, race, and faith/belief, but the responsibility for these is located within various other government departments). Women's movement organisations are concerned with the possibility that gender might receive lesser attention from government within an intersectional approach to inequality.

The United Nations Human Development Index offers comparable data on key indicators related to gender development. In the table below, we show some of the relevant statistics for the three countries in which we have conducted our case-studies (Norway, Spain, and the UK), thus offering a glimpse into some of the key characteristics of and differences between the three countries. Norway is a top scorer on both the HDI (Human Development Rank; second place) and the GEM (Gender Empowerment; first place) measures. Neither Spain nor the UK score in the top ten on these two measures, with Spain obtaining the 13th and 12th places on the two measures, respectively, and the UK obtaining the 16th and 14th places, respectively. In all three countries women received the right to vote before the 2nd world war, but women have not gained full parity in any of the three parliaments. In Norway, women hold 38 per cent of the parliamentary seats, while in Spain they hold 31 per cent and in the UK only 19 per cent. At the ministerial level, however, Spain is highly advanced with women holding 50 per cent of ministerial posts, while in Norway and the UK women hold 44 and 27 per cent, respectively, of ministerial posts. All three countries have some way to go in terms of gender equality in earnings, with Norway as the most developed country and women earning 77 per cent of men's income, while in Spain and in the UK women earn 50 and 66 per cent, respectively, of men's income.

Table Gender development data

	Norway[11]	Spain[12]	United Kingdom[13]
Population in 2005	4.6 million	43.4 million	60.2 million
HDI Human Development Rank	2	13	16
Women obtained right to vote	1913	1931	1918, 1928
Women seats in parliament	38%	31%	19%
Women in government at ministerial level	44%	50%	27%
GEM Gender Empowerment Measure	1	12	14
Ratio estimated female to male earned income	0.77	0.50	0.66

1.4 Religious regime

Norway, Spain and the UK demonstrate different 'religious regimes', including both similar and different aspects in the relationship between religion and the state. Similarly, all three countries have a historical Christian majority church, while other religions have first and foremost become established through post World War 2 immigration. In all three countries, religious minorities are facing 'low restrictions', meaning they are basically free to operate as they wish (Fox, 2008).

Fox characterises the UK as having *a historical or cultural state religion* in the form of the Anglican Church of England and the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. A historical or cultural state religion is described by Fox as 'official state religions, but other than this official designation their governments take few or no steps to support the religion more than they support any other religion. Other than funding for religious education and perhaps some other minor funding of religion, their involvement in religion tends to be symbolic, ceremonial, and generally a result of historical momentum rather than any active support for religion' (ibid.: 119).

[11] http://hdrstats.undp.org/countries/data_sheets/cty_ds_NOR.html
[12] http://hdrstats.undp.org/countries/data_sheets/cty_ds_ESP.html
[13] http://hdrstats.undp.org/countries/data_sheets/cty_ds_GBR.html

In the UK, Christianity, including Catholic, Presbyterian, Pentecostal and other denominations, is the major religion. Like in other European countries, Islam is the second largest religion in the UK in terms of the number of people adhering to it. Although religious freedom is provided by law, there are limitations on some minority religions (for example Scientology). While the UK has no written constitution, its official religions are the Church of England (Anglican) and the Church of Scotland (Presbyterian). Furthermore, each of the four nations (England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales), has distinct religious forms and practices (Weller, 2008). In Northern Ireland there is no state religion, but Catholics constitute the largest denomination with Presbyterians the second largest. Wales, on the other hand, has no single predominant Christian denomination that serves as the national focus (ibid).

The Christian religion also influences government legislation in the UK, as bishops have seats in the House of Lords. However, the practice of preferential treatment of one religion through the allocation of parliamentary seats is being questioned within the context of a multi-religious Britain.[14]

The presence of Muslims in the UK can be attributed to slavery in the 18th century and immigration from the 1960s and onwards. Hussain and Choudhury (2007) traced the presence of Muslims in the UK from the 18th century, when sailors from the Indian subcontinent were employed by the British East India Company. In the 1960s large scale migration of unskilled male workers from South Asia took place. Muslims were also among the East African Asians who began arriving in the late 1960s and early 1970s under pressure from the 'Africanisation' policies in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. In the 1980s, Muslims also began to arrive in the UK in significant numbers as refugees from the Balkans, East Africa, the Middle East, and Turkey. Relations between the British state and Muslim communities have recently become highly politicised, due to the terrorist attacks in New York in 2001 and in London in 2005. Government programmes seeking to reduce the threat of terrorism

[14] http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/cofe/cofe_1.shtml [accessed April 15, 2010].

through the so-called 'prevent agenda' has specifically targeted intervention in and engagement with Muslim communities (see below).[15]

In general, the UK government does not provide funding to the state churches, with the exception of funds for the repair of historical church buildings (Fox, 2008: 120). The government does however fund several thousand faith schools, most of which are Anglican and Catholic. A small minority of the publicly funded faith schools are Jewish, Methodist, Sikh, Muslim, Greek Orthodox, and Seventh Day Adventist. Moreover, the UK government does not fund purely religious activities, but the through Local Authorities the government engages faith-based organisations or groups to provide public services. Faith based organisations were included in the framework of third sector organisations in the late 1990s; however, in order to receive public funding they must, just like all other organisations, demonstrate that they are working in ways that ensure the delivery of key government policies and strategies.[16] The UK government recognises that faith-based bodies and religious organisations contribute significantly to the progress of society. Therefore, they are eligible to be awarded a tender or grants to deliver publicly funded services such as homeless shelters, or pregnancy advice. However, funds received are not primarily to be used to promote solely religious activities but wider faith-based work for the common good. All religious organisations providing public services are subject to the government's equality legislation, which makes it unlawful to discriminate against faith-based organisations in tendering processes. Moreover, faith-based organisations are subject to the discrimination laws that apply to all other organisations, meaning they should not discriminate against clients based on their gender, ethnicity, faith, and so on. In particular circumstances, however, faith-based organisations can receive funding to provide services for a particular religious community as part of service provision to enhance service access to particular vulnerable groups in the community; one example is the provision of Kosher meals on wheels to older Jewish people.[17]

[15] See http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/prevent/faithcapacity/ [accessed April 15, 2010].
[16] http://www.fbrn.org.uk/%E2%80%98non-faith-specific%E2%80%99-central-government-funding [accessed March 29, 2010].
[17] http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/ensuringalevel [accessed March 29, 2010].

In 2005, as part of the UK government's racial equality strategy, engaging with faith communities was identified as one means to deliver essential government policies such as crime reduction, anti-social behaviour and issues affecting young people. The government created the Faith Communities Consultative Council with membership drawn from the nine major world faiths: Baha'i, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Zoroastrianism. The Council is a non-statutory body, chiefly concerned with issues relating to community cohesion, integration, the development of sustainable communities, neighbourhood renewal, and social inclusion. The Council also oversees the engagement between central government and faith communities and takes a broad and strategic view of the role of faith communities in national life.

Furthermore, the government has set up the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund to support capacity building and inter-faith programmes including the increased participation of faith communities in civil society. In the first year, 2006, 588 organisations benefited from an 8.8 million pounds funding pot.[18] In 2007, the fund's focus was on citizenship and working with women and young people; out of the 1,229 who applied 343 were successful in receiving a total of 4.3 million pounds.[19] A three-year framework was launched in 2008 with a funding of 7.5 million pounds to support activities that promote stronger dialogue between different faiths and beliefs to build community cohesiveness.[20] Another funding source specifically aiming at Muslim communities was also launched in 2007, the Preventing Violent Extremism Pathfinder Fund. This fund, with 5.5 million pounds, supports local authorities in their work to tackle violent extremism through programmes that intend to encourage Muslim communities to reject and condemn such extremism.[21]

In recognition of the fact that the UK has become more ethnically, racially and culturally diverse, government aims to build a community of shared set of values and

[18] http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/160560.pdf [accessed March 29, 2010].
[19] http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/improving-opportunity.pdf [accessed March 29, 2010].
[20] http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/11529661.pdf [accessed March 29, 2010].
[21] http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/320330.pdf [accessed March 29, 2010].

a sense of purpose and belonging for each community to benefit from its diversity. The government views the engagement of faith communities as relevant for community cohesion. Through the Equality and Human Rights Commission, the government launched a strategy in 2005 to increase race equality and community cohesion.[22] The strategy extends protection against religious discrimination in the provision of goods and services. The provisions in the strategy bans:

- direct discrimination, where a person is treated less favourably than another on the grounds of his or her religion or belief, such as where a shopkeeper refuses to serve someone because of his or her religion, or a landlord refuses to rent accommodation to a person because of their faith, or a hotel allocates the worst rooms to those of a particular religion;
- indirect discrimination, where a requirement or practice has the effect of putting people of a particular religion or belief at a disadvantage that cannot be justified, for example where an entertainment venue sets unreasonable dress restrictions; and
- victimisation, where someone is treated less favourably than others because, for example, they have complained of discrimination or have assisted someone else in a complaint.[23]

1.5 Demography: Religion and ethnicity

The UK's population is culturally diverse, and in the most current population census (from 2001), White Christians were identified as the largest single group. The census revealed that 72 per cent of the population identify as Christian, with the next highest identification being Muslim, constituting three per cent.[24] More specifically, in England and Wales, eight out of ten ethnically white identify with the Christian religion, while nearly seven out of ten Black Caribbean and Black African identify as Christian. In contrast, more than 9 in 10 Pakistani and Bangladeshi identify as Muslim.[25] However, Weller (2008) points out that white Muslims constitute 11.6 per

[22] http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/racecohesionfaith/ [accessed March 31, 2010].
[23] http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/152393.pdf [accessed March 31, 2010].
[24] http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=293 [accessed January 29, 2010].
[25] http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/ethnic_group_statistics/downloads/ethnic_group_statistics.pdf [accessed January 29, 2010].

cent of the Muslim population, which includes Middle Eastern respondents who opted for the 'white' descriptor amongst the pre-set categories of response of the Census. Thus, in the UK we are most likely to meet Christians who are either ethnically white or black, and Muslims who are of Pakistani background.

Majority and minorities

The concept of 'minority' generally refers to core elements such as reasonably 'stable ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics which are different from the rest of the population, including a numerical minority position, non-dominance and a separate cultural identity which the minority itself wants to preserve' (Henrard, 2000: 30-48 in Freidenvall, 2010:5). In this report, the concept of religious minority refers to numerical minorities, and 'minority women' refers to women in these groups. The word 'minoritised', however, refers to the relational character of minority women, potentially being placed in an inferior and marginalized position in relation to both majority women and men, and to minority men.

In the Norwegian context, Roald (2005: 20) discusses the meeting of ethnic Norwegians and people with a Muslim background. Relations between the religious majority and religious minorities are infused with power, she claims. The majority is inclined to perceive itself as carriers of objective, universal truths – exempt from negotiation – compared to the minorities' representing 'strange' and 'weird' practices that ought to change. Roald points to the idea that mental mechanisms make us inclined to compare our own ideals with the (worst) practices of 'the other' (ibid.: 20). In the empirical chapters, we examine the ways in which the majority-minority problematic is conceived by our respondents.

1.6 Chapter overview

This working paper consists of seven chapters. Chapter 1 introduces our research project and discusses the citizenship, gender and religious regimes of the UK. Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical perspectives of women's gendered citizenship and their gendered religious identity which informs our research. Chapter 3 briefly describes the location of the field work and discusses the methods employed for the field work and data analysis. It also details the analytical approach and questions

applied to the analysis. Chapter 4 presents the analysis of our data on identity and discusses how participants in our study constructed the meaning of religion to their identities. Chapter 5 provides an insight into the forms and practices of gendered citizenship and examines whether religion is presented as a resource or barrier to citizenship by the religious women we interviewed. Chapter 6 explores the discourses of religious women on gender equality, feminism and the women's movement, and their perception of gender relations in their respective faiths. Chapter 6 also presents some views on Muslim women's clothing raised by participants in our study. The conclusion and suggestions for good practice and policy recommendations can be found in Chapter 7.

2 RELIGION, GENDER, FEMINISM AND CITIZENSHIP

2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research focus of FEMCIT WP4, Strand 2. It introduces the theoretical perspectives which inform our research and the analytical approaches applied in the analysis of our data.

2.2 Religion: A resource or barrier to women's citizenship?

As stated in the introduction to this working paper, the overall question to be addressed in FEMCIT is the relationship between the changing forms and practices of gendered citizenship in a multicultural Europe, and the demands and practices which have emerged from 'second wave' women's movements from the late 1960s and onwards. The religious arena, in the form of churches, mosques, temples, and other types of religious organisations, is one of the places in which gender relations are formed and negotiated. At the same time, the religious arena, including the gendered structures within it, provides spaces where women and men act as citizens. While religious organisations may sometimes produce barriers to or actively limit the practicing of equal citizenship for women and men, at other times they may offer formal and/or informal opportunities for more gender equal citizenship practices. Scholars have identified various features of religious faiths, including Christianity, Islam and Judaism, as patriarchal and oppressive to women, but other dimensions have been interpreted as conducive to the 'liberation' or 'empowerment' of women (see, e.g., Brasher, 1998; Ahmed, 1992; Davidman, 1991). The aim of our Strand 2 research is to identify and assess how individual religious identities and practices within organisational religious contexts may provide both resources and barriers to citizenship. Our project examines links between women's gendered citizenship and their gendered religious identity and practice through studying whether and how organised religion can provide women with a platform for exercising active citizenship.

In line with our focus in Strand 1, we investigate religious identities and practices among ethnic majority and minority women in different contexts. Gunaratnam (2003)

applies a social constructivist perspective to the usage of the terms ‘majority’ and ‘minority’. She uses the term ‘ethnic minority’ not in a descriptive sense as such usage would reinforce and reify differences that are created through social exclusion, racism and discrimination. Rather, Gunaratnam views the labels ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ and their connotations as socially constructed, and thus uses these terms within quotation marks. She prefers the terms ‘minoritised’ and ‘majoritised’ as they signal ‘the active processes of racialisation that are at work in designating certain attributes of groups in particular contexts as being in a ‘minority [or in a majority]’’ (Gunaratnam, 2003: 17). In our research we use the terms ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ as socially constructed labels, and we use them interchangeably with those suggested by Gunaratnam (‘majoritised’ and ‘minoritised’) in order to signal that the labelling of groups of people is in large part determined by existing power relations and differentials between different groups in society.

Another ‘layer’ of the ‘majority-minority’ problematic is embedded in the religious sphere, as some religions may be linked with the state and/or with the ‘majority’ ethnic group in a particular nation state. In Western Europe, Christianity has historically been accorded, and continues to enjoy, a privileged status as the ‘majority religion’. Although practices within majoritised Christian religious organisations have been and continue to be gendered in various ways, it is possible that both women and men who adhere to Christian forms of faith and practice may experience less barriers and constraints on their citizenship practice than women and men who adhere to ‘non-Christian’ or ‘minority’ faiths. Religions such as Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism, and new religious movements, do not enjoy a similarly privileged position in Western European countries, and are in large part associated with various ethnic ‘minority’ groups. Practices within these minoritised religious faith traditions are also in many ways gendered, and women and men may experience additional barriers and constraints on their citizenship practice due to their minoritisation in relation to ethnicity and religion. Moreover, women within minoritised religions may be further discriminated against due to their gender, thus constituting a ‘minority within a minority’ (Eisenberg and Spinner-Halev, 2005).

In order to capture the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and religion, we have included both majoritised (Christian) women and minoritised (Muslim) women in our

research. We ask whether and how women within Christian and Muslim faith traditions use their religious identities and practices to define and mark their identities as women and as citizens, and how religious organisations they participate in provide opportunities and/or constraints for their citizenship practice. We approach these questions mainly through organised or institutionalised religious life, as we are interested in whether and how women experience constraints and opportunities for active citizenship through their participation in organisational religious structures (churches and mosques).

2.3 Feminism and religion

In order to explore possible links between religious women, feminism, and the women's movement, one of the questions we ask is whether the interviewed women's personal religious faith and practice has been influenced by women's movements, and whether or not the women identify with feminism. Moreover, we seek to understand the extent to which they actively embrace or resist an agenda for gender equality.

Women's place within religious belief and practice has been a contested issue for feminists since the beginning of the 'second wave' women's movements in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and, indeed, since the 'first wave' women's movements of the late 19th and early 20th century (see Morgan, 2002). In the UK context, for example, Christianity, Judaism and Islam have been scrutinised by religious and non-religious feminist women alike, and the question of whether religious belief can co-exist with feminist values has been vigorously debated. The journal of the organization *Women Against Fundamentalism* devoted a special issue to these topics in 1996 (WAF, 1996), where questions such as 'Why can't I be a Jewish feminist?' and 'Is there a space for feminism in Islam?' where posed by participants in the women's movement.

Far from being alienated from the women's movement, religious feminist women have identified with and sought to influence the women's movement in directions compatible with their faith. Moreover, religious feminists have sought to change gendered practices within their own faith traditions by arguing, for example, that

women should be allowed to perform various functions that have traditionally been the preserve of men. In the Christian tradition, women have challenged, and in some churches successfully overcome, the notion that functions related to religious leadership and evangelisation should be performed by men only. In the Muslim tradition, and especially in the West, women are taking on new roles related to religious leadership, and the notion that the functions of the Imam are a strictly male preserve have been challenged through high-profile women-led religious events in the UK and the USA (Roald, 2001; Wadud, 2006; Haddad et al., 2006).

Whether or not women's movements have influenced gender and power relations within religious organisations is a complex empirical question. Some non-religious feminists have rejected religion outright, claiming that all world-religions are patriarchal, and have opted for non-engagement with religion (e.g., Okin, 1999; Siddiqui, 2008). Feminist philosopher Susan Moller Okin, who in the 1990s became a reference point for all scholarly discussions about gender and multiculturalism, argued that the protection of minority cultures through group rights or privileges could have anti-feminist consequences in instances where specific cultures or religions endorse male control of women (Okin, 1999). Okin specifically identified Judaism, Christianity and Islam with founding myths that 'attempts to justify the control and subordination of women' (ibid.: 14). Acknowledging that progressive versions of these religions have 'softened' the drive to control women, Okin is nonetheless concerned about 'their more orthodox or fundamentalist versions' (ibid.: 14) which continue to propagate women's subordination. Viewing such patriarchal practices as fundamentally ingrained in certain cultures, Okin famously argued that women in patriarchal 'minority' cultures '*might* be much better off if the culture into which they were born were either to become extinct (so that its members would become integrated into the less sexist surrounding cultures, or preferably, to be encouraged to alter itself so as to reinforce the equality of women' (ibid.: 22-23). A strong reading of Okin would lead to a politics of assimilation and ethnocentrism, where minority groups would be called upon to rid themselves of any minoritised cultural characteristics and assimilate into the perceived hegemonic culture. A softer reading, however, does not necessarily imply assimilationist policies, but leaves us with the question of how to solve the multicultural dilemma of recognizing (through the granting of rights and privileges) ethnic, cultural and religious minorities whilst

protecting ‘minority’ groups (e.g. women and other disadvantaged groups) within such minorities. If cultural or religious groups are allowed to practice gender discrimination, conflicts inevitably arise between women’s rights to equality and the group’s rights to possibly override such equality rights. On this issue, Sunstein (1999) points to the asymmetry between the fact that ‘most civil and criminal law’ apply to religious institutions, whilst ‘law banning sex discrimination’ does not.

The feminist political theorist Ann Phillips has suggested that ‘multiculturalism can be made compatible with the pursuit of gender equality and women’s rights so long as it dispenses with an essentialist understanding of culture’ (Phillips, 2007: 9). Essentialist readings of culture imply that cultural practices are static and unchangeable, which in turn has the effect that minoritised women in particular are seen as devoid of agency and ‘victims of culture’. Forwarding instead a view of culture (and religion) as changeable and as contested from both within and outside, Phillips suggests that Okin’s strong demarcation between egalitarian and patriarchal cultures is not very useful in moving towards a liberal practice that endorses both equality and difference. Phillips suggests three so-called ‘limiting principles’ in relation to whether or not social practices should be accepted or not, including protecting minors from harm, preventing physical and mental violence, and ensuring equal treatment of women and men (ibid.: 34). The notion of ‘equal treatment’ of women and men is of course a highly contested issue, not least within the women’s movement itself, as different interpretations of what counts as ‘equality’ (from feminists and non-feminists alike) compete with each other. In relation to religious belief and practice, the question arises whether it should be tolerated and/or accepted that women are accorded less rights, status and privileges than men. Moreover, even if such beliefs and practices are tolerated and accepted, should they also be endorsed, either directly or indirectly, by the state (through financial or other regulations)?

In contrast to secular feminists, religious feminists have accepted the notion that religion may be used to support gender inequality and the discrimination of women, but they have generally rejected the notion that religions are *necessarily* patriarchal (e.g., Roald, 2001; Wadud, 1999 and 2006). Rather than rejection, religious feminists have chosen a route of engagement with their own religious tradition in an

attempt to change gendered practices from within. They have started a process of reinterpreting their religious faith to reconcile it with their feminist beliefs. Such reinterpretations have taken place across a variety of religious belief, including Christianity and Islam (e.g., Daly, 1994; Mernissi, 1991; Wadud, 1999; Cochran, 2005). Their position has found resonance with religious feminist and scholar Martha Nussbaum who is very critical of Okin's view of religion as irreversibly patriarchal. Nussbaum charges Okin with a fundamentally Marxist analysis of religion, where religion 'is little more than a bag of superstitions' ultimately aiming to control women (Nussbaum, 1999: 105). Highlighting instead aspects of religion as conducive to providing people with meaning, purpose and a sense of community, Nussbaum argues that internal religious debates within various faith traditions have been 'highly pertinent to religion's role in the search for women's equality' (ibid.: 107). She suggests that religion can 'contribute to the struggle for justice', including the struggle for gender equality, and that religious feminists are thus potential allies of secular feminists (ibid.).

Today, women from religious faiths including Christianity, Islam and Judaism continue to grapple with questions of faith and gender justice (see Manning, 1999), but Islam has become singled out as the most contested religion of the day due to perceived links between the Islamic faith and religious extremism in the form of terror attacks in New York, Madrid, and London. Moreover, Islam has become a symbol of women's oppression, as the religion itself (rather than certain interpretations or practices of it) is sometimes linked with both harmful and violent practices such as forced marriage and female genital mutilation and with non-violent but allegedly patriarchal practices such as veiling. Paradoxically, according to Dustin and Phillips (2008) the acceptance by both government officials and women activists of the notion that such practices are 'grounded in culture not religious belief' has sustained and further legitimated a practice in which the UK government either abstains from interfering with religious belief and practice or privileges religious belief and practice through anti-discrimination and other laws.

Although the increased diversity among women due to immigration has had an impact on the willingness of the women's movement to take on intersectional perspectives on gender, race, and class, we have argued (Nyhagen Predelli et al.,

2008) that women's movements have yet to seriously engage with issues of faith and belief, and the way in which religion can have an impact, either positively or negatively, on women's rights and on women's position in the home and in society. Rather than dismissing or ignoring the voices of religious women as irrelevant or non-conducive to feminism, the women's movement needs to engage with religious women and build alliances with feminist religious women. In the UK, an example of such engagement is that of the Women's National Commission which has been instrumental in developing and supporting the *Muslim Women's Network* established in 2002. This network can be said to be part of the broader UK women's movement and thus by its very existence it may contribute to the deconstruction of an alleged inevitable opposition between religion and feminism. We would argue that women's movements must voice clear demands to be heard when governments engage with women's faith groups, and continue to demand the protection of established women's rights from erosion caused by pressure from conservative religious groups.

On some issues, faith-based organisations may actually erode or undermine gender equality and women's rights 'by creating pockets in society where 'religious freedoms' justify the marginalization of women' (Ghodsee, 2007; see also the section below entitled 'gender, religion and citizenship'). Religious freedom is protected in international conventions, and covers both individuals as well as religious communities. Such protection has been established mainly due to the oppression and persecution experienced by religious minorities throughout history. Today, the protection of religious freedom often collides with claims to women's rights and with rights of gays and lesbians, and the rights of women and sexual minorities often have to 'yield' to the rights of religious communities to practice in ways that discriminate against women and sexual minorities. We do not want to suggest that the protection of religious freedom is illegitimate. It could be that religious communities are sometimes justified to have the right to discriminate against women or sexual minorities. The crucial question is on what ground and to what extent. While Nussbaum (1999: 111) claims that faith communities have a right to unequal treatment of women and homosexuals within 'the core of worship', she does not define the limits of such a core. Solhøy, Strand and Økland, on the other hand, contest the claim that there is an unassailable core in religion that has the right to be

protected. They argue from the standpoint that the right of religious communities to practice unequal treatment or discrimination must be justified in each particular case.

2.4 Religion, gender and power

Sociology of religion scholars argue about how to define the phenomena they study. Inclusive definitions are often very broad and functional, and focus upon what religion 'does', including providing meaning, purpose and hope. For example, Anthony Giddens defines religion as 'a *cultural* system of commonly *shared beliefs and rituals* that provides a sense of ultimate *meaning and purpose* by creating an idea of reality that is sacred, all-encompassing and supernatural' (Giddens, 2006: 534; our emphasis). Exclusive definitions are much narrower and focus upon what religion 'is', or the content of religious belief, including whether or not it includes a belief in 'divine beings'. The starting point for our research includes a deep acceptance and acknowledgment of the importance of religious belief and practice in the lives of women and men in modern society. We do not examine the theological foundations of religious beliefs, but take the existence of religious beliefs and practices for granted. At the same time, we are interested in how religion can create meaning and identity for individuals (for women in particular), and how religion can be used as a flexible resource by individuals to support their own beliefs and practice.

The notion of religion as a flexible resource conveys the idea that religion is not so much a set of eternally fixed rules and beliefs as a malleable resource that can be adapted to various social circumstances. Religion is, in other words, a 'dynamic toolkit' (Bartkowski and Read, 2003; see also Swidler, 1986) that can be used to support a range of views and practices among adherents of a particular faith tradition. Women can thus find backing for both gender traditionalism and more egalitarian views on gender relations in their own religious traditions.

Both Christianity and Islam include elements that can be interpreted as discriminatory and subjugating, and/or as liberating for women. In particular, a literal reading of foundational religious texts will often yield evidence of discrimination against women. However, a 'softer' reading of such texts, allowing for adjustments

to contemporary contexts, including gender ideologies which support equality between women and men, allows potential for more 'women-friendly' and gender equal understandings of religious canons. Women must, to be sure, relate to the patriarchal features of their own religion, but as agents they are also capable of finding ways to achieve power and influence through religious faith and practice. Women have a tradition for mobilizing energy and resources through religious organisations (Warner, 1993; Wuthnow and Lehrman, 1990), and the religious arena is one of the spaces where the formation of and negotiations about gender relations are taking place (Nyhagen Predelli, 2008, Brasher, 1998, Stacey, 1998). Religious beliefs, practices and organisations are themselves gendered, to the extent that women and men are allocated different rights and duties and perform different religious roles.

Linda Woodhead (2007) has proposed a theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between religion and gender, and in her view *power* is central to this relationship. Woodhead approaches religion as a system of power (to which the notion of sacred power is unique), and distinguishes between religion's descriptive *situation* in relation to gender, and religion's normative *strategy* in relation to gender (ibid.: 569). On the one hand, religion is situated in relation to existing distributions of secular power, including gender power. For example, religion is empirically situated in relation to the (secular) state and the ways in which the state and society is gendered. On the other hand, religion can be normatively used to mobilise claims-making or action in relation to existing distributions of secular power, including gender power. For example, a church or any religious organization may mobilise for or against particular state policies, including policies that seek to advance gender equality.

Woodhead (2007: 569) distinguishes between four main ways in which religion can be situated in relation to gender: as mainstream, as marginal, as confirmatory, and as challenging. Religions that are situated as mainstream can be seen as *integral to* or a part of the existing hegemonic regime, including the existing gender regime. In Western Europe, various Christian faith traditions have been and often continue to be associated quite closely with the state. The Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church in Spain, and the Lutheran Church in Norway, are all examples of

'majority' religions that are still closely linked with the states in which they are located. However, the way in which they opt to relate to gender, or their strategies in relation to gender, might change and even fluctuate over time, and whether or not they resist or support changes towards gender equality is thus an empirical question.

Religions that are situated as marginal in relation to gender are, according to Woodhead, those that 'sit[ ] at more of an angle to the social and gender order' and as such are treated as 'socially deviant' by the majority (ibid.). Religions that are situated as confirmatory in relation to gender, on the other hand, 'seek[ ] to legitimate, reinforce, and sacralise the existing distribution of power in society, particularly the existing gender order' (ibid.). Finally, religions that are situated as challenging in relation to gender 'seek[ ] to ameliorate, resist or change' the existing gender order (ibid.).

Furthermore, Woodhead distinguishes between four ways in which 'religion as power' may relate to 'gender as power' (thus referring to religion's strategy in relation to gender). Firstly, a mainstream religion can act to *consolidate* existing gender differences and inequalities. An example is Orthodox Judaism, a form of religion which 'sacralise[s] gender difference and inequality' (Woodhead, 2007: 572) but which, nonetheless, manages to attract women precisely because of the traditional gender roles it endorses (Davidman, 1991).

Secondly, a mainstream religion 'can be used to give access to power from 'inside' and use it in ways which may be subversive of the existing gender order' (Woodhead, 2007: 569). Such a *tactical* pushing of the boundaries of the dominant gender order has, for example, been observed within the 19th century evangelical missionary movement. By allowing women to proselytise among potential Christian converts, and thus giving them an independent role in the mission field, the missionary movement was (albeit unintentionally) subverting the dominant gender order it otherwise upheld (Nyhagen Predelli, 2003). Missionary women were thus effectively 'bargaining with patriarchy' (Kandiyoti, 1988) by gaining an independent role and entering the male domain of preaching, whilst not radically undermining the patriarchal gender regime of the mission. Moreover, in her study of the evangelical-Charismatic 'Women's Aglow' movement in the United States, Griffith (1997) has

shown how women accept a role of female domesticity and patriarchal family rule, while using women-centred activities to exercise autonomy and empower themselves as wives and mothers.

Thirdly, a religion might be in a position of marginality to the dominant gender order, but aim towards improving it - a situation Woodhead labels as 'questing' (ibid.). A religion can thus be 'used as a means of access to [the hegemonic] power from the outside', without aiming to radically alter existing power relations but rather 'improv[ing] one's position - and well-being - within it' through a focus on inner life and spirituality (Woodhead, 2007: 575). According to Woodhead, the New Age movement or self-spirituality are the forms of religion that most clearly represent a type which 'tacitly accept[s] the dominant gender order, whilst seeking to shift the balance of power within it' (ibid.).

Fourthly, a religion may be in a position of marginality to the dominant gender order but actively 'try to contest, disrupt and redistribute' the existing gendered distribution of power (Woodhead, 2007: 569). Such a 'counter-cultural' strategy is exemplified by the Goddess feminist movement, including witches and Wicca (ibid.: 576; see also Salomonsen, 2001). A focus on 'the divine feminine in their own lives and in society', coupled with female empowerment strategies and a deep commitment to gender equality, are the main characteristics of this fourth way in which religion as power may relate to gender as power (Woodhead, 2007: 576).

In our project we ask whether and how women experience constraints and opportunities for active citizenship through their participation in religious organisations, and we attempt to link citizenship practices within religious organisations to the actual gender regimes promoted by the Norwegian, Spanish and UK nation-states. More broadly, we are investigating the relationship between gender equality, citizenship, and religious belief and practice.

2.5 Gender, religion and citizenship

Feminist studies of 'citizenship' have opened up the term from a narrow political-legal definition to a broader and more inclusive cultural-social definition, and include

attempts to analyse the extent to which women in various communities exercise citizenship in this broader sense (Lister, 2003, Tastsoglou and Dobrowolsky, 2006, Siim, 2000). The classic view of citizenship as delineating legal and political rights and duties has been challenged on several fronts, including its limitation of citizenship to the public sphere and its narrow view of citizenship as 'status'. Feminist scholarship has thus claimed that citizenship encompasses *practices* within all spheres of life - be they political, economic, social, cultural, religious, domestic or intimate. An emphasis on practice implies that citizenship is not a fixed attribute of a particular group of individuals included in a given polity, but that citizenship is contested, fluid and dynamic, and involves processes of negotiation and struggle (ibid.). A feminist perspective on citizenship would also argue that classic citizen rights such as holding a passport and voting in political elections are not gender neutral but may be distributed and applied in ways that are discriminatory of women in general and of ethnic minority, immigrant, and refugee women in particular (Lister, 2003; Tastsoglou and Dobrowolsky, 2006; see also Yuval-Davis and Werbner, 1999).

From this type of feminist argument it follows that if women do not have the same rights and opportunities as men to participate in all areas of life, that is, if women are not free to choose whether they want to act as full citizens at work, in the family, in civil society and in politics, then they are not treated as equal citizens and are hence discriminated against. In so far as rights and the freedom to choose do not guarantee equal outcomes for women and men, a radical implication of feminist theories of citizenship is that *practices* should be inclusive of women and men in all aspects of life. A precondition for inclusive practices, and hence for democracy, is *agency* - '[a] conscious capacity to choose and act at a personal and political level' (Lister, 1997: 38). Women are on the one hand agents that may put forward citizenship claims and demands in various contexts. On the other hand, their agency may be constrained or conditioned by the particular characteristics of the socio-economic, political, and religious structures in which they are embedded.

Religious practice poses a particular dilemma for a broadened notion of citizenship, as patriarchal religious laws, norms and practices are often at variance with state-implemented laws on gender equality and international conventions on human rights

such as CEDAW (Convention for the Elimination of All Discrimination Against Women). For example, in the context of Islam and human rights, traditional Sharia law legitimates and even 'requires legal discrimination of women' (Mayer, 1991: 99), and in effect undermines the protection women in Muslim states have under international conventions such as CEDAW (ibid.: 137; see also Moghadam, 2002). In the Norwegian context, the state law on gender equality prohibits discrimination against women, but religious associations are exempt from gender equality legislation and can legally discriminate 'on the basis of gender or sexual orientation when such discrimination is based on religious doctrine' (Skjeie, 2004: 6; see also Skjeie, 2006). We might say that for religious associations, including the Norwegian State Church, the issue of gender equality is deemed a private matter by the state, as religious associations are exempt from laws dictating gender equality in leadership and participation. Likewise, in Spain and the United Kingdom, religious communities are free to implement gender-discriminatory practices which would contravene gender equality laws in other social spheres such as education and the labour market. We would argue that, by virtue of their status as 'voluntary associations of civil society' (Lister, 2003: 30), religious organisations are part of the public sphere and should thus be subject to feminist investigations of citizenship. In a sense, religious institutions, in overlapping the private and public spheres, can be seen as 'borderlands' where the contestation and negotiation of citizenship may become especially acute. It can be argued that the religious arena, in its different formations across a variety of religious belief and practice, presents a test case for the inclusion or exclusion of women in the broad definition and practice of citizenship that is currently being promoted by feminist scholarship. In the words of Tita Loenen (2007: 5), 'where should one draw the line between permissible differentiation and unacceptable discrimination' on religious arenas?

A particular problem arises when the state not only tacitly accepts or tolerates practices that discriminate against women, but also actively endorses such practices through financial support. In Norway, Spain and the UK, religious organisations whose practices contradict gender equality laws applicable to other areas in society can draw on public financial resources to support such practices. Principles of religious freedom and non-interference from the state are thus privileged through financial practices, whilst principles of gender equality must, as Skjeie has argued,

effectively ‘yield’ (Skjeie, 2006). Such yielding is however difficult for feminists to accept. Moreover, rather than giving a ‘blanket freedom’ for religious communities to discriminate against women, it could be argued that any religious practice that implements discrimination should be justified by religious communities on a case-by-case basis (Solhøy, Strand and Økland, 2010).

2.6 Religion, citizenship and identity

Our project attempts to examine ‘religious citizenship’ in particular contexts, those of ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ religious organisations including churches and mosques, with a focus on women’s beliefs and practices. The idea that religion and citizenship are connected is not new; indeed, full citizenship rights are sometimes exclusively conferred by nation-states upon members of particular religions. Moreover, linkages between democracy and religion are being discussed in contemporary debates by authors such as Habermas (2006), Kymlicka and Norman (2000), Spinner-Halev (2000) and Weithman (2002). The term ‘religious citizenship’ appears, however, to be of a more recent coinage, its usage gaining momentum alongside the development in citizenship theory towards an increasing number of distinctions between different citizenship dimensions such as ecological, technological, sexual, and others (see Isin and Wood, 1999).

Although the term ‘religious citizenship’ appears to be increasingly used by scholars (including Permoser and Rosenberger, 2009; Levitt, 2004; Yip, 2003: Yip and Keenan, 2004), few offer a precise definition of what religious citizenship entails. An exception in this regard is Wayne Hudson (2003: 426), who makes a distinction between a ‘nation-state definition’, a ‘civil-society definition’, and a ‘rights of persons’-definition of religious citizenship. Our own thinking about religious citizenship is more inspired by feminist developments of citizenship theory, where citizenship is regularly presented as encompassing the following three dimensions: status and rights, participation, and identity and belonging (Lister et al., 2007; see also Bellamy et al., 2003). Status and rights refer to both collective and individual levels, where the state assigns a certain status and rights (such as the status of national/state religion or minority religion, and the right to religious practice) to collectives and

individuals.[26] Status and rights are also conferred upon collectives and individuals by religious institutions themselves. Religious institutions often design hierarchies in which different groups of people (lay men versus religious leaders; men versus women) are assigned different status and rights.[27] In turn, the status and rights conferred by nation-states and by religious institutions have implications for the *participation* of various groups and individuals as citizens acting within nation-states and within religious institutions. There is not a deterministic relationship, however, between status and rights on the one hand, and participation on the other. Despite in many instances lacking both status and rights, women have been able to circumvent and challenge discriminatory rules and conventions, and to carve out independent roles and dignified practices for themselves. In doing so, they have often drawn on their own sense of identity and belonging as a resource for empowerment and action. Religious identity and belonging can thus be a (re)source of citizenship practice. As outlined above, however, religious identities may provide both resources and barriers to citizenship, depending on what frameworks of religious meaning individuals draw upon, and how they interpret and use such frameworks to support their own actions and practice. Religion is thus a flexible resource that individuals can use to support their own identities, beliefs and practice, and as such it may have both empowering and disempowering effects.

Religious identities, as other identities, are not unitary, stable or fixed. Rather, identities are 'in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions' (Hall, 1996: 4). As such, identity is a continuous *project* (Calhoun, 1994) which we constantly work on, reshape and change through the interplay between our own life-course, our personal agency, and the social and institutional contexts in which we are located and positioned. In the words of Linda Alcoff:

> *'[s]ocial identities are not simply foisted on people from the outside, as it were, but are more properly understood as sites from which we perceive, act, and engage with others. These sites are not simply social locations or positions,*

[26] Hudson (2003: 426) refers to this dimension of religious citizenship as part of a 'nation-state definition' of religious citizenship.
[27] Hudson (2003: 426) refers to this dimension of citizenship part of a 'civil-society definition' of religious citizenship.

> *but also hermeneutic horizons comprised of experiences, basic beliefs, and communal values, all of which influence our orientation toward and responses to future experiences'.*
>
> (Alcoff, 2006: 287)

Identities, including religious and gendered identities, are thus constructed through a dynamic interplay between internal (within the individual self) and external processes which cannot easily be disentangled and observed. We find Sissel Østberg's notion of 'integrated plural identity' useful in this regard, as it captures both the floating and shifting (plural) aspects of identity and the stable and connected (integrated) aspects of identity (Østberg, 2003: 46). According to Østberg, our identities can be plural because we present ourselves in different ways depending on the particular situation or context (situational identity). Despite presenting such fragmented and varying pictures of our identities, each one of us is *her own integrated self*, in the sense that we are conscious of our (constantly created) self and how it changes over time. In this understanding of identity construction, the contradictions that may be detected in our story-telling do not necessarily demonstrate a lack of coherence in our selves. Rather, such contradictions display how we actively navigate and negotiate between multi-faceted aspects of our identities. In Østberg's terminology (ibid.: 18), our *narrative identity* is plural as it consists of many stories or multiple identities. Identities can be characterised by difference, instability, volatility, and context, but the individual does not let go of the feeling of 'being a self'.

Contemporary, modern approaches to identity (including the approach forwarded by Østberg, 2003) are enriched by postmodern concepts like hybridity and creolization, where identity categories are viewed as contextual and dynamic. The concept of creolization refers to 'the intermingling and mixing of two or several formerly discrete traditions or cultures' (Hylland Eriksen, 2007a: 112). The notion of hybridity is according to Hylland Eriksen 'a more general concept than creolization, and [...] may be used to refer to any obviously mixed cultural form' (ibid.: 113). 'Hybridity' seeks to capture how individuals who live in a 'cultural borderland' (for example due to mixed national and cultural heritage) are not primarily characterised by cultural conflict and powerlessness, but rather by options and cultural creativity. A 'hybridity approach' means that individuals are not prisoners of culture, but reflexive, creative and active users of resources available to them (Bredal, 2004: 52). In a study of arranged and

forced marriages, Bredal insists on viewing religious identity as actively formed both reflexively and discursively, rather than as a simple continuation of unambiguous or fixed traditions (ibid.).

Concepts such as hybridity and creolization, and also those of syncretism and bricolage, have thus been introduced by new theories of identity in late modernity in which binding traditions are understood to be superseded by the obligations to be responsible for one's own life and to make individualised choices (as opposed to relying on tradition and social/collective networks). Theories of late modernity have, however, been critiqued for overestimating individual choice and freedom. Yvonne Mørck (as cited in Bredal, 2004: 53) has, for example, suggested that certain stages and life situations may be more influenced by the continuity of traditions rather than by change.

Anderson's notion of 'identity work' (Anderson, 2000) is useful in describing the active work that goes into creating our narrative identities. Anderson views identity work as '(...) the dialogue between collective identities ascribed to us from others and our own identifications with various manifest and imagined communities of belonging' (ibid.: 291). Identity work is thus (in line with Calhoun, 1994) a continuous project which refers to both reflexivity and constant attention to the question of 'who am I?' and to how different social contexts both constrain and provide opportunities for different forms of behaviour and practice. In our research, we are concerned with the identity work accomplished by religiously active Muslim and Christian women: how do they produce meanings of religion and of gender, and how do they construct their identities in relation to religion, gender, ethnicity, nation, and tradition?

2.7 Religion and gender equality

Our research is based on the notion that religious belief and practice has both private and public aspects, and that the institutional practice of religious belief should ideally be governed by gender equality laws. We do not support, however, the notion that gender equality laws should be one-sidedly imposed upon religious associations. Rather, the road to gender equality within religious contexts should be built and sustained from within, by women and men who support the gender equal

rights and participation, *in combination with* strong recommendations and pressure (including prevention of the use of public funds to support gender inequality) from external actors such as the state and women's movements.[28] Notwithstanding the choice of strategy, the desirable outcome must be that women and men have equal rights and are free to choose the extent to which they want to act as full citizens at work, in the family, in civil society and politics and in religious observance.

As noted above, Phillips (2007) argues that multicultural practices cannot be accepted unless men and women are treated as equals. What gender equality means is of course a complex issue and feminists are also divided on what such equality entails. Different viewpoints include equal rights, equal opportunities, equal participation, and equal outcomes - all of which entail different opportunities and limitations for women's demands and multicultural demands. Furthermore, if equal rights and practices are only being supported and monitored in designated 'public sphere's such as education and the labour market, and not in designated 'private spheres' such as the family and religious organisations, then it is difficult to sustain the notion that gender equality must encompass all areas of life, despite the insistence of feminists that citizenship practices must be gender equal in both the public and private spheres (see, e.g. Lister, 2003). From a feminist viewpoint it follows that the family and religious organisations should not be considered private, in as much as they constitute important areas for the formation and contestation of gender relations and as such require political interventions. The question is then what kind of political interventions are required, and how are they to be implemented and reinforced? Clearly, the state has a choice in whether to formulate and promote policies that support the development of more gender equal practices from within the family and religious organisations. However, women who favour gender equality in the so-called 'public sphere' may be accepting of gender hierarchies and complementary (rather than equal) gender roles within the alleged 'private sphere' (Siim, 2005). Religious women may simply not care at all about gender and positions, the lack of female preachers, of the 'God our Father' discourse (Høen, 2008; Thorbjørnsrud, 2007). In our project we explore the discourses of religious

[28] For an elaboration of the use of external protection (of women's rights) to reduce internal restrictions upon women and other disadvantaged groups, see Shachar (2001) and her concept of 'transformative accommodation'.

women on gender equality. We ask whether religious women find women's movements and feminism relevant to their lives, thus exploring their concern (or lack thereof) with women's rights and gender equality.

Our research analyses how women's experiences and participation in churches and mosques can be interpreted as contradictory and complex as women's active participation is sometimes encouraged, while at other times their participation is constrained through practices which cement or maintain the disciplining and control of women. In religious organisations both formal and informal negotiations take place about the group rights and duties of women and men. These group rights and duties are decisive in terms of the opportunities and constraints they produce for individual women and men who wish to be active citizens on arena such as churches or mosques. The 'successful integration and participation of [religious] citizens and residents into European societies' (Triandafyllidou et al., 2006: 1) may be crucial for an inclusive multicultural citizenship, but the integration and participation of women into religious communities and organisations may be equally important for an inclusive gendered citizenship.

3 RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Introduction

The main objective of this working paper is to present how religious women in the UK define, construct and practice citizenship in their everyday life. The research was designed to examine women's religious identities and practices and how they may provide resources and barriers to citizenship in the UK in both majority and minority religions. This chapter describes the research strategy and methods adopted in our empirical study, and the questions that have guided our analysis.

3.2 How are issues of gender, feminism, religion, identity and citizenship talked about in our interviews?

In Strand 1 of FEMCIT WP4 we applied theoretical perspectives inspired by the political opportunity structure approach, frame analysis, and Bacchi's 'What's the problem represented to be' approach (Nyhagen Predelli, Halsaa, Thun and Sandu, 2009). In Strand 2 we have found Bacchi's approach to have continued relevance to our analysis. Although Bacchi is first and foremost interested in various actors on political arenas, including governments and non-governmental actors, and how they identify and define social policy problems, her approach is useful also on arenas that are associated with civil society more than with the state. Bacchi (1999) argues that actors give a particular shape to social 'problems' through the ways in which they are spoken about and the proposals advanced to address the problems. It is not 'the problem' itself that requires exploring, rather, it is how the problem is *represented*. Competing understandings of social issues can, according to Bacchi, be labelled as 'problem representations' (Bacchi, 1999: 2). She argues that it is important to identify competing representations of 'problems', because they will include concomitant representations of possible and desirable solutions. Bacchi is concerned with both structure and agency, or with both constraints and opportunities. She draws attention to the fact that we are all situated in discourses which may limit how we view the world, while we at the same time can use language constructively, intentionally and politically to shape the way we describe problems and prescribe solutions.

On the religious arena, we examine how individual religious women use language and discourse to construct particular problem representations of the relationship between themselves as women, their religious belief and practice, and the opportunities and constraints they experience in practicing citizenship within religious organisations. We also examine how religious women understand the concept of feminism, and how they talk about the women's movement. Bacchi's focus also requires a 'reflexive scrutiny' of discourses and concepts, which engages a wide range of voices that may challenge our pre-existing and possibly biased understandings (Bacchi, 2005: 207). Such voices should include those that may struggle to be heard and voices that may be silenced by more powerful actors. By interviewing representatives of both majoritised and minoritised women within different religious organisations, we seek to identify different voices in current debates addressing the relationship between gender, religion and citizenship.

The following questions are addressed in the analysis of our interviews with religious women:

A. Religion, identity and meaning

How is the meaning of religion represented in the interviews?
Is religion represented as fixed, as flexible, or both? What aspects are talked about as fixed, or as flexible?
How is religion practiced?

B. Citizenship

How is citizenship talked about? (in general? In terms of religion?)
Can/is religious participation and practice be linked to citizenship?
Is religion represented as a resource or as a barrier (or both) to citizenship as practice?

C. Gender equality

How is gender equality and women's rights talked about?

How is feminism and the women's movement talked about?
How are gender relations practiced?

3.3 Location of study

The findings discussed in this working paper are based on empirical evidence collected from 20 in-depth interviews conducted with religious women in the East Midlands region of England, UK. The UK has 12 regions in the four provinces of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. England is the biggest with nine regions. East Midlands has been described as one of England's most diverse regions in terms of ethnicity. The population of the East Midlands in 2007 was estimated to be 4.4 million, which amounts to 8.5 per cent of England's total population. The region is geographically England's fourth largest region in terms of area, and the second smallest region in terms of population. The region consists of five counties and four unitary districts: One county and one unitary district, Leicestershire and Leicester City, were locations for this study.[29]

Leicester city, with a population of 292,600, has a thriving ethnic community which accounts for more than a third of the population.[30] Leicester experienced large scale migration of East African Asians, with Indian heritage, in the 1970s. These migrants tended to have higher educational and social capital than the Pakistani and Bangladeshi migrants that had arrived in the 1960s. In 2007, a quarter of the population in Leicester was estimated to be of Indian ethnic origin, whilst 58 per cent classed themselves as White British (ONI, 2009).[31] Outside London, Leicester is the most religiously diverse city in the UK. Compared to the national (UK-wide) figure of 72 per cent, only 44.7 per cent of the population in Leicester identified themselves as Christian.[32] Although Leicester has a large Muslim population, amounting to eleven per cent of the city's population, Muslims are not the largest minority faith group. Hindus account for almost 15 per cent of the population in Leicester, while just above

[29] http://www.gos.gov.uk/goem/factem/Eastmidlands/ [accessed February 4, 2010].
[30] http://www.gos.gov.uk/goem/factem/leicester [accessed February 4, 2010].
[31] http://www.statistics.gov.uk/CCI/nugget.asp?ID=2232&Pos=4&ColRank=1&Rank=374/ [accessed February 4, 2010].
[32] http://www.leicester.gov.uk/your-council-services/council-and-democracy/city-statistics/demographic-and-cultural/ [accessed February 9, 2010].

four per cent are Sikhs.[33] As a consequence of the largest minority ethnic group being Indians, they also constitute the dominant ethnic group among the Muslim community. However, in the late 1990s, a significant number of Somali Muslims began to settle in Leicester. The city therefore provides an example of an ethnically diverse Muslim community.

The county of Leicestershire, on the other hand, has a much higher population of white British, 94.7 per cent of its total population of 641,000 (ONI, 2008).[34] Furthermore, in the county as a whole, less than six per cent of the population identify as ethnic minorities. Christianity is the majority religion with about 74 per cent of the population; Hinduism is the second largest religion with two per cent, whilst close to one per cent identify as Muslims. The demography of the location for our study suggests that participants' experience of multiculturalism might not be the same in other parts of the UK where the population of ethnic minorities is low or differently mixed to those of Leicestershire and Leicester.

3.4 Research strategy

Our research design includes in-depth interviews with religious women from within the traditions of Christianity and Islam, and has been adapted to overall comparative ambitions of the project (religious women in Norway, Spain and the UK). The WP 4 research team has assessed different recruitment strategies in relation to the landscape of majoritised and minoritised religious organisations present within the three country contexts. For example, we have carefully considered the possibility of recruiting women from gendered religious organisations; that is, from organisations that are intentionally formed to establish collectives of religious women.[35] Looking at the national level (capital-based), we found that only the United Kingdom displayed a sufficient number of such organisations to recruit from. The UK has a variety of religious women's organisations at the national level, representing a wide range of majority and minority faith traditions. While Norway and Spain have national

[33] http://www.leicester.gov.uk/your-council-services/council-and-democracy/city-statistics/demographic-and-cultural/#Eth [accessed February 9, 2010].
[34] http://www.gos.gov.uk/goem/factem/Eastmidlands, [accessed February 9, 2010]
[35] Examples of majority organisations are the Inter-cultural interdenominational organization of Christian women AGLOW Norway (AGLOW Norge), and of minority organisations the **Islamic Women's** Group **Norway** (Islamsk Kvinnegruppe Norge).

organisations for Christian women, 'minority' religious organisations for women are generally absent at the national level. This is likely to be a reflection of the immigration histories experienced by Norway and Spain, both in terms of the different historical time-periods of immigration, and the different composition of immigrant groups.

Hence, we chose a recruitment strategy that enables us to produce rich and comparable data through focusing on religious organisations from within majority (Christian) and minority (Muslim) faith communities. Whilst Christianity has the largest number of followers in all three countries, Islam forms the second largest religion in all three countries due to immigration. A focus on both churches and mosques was thus deemed most feasible in order to facilitate recruitment and data production. We decided to adopt a four-dimensional strategy, including Christian 'majority' churches (in the form of the state religion) and Christian 'minority' churches (in the form of a 'free church' Christian faith tradition), Muslim 'majority' mosques (representing the largest Muslim immigrant group in each country) and Muslim 'minority' mosques (representing a smaller Muslim immigrant population in each country).

Christian majority churches (as state or official churches) were easily identifiable in each country, and a large church was chosen in each country context. In terms of Christian minority faiths, there are many traditions to choose from, including Methodists, Baptists, Pentecostals, and so on. For all three countries, we have selected Pentecostal churches as our majority-minority faith with no ties to the state, as the Pentecostal movement is considered the 'fastest growing group of churches within Christianity today' (Anderson, 2004: 1). After examining the presence or absence of various Pentecostal faith traditions in all three countries, we have chosen to recruit women from Assembly of God churches.[36]

In terms of the major Islamic group, our strategy was to focus on the largest immigrant Muslim group in each country (Pakistanis in Norway and the UK, and

[36] According to Anderson (2004: 94), the Assembly of God movement within Pentecostalism (at least in the UK) have been critical of centralised forms of organisational control in other Pentecostal movements such as the Elim movement, and has represented strong theological positions on the issues of 'initial evidence' and premillianism.

Moroccans in Spain). All Muslims belong to the same *Ummah* or community of religious believers, but various historical processes of differentiation have led to a great variety of law schools and sects. Sunni-Islam, which represents the most widespread belief tradition and includes four major religious law schools, accounts for about 80 per cent of Muslim believers (Esposito, 1998). Shia-Islam, the second largest faith tradition within Islam, has its own religious law schools and represents about 20 per cent of Muslim believers (ibid.). In Norway, Spain and the UK, the largest immigrant Muslim groups are Sunni Muslims. In order to reach a minority Muslim group in each country, we opted to recruit from Shia mosques. As it turned out, it was difficult to recruit Shia women from within organised religious contexts, and the Shia women we interviewed were often attending Sunni rather than Shia mosques due to the availability of designated spaces for women in some Sunni mosques.

The following table represents our final recruitment strategy:

Christianity	**Islam**
Majority-majority religion	**Minority-majority religion**
Norway: Lutheran State Church	Norway: Pakistani mosque (Sunni)
Spain: Roman Catholic Church	Spain: Moroccan mosque (Sunni)
UK: Church of England (Anglican)	UK: Pakistani mosque (Sunni)
Majority-minority religion	**Minority-minority religion**
Norway: Assembly of God (Pentecostal)	Norway: Shia mosque
Spain: Assembly of God (Pentecostal)	Spain: Shia mosque
UK: Assembly of God (Pentecostal)	UK: Shia mosque

3.5 Overview of participating organisations in the UK

As noted above, two Christian traditions, the Church of England and the Pentecostal Assemblies of God, were selected for the study. For Muslim participants, a Sunni Mosque was selected and a group of Shia women were identified.

3.5.1 Brief history of religious institutions

Church of England

The Church of England dates as far back as the sixth century.[37] The structure of the church is hierarchical. There are 43 dioceses in England covering the two provinces of Canterbury and York, and a diocese in Europe, with chaplaincies in various corners of the world.[38] Each diocese has a Cathedral which is the 'seat' of the bishop but it is managed independently of the Bishop.[39] Each diocese is also split into archdeaconries run by archdeacons, who are responsible for the administration of that part of the diocese. Further, each archdeaconry is split up into deaneries, which is a collection of parishes; where each parish church is run by the priest in collaboration with the Parochial Church Councils.[40] The Leicester Diocese became a Cathedral in 1927;[41] it has 237 Parishes with 17,700 people attending churches on a regular basis.[42] Anglican participants in this study attend two of the parishes under the Leicester Cathedral.

Assemblies of God

The Assemblies of God is one of the largest Pentecostal denominations in the UK. It was established as the British Assemblies of God in Birmingham in 1924, as a congregational association of autonomous churches under the chairmanship of J. Nelson Parr (Anderson, 2004). It has 600 churches all over the country.[43] Participants in this study attended one of the churches of Assemblies of God in Leicester. Members of the church are multinational from around 40 different nations, and English is the main language for all the church activities.

Sunni and Shia Muslims

Sunni and Shia Muslims both agree on the fundamentals of Islam and share the same book, the Qur'an. Their separation, dating back to AD 632, was on the differences of opinion of who should succeed the Prophet Mohammed as their

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[37] http://www.cofe.anglican.org/about/history/ [accessed February 3, 2010].
[38] http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/cofe/cofe_1.shtml [accessed February 3, 2010].
[39] The Church of England allows only male bishops.
[40] http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/cofe/cofe_1.shtml [accessed February 3, 2010].
[41] http://www.cathedral.leicester.anglican.org/ [accessed February 3, 2010].
[42] http://www.leicester.anglican.org/site-content/about-us.aspx/ [accessed February 3, 2010].
[43] http://www.aog.org.uk/pages/14-our-history/content/ [accessed February 3, 2010].

leader.[44] Over the years the differences between the two groups have widened through different historical experiences, political and social development, and ethnic composition.[45] Sunnis constitute the largest group of Muslims in the world, and in most countries they are the majority except for Bahrain, Lebanon and Iran.[46] There are 22 mosques in Leicester and Leicestershire, with 20 of them located within the city of Leicester.[47]

Sunni Mosque

The Sunni Muslims who participated in this study all attended the Islamic Centre in Leicester. The Islamic Centre was established in 1968 by a group of Pakistani Muslims who settled in Leicester, it started as a mosque converted from residential properties. In the mid 1970s, the mosque was extended as a result of a large influx of Muslims from East Africa, India, Bangladeshi and other countries who had come to settle in Leicester. In 1988, the Islamic Centre started building the Leicester Central Mosque with facilities including the main prayer hall, providing prayer facilities for 1500 men and a gallery providing prayer facilities for 300 women.

Shia Muslims

The Shia participants in the study mainly resided in Leicestershire. There is only one Shia mosque in Leicester, and the researcher was informed that many Shia women attend other mosques mainly because of the lack of a women's gallery at the Shia mosque. Thus, the Shia participants constituted a group which could not be identified with a particular place of worship.

3.6 Selection and Recruitment

The criteria for the selection of participants in this study were based on the following characteristics:

- Residing in the East Midlands, UK;

[44] http://www.awm.org/i/resources/faq/islam/difference-sunni-shia/ [accessed April 15, 2010].
[45] C:\Documents and Settings\ssem4\My Documents\FEMCIT\Strand 2\Draft rpt\BBC - Religions - Islam Sunni and Shi'a.mht, assessed April 15, 2010.
[46] Op.cit.
[47] http://www.tijarapages.com/categories.asp?cid=20&id=121, assessed April 15, 2010.

- Ability to communicate in English;
- Having obtained secondary level education, and be associated either with:
- Church of England, Assemblies of God, or profess to be a Sunni or Shia Muslim.

The sampling method adopted for the field work was quota sampling, where five women of each cohort, Church of England, Assemblies of God, Sunni Muslims and Shia Muslims, were selected. Leicester Cathedral was selected as it has jurisdiction of the parishes in Leicestershire and Leicester. For Assemblies of God one of the two churches in Leicester agreed to participate. In the case of the Sunni Women, one of the largest Sunni mosques in Leicester, which had a women's gallery, was contacted. However, for the Shia women recruitment in one particular mosque was not possible as it was identified that the Shia mosque in Leicester does not have a designated space for women. Shia women in Leicester or Leicestershire who want to pray in the mosque either join with Sunni Muslims in worship or travel to mosques in Nottingham or Birmingham.

The snowball method best describes the strategy used in recruitment of participants for the study in all the four cohorts. The initial steps taken were to contact the administrative section of each religious institution; secondly, e-mail were sent to each identified person, detailing the aims and objectives of the research project. Further discussions were held by telephone. These steps were taken for all groups with the exception of the Shia Muslims, as no religious Shia institution with space provision for women could be identified in Leicester.

The subsequent strategy for recruitment varied for each cohort. A meeting was arranged with a contact in the Leicester Cathedral Bishop's office where she suggested names and provided contact details of possible individuals that could participate in the study. Two individuals declined to participate but the researcher used the network of those who agreed to participate to obtain the desired number of five. In the case of the Sunni women, contact was made with the Islamic Worship Centre, the Sunni mosque, where the contact details of one of the participants were obtained. Communication between the researcher and identified contact person was done mainly through phone calls and e-mails, where after six weeks of negotiation the contact details of five participants were obtained. Assemblies of God was

contacted on the telephone, but the contact person could not confirm participation of women in her church. The researcher therefore attended two church services in order to recruit women for the study. The recruitment of Shia participants was distinctively different; it was based solely on the network of one Sunni woman contact and a Shia woman in Leicestershire. These resulted in recruiting Shia participants who are part of their social network and could speak English. Although the recruitment strategy was different for each cohort, the researcher managed to recruit individuals who adhere to a particular organised religion.

3.7 Characteristics of Participants in the Study

A total of 20 women living in the East Midlands volunteered to participate in the study. Nine belonged to the ethnic majority (white), and 11 were from ethnic minority backgrounds. The breakdown according to their religious affiliation is as follows:

Religion	**Ethnic Majority**	**Ethnic Minority**
Anglicans	5	0
Pentecostals	3	2
Sunnis	0	5
Shias	1	4

The ages of participants ranged from 29 to 65 years, with more than half of the participants in their 40s. At the time of the interview, less than half were in full-time employment, and these were working in highly skilled occupations. The reasons mentioned by other participants for not being in full employment included retirement, stay home mums, and part-time work due to child care demands. None of the women who participated in the study had been a member of or active in the women's movement in the UK.

The study aimed to reflect the views of women who identified themselves as religious, and the snow ball method resulted in the participation of women who have diverse backgrounds, reflecting the demography of the region. It also reflected the ethnic diversity of the East Midlands, where different ethnic groups could be

identified in the various religious categories. Secondly, the background of participants suggests that the findings in this study would provide an insight into how religious women who did not actively participate in the UK Women's Movement perceive gender issues. Finally, the snowball method resulted in having Sunni and Pentecostal participants from the city of Leicester, whilst the Anglicans and Shias were residing in the larger Leicestershire county. Their location suggests that is likely that the Sunni and Pentecostal women will have more everyday interactions with other ethnicities than women from the other two faiths.

3.8 Research ethics

Ethical approval for this research has been obtained from Loughborough University's research ethics committee. Furthermore, research participants were given a general letter of information about the research, and they signed a written consent form which stated respondents' right to withdraw from the study at any time without being required to explain any reasons from withdrawing. Additionally, participants were assured of anonymity, such that their individual identities would be kept confidential. In the working paper, interviewees are referred to in relation to their religious affiliation, either as Anglican, Pentecostal, Sunni, or Shia participant. Although some consented to be identified by their real names, in order to protect the anonymity of all the interviewees, no real names have been used.

3.9 In-depth interviews

The interviews have been based on a qualitative approach to research, where in-depth, personal interviews have been conducted with the aid of topic or interview guides. Such an approach offers the opportunity to focus on a limited number of cases whilst exploring topics and meaning in depth, resulting in the production of 'thick description' data (Geertz, 1973). Following Rubin and Rubin (2005: 30), we define our approach to interviewing within the tradition of interpretive constructionist thinking, in which 'responsive interviewing' (ibid.) entails the understanding that both the researcher and the interviewee come to the research situation with their own feelings, personality, interests, and experience. Moreover, a dynamic relationship is created in the interview situation which might challenge both the researcher and the

interviewee in terms of his or her understanding, and the interview setting thus provides an arena for dialogue and conversation which aims at 'depth of understanding, rather than breadth' (ibid.). A strategy of engagement in the research interview, rather than disengagement and distance, is a valued aspect of feminist methodology and research, and emphasises connections between knowledge, theory and language, and experience (Ramazanoğlu, 2002; see also Kitzinger, 2007).

Exploring issues of religion, gender and citizenship through a qualitative study requires adaptation to the interviewee's personal situation and giving priority to the interviewees' choice of time and place in which to be interviewed. Of the 20 interviews, 15 took place in the homes of the research participants, four interviews were conducted in the offices of participants, and one was conducted via the telephone. Some of the interviews had to be rescheduled because of family commitments. Only in a few cases did invited participants decline to participate in the study because of unforeseen circumstances. The interviews were conducted within the period of March 2009 - July 2009; each interview lasted on average one hour. All interviews have been transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription agency.

Two sets of topic guides were developed and used for the two major different faiths, Christianity and Islam. The differences between the two topic guides were mainly in terms of terminology; the terms church, mosque, Christian and Muslim were interchanged where appropriate. The two topic guides are included in the Appendices.

3.10 Analysis of data

The analysis has been based on an inductive approach and has thus been grounded in the data. All the 20 transcribed interviews were read several times to identify emerging themes and patterns. The analysis process was managed using the qualitative analysis software, Atlas.ti 5.6, which provided an easier way of looking at the relationships in the data and aided in a more conceptual and theoretical thinking about the data.

In the analysis, the different types of research participants, Anglicans, Pentecostals, Shia and Sunnis, are presented and represented through different 'voices' (Baklien and Solberg, 1997: 22). These voices are sometimes expressed through direct quotations from the interview transcripts, while at other times they are expressed through statements produced by the researchers - statements which summarise and interpret what the research participants have said (ibid.). Moreover, our own 'researcher's voices' are expressed through the evaluations and interpretations that are made by us on the basis of interviews and document-based data. While our aim is to keep as much distinction between these different voices as possible, we might not always have succeeded in achieving clear distinctions recognisable by our readers. Again, based on the view that research data are produced through interaction between the researcher and research participants (Kvale, 1997), we acknowledge that it is unrealistic to succinctly separate all the different voices that speak through the discourse produced in our study.

3.11 Limitations of the study

A qualitative approach to research offers comparable data, but findings cannot be generalised to the whole population. The findings in this study arose from in-depth interviews with the religious women who participated in our study. However, the findings reveal issues and problems that are probably indicative of a broader set of religious women's perspectives on the issues of gender, religion, and citizenship.

The responses are based on four different faith traditions (two Christian and two Muslim), but there are of course other faith traditions within Christianity and Islam. Additionally, participants' recruitment was based on a snow ball method which did not allow equal characteristics of interviewees, for example some of the Christian women were involved in the religious practices of teaching whilst none of the Muslim participants played a similar role. Therefore, it cannot be concluded from our study that Muslim women do not help or assist in the Islamic worship. However, the main purpose of qualitative research is to discover and examine the different meanings and interpretations people have of social issues and behaviour.

3.12 Insider/outsider problematic

Self reflection in qualitative research is common place for many social researchers today. Reflecting on the research process and the analysis of the UK study allows an insight into the researchers' perspectives or biases on the subjects studied and how they engaged with the experiences of the participants in both the interview and analysis stages.

The fieldwork for the UK study was undertaken by a non-British citizen, an African female researcher. She is a self confessed Christian, belonging to the Pentecostal faith tradition. She was socialised with a 'Christian ethos' as a child, and attended Anglican and Catholic Secondary Schools. Her only experience of Islam prior to the fieldwork is through reading and through interactions with Muslim friends. Furthermore, she has not been an activist in the women's movement. Her main research focus has hitherto been on children's rights, which in some instances advances the rights of women to ensure the development of children.

The second researcher for the UK study was born in Norway, and lives and works in the UK. She is ethnically white. She is not active in the women's movement, but considers herself a feminist academic. She was raised within the Lutheran State Church in Norway, but now holds secular beliefs. Much of her research has focused on issues regarding gender, religion, and citizenship, including a study of Norwegian evangelical missionaries in nineteenth century Madagascar (Nyhagen Predelli, 2003), studies of Muslim immigrant women and men in Norway (Nyhagen Predelli, 2004 and 2008), and studies of women's movements in Norway, Spain and the UK (Nyhagen Predelli et al., 2008; Nyhagen Predelli et al., 2009).

In the interview context, the negotiation of boundaries between interviewer and participants was evident in relation to the interviewer's ethnicity and faith. In almost all the interviews, there was an initial telephone conversation to discuss time and venue, where participants could have detected the interviewer's ethnicity in her accent. It might not have influenced all participants, for instance the Pentecostals were more ethnically diverse than the Anglicans, however the Muslims might have associated more closely with her because all but one were of ethnic minority

backgrounds. Nevertheless, the interviewer was a Christian, which some of the participants, both Christian and Muslim, enquired about before the start of their respective interviews. Whilst for the Christians she made them aware of her understanding of some of their principles, for the Muslims she assured them that she has some friends who are Muslims and that the interview material would be used for academic purposes only. Informing participants of the interviewer's religious beliefs was done to gain their confidence and also to assure them that the study was not being done under any covert means, which would have rendered the interview situation unethical. The interviewer's Christian faith makes her an insider to Christian communities, while the fact of being a religious believer also makes her share an important identity aspect with all of the interviewed women. The interviewer's ethnic minority status probably supported access to and recruitment of ethnic minority participants in the study. Holding a non-British passport, however, makes the interviewer an outsider in relation to citizenship rights and status within the UK context.

4 ANALYSIS – IDENTITY

4.1 Introduction

Identities, as indicated in Chapter 2, are constructed through a complex interplay of internal and external processes, and are being re-worked, reshaped and changed throughout the life-course. The notion of plural integrated identities (Østberg, 2003) signals that our identities are situational or might vary according to context, and that the different aspects of our identities are integrated into a 'whole' self. One objective of this study was to examine individual religious identities and practices which may provide resources or barriers to citizenship. This chapter presents how participants in our study constructed the meaning of religion to their identities, and whether they perceived their religion as fixed, flexible or both. Their responses suggest that different parts of their cultural environment are influencing their lives; a process which Hylland Eriksen (2007a; 2007b) describes as hybridity, where individuals reflexively and creatively combine different cultural forms. The discussion commences with how participants generally described their identities, followed by the relevance of religion to their identity.

4.2 How is the meaning of religion to identity represented in the interviews?

4.2.1 Participants' identity

We explored participants' identity by asking them; 'How would you describe who you are - what is your identity?' All the participants in the study represented their identities as plural, largely falling into four overlapping themes: personal achievement, ethnicity and nationality, family relations, and religion.

4.2.2 Personal achievement: career and independence

Some of the participants in our study emphasised their personal achievements in describing who they were. One participant refused to measure herself with the expectations of others, she stated:

> *'I suppose I am a mature woman, I don't need anybody else to define me, I am me. I know a lot of women define themselves as being somebody's wife*

or somebody's mother, I don't do that. I am a Christian and I am English and a musician.'

Anglican 4

She defines her identity by her own faith, ethnicity and profession without reference to her relations with any other individuals.

Another interviewee included her career achievements and her migration from Pakistan to Europe in describing her identity, by saying:

'I am from Pakistan, been living in the UK for more than 16 years now. I spent most of my time in Europe, but I did complete my basic qualifications in my country. I am a self-made person, and I have my career so I can say that I have done a lot through my life. I also spent a family life together with my family in Pakistan, because we had a combined family system in Pakistan. Here in England I have got relatives, when I first came I lived with them, and now I am living with my husband.'

Shia 3

This interviewee narrates her achievement through her migration routes and links her identity to both immediate and extended families. In describing their identities, the emphasis of the comments of these two women was not mainly on their careers, but rather on their individual characteristics; they perceived themselves as self-made and independent women.

4.2.3 Family Relations

Whilst the previous interviewees defined themselves with an emphasis on independence, others on the other hand preferred to describe their identity emphasizing their family relations. One Shia participant, who is white English, in describing her identity stated:

'*I have been married for 28 years, seven kids, full-time housewife, mother and I have a degree, I have a teaching qualification, […] I don't do paid work. […], I have been involved in some programmes of going in to schools and teaching if the teachers have needed help with explaining Islamic customs and traditions to the children. That is basically it for me, mum.'*

Shia 4

She presents her identity as complex, as that of wife, mother and housewife; all within the context of the home.

Similarly, one participant's response, a Pentecostal, was:

> *'Who am I? I am a wife and a mum, I have three daughters. None of them are permanently at home. I am also a daughter, my mum lives relatively near. I see her fairly often*.'
>
> **Pentecostal 5**

This interviewee also presents her identity within the context of her family, as a daughter, wife and mother. These interviewees thus viewed their plural identities in relation to the different roles they play in the family as a daughter, wife or mother. These participants did not mention any identity aspects related to life outside the home.

4.2.4 Ethnicity and nationality

Some of the participants, in describing their identities, focused on their ethnicity or cultural heritage in addition to other identities. Although both ethnic majority and minority women in our study included their ethnicity in describing their identities, some ethnic minority women highlighted their cultural heritage more. Thus this section discusses some of the comments ethnic minority women in our study made. One Pentecostal described her identity as:

> *'I am an Indian, because I was born in India and you know I have a British citizenship and I grew up here, I was born in India. So I would say I am, although I regularly go back and forth to India, because I minister there, but I would say I was very much British to be honest, been here too long.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 1**

This interviewee defines her identity based on her cultural heritage and her legal status in the UK; her response emphasises a 'hybrid' identity which combines elements of Indian and British cultural heritage.

Similarly, one Shia woman described herself as an Iranian in England, she stated:

> '*I would describe myself as an Iranian English woman living in England. It is a very difficult question*.'
>
> **Shia 6**

Again, the participant emphasises a hybrid or mixed identity of being both Iranian and English.

One Sunni described her identity with the nationality she most relates to, she stated that she sees herself as:

> *'A British Muslim. Although my parents are from Pakistan, my father was actually born here, my mother is from Pakistan, and I relate myself more to Britain and being a Muslim than being from Pakistan. Some of my friends from a similar age say British Pakistani Muslim or Pakistani Muslim, but I myself would class myself as British.'*
>
> **Sunni 5**

This participant highlights another dimension by combining religion with her national identities, demonstrating a mix of Pakistani and British heritage and her religious identity of being a Muslim.

Likewise one Pentecostal also emphasised her cultural heritage, she stated:

> '*Who am I? I am a Caribbean Heritage woman, a Black British woman who is a Christian, working and living my life in Britain*.'
>
> **Pentecostal 4**

She also depicts a hybrid identity, where her cultural heritage is combined with religious, national and racial identities. Thus, some participants preferred to emphasise their cultural heritage, religious belief, and work. The responses under this section were made by ethnic minority participants; however some white participants also identified with their heritage as one of their identities but with less emphasis compared to these four women. The responses demonstrate that some individuals describe their identities with an emphasis on plural aspects, including cultural, religious, and national characteristics.

4.2.5 Against labelling

Others were however reluctant to associate themselves with particular identity characteristics, arguing that they disliked labels. One Shia woman argued that she did not want to be labelled because she was a Muslim, she emphasised:

> *'Me, I am just your average working mum. The fact that I am Muslim and am Asian […], that is personal to me, but I just consider myself as a normal, everyday citizen. I go to work, pay my taxes, do everything that everybody else does. So […], I don't like labels. Yes I don't like labels, I don't like people pigeon holing you and saying, you are this and you are this you know.*

I try to be a decent human being and that is what I am, or that is what I strive to be.'

Sunni 4

This interviewee is emphasizing her commonalities with other 'British citizens' rather than her differences from the majority as Muslim and Asian. She does not want to be labelled as the 'other' just because she belongs to an ethnic minority group. The local community in which the interviewee lived was predominantly Asian, so her dislike of being labelled was probably directed to her national status as a citizen in the UK, where she is a minority both in terms of her religion and her ethnicity.

One Anglican participant's dislike of being labelled could be attributed more to the challenge of finding one identity that best described who she was. She stated:

'OK, well I don't tend to think of myself particularly with labels, I suppose that Christianity is important to me, so I would probably describe myself as a Christian. I am not sure if I would particularly describe myself as single, although I am, because to me that is not important. I would probably describe myself as a quantitative researcher, […]. I also might describe myself in terms of being creative or artistic, and liking artistic hobbies. I am kind of practical, […] I suppose that is how I see myself I guess.'

Anglican 6

This participant's dislike of labelling seems to signify that she could not identify with one distinct identity; she thus considers her religion, marital status, career, talents and interests as part of her identity. Her comments present an example of how challenging it can be to talk about one's identity when it consists of many and different aspects. Therefore the dislike of labelling could be attributed to different things, including the desire to be identified with the majority of the population or the challenge of fitting into one overall identity category.

Women's identity is multilayered and few respondents, if any, represented themselves as fitting into one category (Suleiman, 2009). The presentation of the identities of women in our study fell broadly into four themes. We presented their responses to our question based on the theme which they emphasised most, but we have shown that their identities were in all instances plural. Findings confirm existing literature that identities are plural (Calhoun, 1994; Hall, 1996, Suleiman, 2009); for some of the women relating to mainly one aspect of their identity was either difficult

or they disliked labelling; whilst other participants focused their identities on their personal achievements, or preferred to be identified first and foremost with their family relations or their legal status within England. These findings suggest that although participants in our study were all religious women, the focus of their identities varied. Their responses also raise the question why they emphasised some particular aspects of their lives; for example why did some emphasise their family relations and not include their lives outside the home, and others their cultural heritage without mentioning their identities as mothers and wives.

4.3 Importance of religion to identity

Although there is no consensus on the definition of religion by sociologists (Woodhead, 2007), a distinction can be made between what religion 'is' (the content of religious belief) and what religion 'does' (e.g., providing meaning and purpose). In our project we explore how important religion is to the identity of women of faith. Women in our study were asked the question 'How important is religion to your identity? And in your everyday life?' Their responses indicated to a large extent that what religion 'does' is to create meaning and provide emotional support in their lives. Some women mentioned how religion shapes their behaviour in everyday life, with some also making an explicit link between their faith and their active participation in the religious community. Others however, before responding to the question, expressed their dislike of being labelled 'religious', and preferred instead to focus on their personal faith. There were no differences in opinion between the two religions or the ethnic groupings, which suggests that for participants in our study religion was perceived as a contributor and shaper of their moral codes irrespective of their ethnicity or faith.

4.3.1 Rejection of the label 'religion'

Although religion was very important in the lives of participants in the study, some were not comfortable with the term 'religion' and preferred to distinguish between religion as a 'belief system' and their personal faith. One Anglican participant tried to distinguish between the belief system and her own religious faith and practice by stating:

> *'Religion no, faith yes. There is a difference. The religion is the concept of the overall thing that there is a god [...]. The faith is how you live that in that religion, in that journey. And I think religion is taught to children OK, you can't*

teach someone faith when they are little, it is something you learn as you grow, and I think through experience as much as anything. […] But faith as opposed to religion I think.'

Anglican 5

She is arguing that religion is a rather abstract concept, whilst faith is her own belief and practice of the concept. Her comments allude to a distinction between what religion 'is' (a belief in God), and the practising of religion ('how you live in that religion' and the meaning it provides in everyday life.

Another participant, a Pentecostal, was also of the view that the term 'religion' has not been beneficial to society, and preferred to consider herself as 'Biblical' instead of religious. She stated:

'I think we have to clarify our definition of religion. I don't call myself religious, I consider myself biblical. I think religion is a blight on society, I think it is a blight on the church. I think religion is organised human ways of dominating people, of keeping people under. So I don't consider myself religious. I do consider myself biblical, yes.'

Pentecostal 4

This participant also makes a distinction between the broad concept of religion and a specific faith. Religion, in her opinion, can be used as a tool to oppress people but she would like to identify instead with what religion *is*, faith in the Bible. She seems to be disassociating herself from the general concept of religion, and preferring instead to be identified with Biblical beliefs.

One Shia woman, who has chosen not to wear the headscarf, also found it problematic to identify and present herself primarily as a religious person, as she perceived the word to be restrictive. She explained:

'It affects me but I don't introduce myself through my religion, I am free of that name. If they ask me I am a Muslim, but I am free, I don't, I am a Muslim I was brought up in a Muslim family and I believe in, I read the Qur'an [and] I believe in it. It is difficult.'

Shia 6

Her expression of 'I am free' could suggests two things: On the one hand, it could be that she finds Islam to be practised in constricting ways that are inconsistent with the Qur'an as revealing the word of the Prophet. On the other hand, it could be that

people easily put her into the category ‘Muslim woman’, with all the constraints and limitations this category produces in cultural and social terms, rather than seeing her first and foremost as an individual, with a multitude of interests .

These comments provide an insight into how some participants perceive religion. Although all the interviewees adhered to a religious belief, some did not want their adherence to be expressed as ‘religious’ or ‘religion’, suggesting that the word has negative connotations. They preferred to be identified with their specific faith, indicating a focus on their practice instead of considering religion as a total belief system. They seem to associate what religion is with the canonic texts of their faith tradition, and with the practice of faith in their everyday lives, rather than with how religion has been interpreted by followers. However, their position raises the question of whether we can isolate faith from religion, based on the notion that faith also is part of a common shared belief within a group of people. On the other hand, their comments also suggest that the term ‘religion’ has been used for other purposes not only as a belief system, but a tool of oppression and discrimination, either from within religious traditions themselves, or by external forces (such as the state).

4.3.2 Religion as a way of life

For some participants in our study their faith serves as the basis of their moral codes. The Christian faith was described by one Pentecostal as the source of her values. She said:

> *‘My faith in Jesus Christ defines exactly everything about who I am. He gives me my value system, so that if anyone says anything negative to me, I might not like it very much but it doesn’t change who I am, it doesn’t define who I am. God alone gives me my value. So everything that I do comes out of the love that God has put into me, and the security and wholeness that I have, all that I do comes out from that, it is a natural out working of that.’*
>
> **Pentecostal 2**

This interviewee views her personal relationship with God as the most important relationship and source of values in her everyday life.

Similarly, one Shia participant also stated that her faith structures and defines her everyday life, she said:

> *'Oh very, oh yes, because it is something that doesn't leave you from when you wake up to when you go to sleep. I mean, it is part of who you are and how you behave and how you go about your daily actions and what you want to achieve in your day you know. It is a constant. But everything in our life is sort of like, we have got no doubts about how we are going to go about our daily life, or problems that arise. If we do have a doubt or something we need to ask. But most of the time we know what we are supposed to be doing and you know in a way it is sort of like, all the answers are there for us. So yes I would say very important and very natural. […] I like my life, it is very ordered, you wake up you know what time your prayers you know, I don't know I just find prayer time, it organises your day […]'*
>
> **Shia 4**

Her personal faith structures and guides her daily life; she presents her faith as virtually part of who she is. This notion was not unique to the Islamic faith, as one Anglican woman also stated:

> *'I suppose it is fairly quite important, because it is something that I do. […] I start the day by doing Bible readings and what have you. It is part of my life, certainly, it has always been part of my life.'*
>
> **Anglican 4**

Adhering to Christian principles on a daily basis is thus an integrated part of her identity.

A Sunni participant emphasised that Islam is part of her identity and her everyday life:

> *'Extremely […], I have realised that my religion is part of my life, it is not a religion where it has different components. Islam is a way of life really, and I don't see any reason why I can't mix my religion or my identity, but yes, my religion is extremely important because it helps me to be who I am today.'*
>
> **Sunni 5**

This interviewee also re-echoes previous comments about how religion serves as the basis of the participants' moral code.

Religion was also mentioned by some interviewees as the basis for the motivation to participate in their communities. One Sunni participant related her faith to that of being a good citizen:

> *'It is yes, it is very important to my identity. I think if you are a good law abiding [person] in religion as well, that makes you a good law abiding citizen as well. Because all the religions teach us the right things and they always say don't do the wrong things, so if you are abiding by your religion, which is obviously you are a good citizen as well. That is how I treat my religion.'*
>
> **Sunni 1**

This interviewee suggests that abiding to her religion will ensure that she does not break the laws of the state; thus if all citizens were to believe and abide by their faiths, society would be devoid of social problems. Another interviewee suggested a more hands-on approach, she explained that:

> *'I feel the way to help impart that or get the message of Christ across is to be involved with the people who are in church. I may not see them, many of them I don't see outside of church, but in my interactions with them, I hope they have opportunities to share how my life as a Christian impacts not just when I am in church, but when I am at work and with my family.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 4**

The interviewee thus made a link between participating in the community and sharing her faith with others.

Irrespective of the plural identities presented by participants in our study, religion forms a fundamental and basic part of their identity, informing and guiding their everyday life. Some of the responses also reflect the notion that the term 'religion' has dichotomous meanings, what religion 'is', in the sense of the content of religious belief, and what it 'does' to participants, in the sense of creating meaning and purpose in their everyday lives. This finding indicates that aspects of ethnicity, family relations, and personal achievements shape the women's identities, whilst religion provides a deep sense of value or meaning to their identities, to their everyday lives, and to their sense of communal belonging. Thus, for participants in this study religion has significantly shaped their identities and their everyday behaviour and actions. Other factors, such as their geographic location, familial positions, or their personal achievements, provide further aspects or layers of their identities. Altogether, the women presented themselves to us with plural integrated identities

(Østberg, 2003) for which their personal religious faith and practice provided fundamental meaning and purpose .

4.3.3 Conclusion

In summary, the meaning of religion to identity was represented by women in our study as a basis of the values and meanings which shape their way of life. Participants' personal faith, be it either Christian or Muslim, structures and guides their way of life within the home and in their respective communities. One of the issues raised was the dislike of labelling, including the use of the term 'religious' as part of their identity. It raises the question why do some women dislike to be labelled? The rejection of labelling could be an indication that some do not want to be judged by the expectation or interpretations of others, they want to be who they are and not to conform to perceived identities formed by others including the media. It could also be a desire to be part of the majority and not to be regarded as different. There were some silences in the interview data however; in relation to the women's status in society. Some of the participants were in public positions, for example a governor of a school, in their respective communities or churches, but they did not explicitly identify themselves with such positions. However, it is difficult to argue whether they were being modest in describing their identity or did not want to include their public life in describing their personal identity.

5 ANALYSIS - CITIZENSHIP

5.1 Introduction

The understanding of the concept of citizenship has changed over time, and the concept also has multiple meanings, reflecting different histories within respective countries (Lister et al., 2007). Hudson (2003) argues that the concept of citizenship is theorised as multilevel, heterogeneous and differential, resulting in the meaning of citizenship to differ depending on sites, contexts and domains. Importantly, the concept is not restricted to that of nation - state citizenship, and major changes in the understanding of the concept were initially traced by Marshall (1950), from the eighteenth century to the twentieth century, from civil citizenship, to political citizenship, and social citizenship, respectively. These different categories reveal the complexity of the concept of citizenship and the different constructions of the concept. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 2, feminist debates on citizenship have broadened the understanding of citizenship significantly to include issues of identity, participation and belonging.

This chapter provides an insight into the forms and practices of gendered citizenship observed among the religious women we interviewed. We present how the concept of citizenship is understood, how participants construct their nationality and their perception of being British, their understanding of multiculturalism, and the kind of barriers or resources religion may offer them.

5.2 How is citizenship talked about?

5.2.1 Understanding of citizenship

We started by asking women interviewees in our study to respond to the question; 'What does citizenship mean to you?' Four themes were identified in their responses; citizenship was given meaning by our interviewees through legal and political discourses, as a sense of being part of a community (belonging), the ability to participate in social activities, and through religion or faith.

5.2.2 Legal and political citizenship

For a majority of the participants, the meaning of citizenship was immediately perceived in terms of its legal definition. One participant understood citizenship to mean a member or citizen of a country, but her argument suggests that there is a tension between the definition of citizenship and her faith, she said:

> *'Citizenship is being a member, a citizen of the country. How I behave as a citizen is affected by my faith, and most of the Christian rules would lead towards a good citizen I think. But I think it is something that, to me the connotations are more connected with the secular relationships and so on, than anything else.'*
>
> **Anglican 2**

The tension her comment presents relates to how religious behaviour is connected to a secular status of a citizen where behaviour is not informed by religious principles.

Another participant's understanding focused on equal rights as a citizen:

> *'A member of a city, a person who has rights as everybody else.*'
>
> **Shia 1**

She suggests that citizenship ensures equal treatment, irrespective of one's identity or personal characteristics.

Another Anglican participant understood citizenship in terms of the rights and responsibilities of a citizen. She further relates her understanding of the concept to participation in national politics and to global issues, and how to support the integration of immigrants. She argued:

> *'I suppose it comes down in a sense to rights and responsibilities. A citizen will have certain rights, but I think also there are certain responsibilities on you and so for example, you have the right to vote but also the responsibility of voting. I think you also have the responsibility to be active in your local community and I tend to do mine through the church I suppose, which a lot of people might say is not a good activity, but that, you know that is how I choose to do it.'*
>
> **Anglican 6**

She acknowledges that one has rights as a citizen of a country whilst one also has responsibilities within the country; she highlights civil and social responsibilities by connecting citizenship with activities in the religious arena.

She further argues on global responsibilities:

> *'And I think you can also be active globally, and that part is a part of being a citizen as well. So I am sort of concerned about the environment, […] I can make sure things are reused. So that is quite a big part to me of being a citizen.'*
>
> **Anglican 6**

She uses a social definition of citizenship to suggest that she also has to be responsible for global issues, in her case the environment. Her comments thus suggests a need to also consider 'environmental citizenship' (Isin and Wood, 1999).

She elaborated on her views by highlighting how upholding one's tradition could be challenging in relation to immigration. She commented:

> *'but also I suppose, I would say upholding traditions of your country, but I think that can be a dangerous one because that is a sort of changing thing, and as new groups come in and join the country you know, you have to be careful that you are not actually discriminating against those groups or excluding them in some way. So I think that although that is on the face of it part of being a citizen, I think you have to be a bit careful about it and make sure as I said that you are, because you are not being a good citizen if you are excluding some group that is in your country are you.'*
>
> **Anglican 6**

Her comment against discrimination of other ethnic groups highlights the argument for 'ethnic citizenship' which Nyhagen Predelli et al., (2009) apply tentatively as a theoretical and empirical concept to demands for justice and a new set of anti-racist and anti-discrimination policies. This Anglican interviewee also indicates how being a citizen is multi-faceted, via both legal and social responsibilities. To her, the community, the environment, her country and the international community all are important contexts for responsibility.

One Shia participant's understanding of citizenship also reflected different issues, she started by saying: *'Citizenship, in this country, it is very important. Citizenship to me is having a liberation, the liberty of moving easily from one place to another.'*

Here she emphasises the ability to travel, which is enabled through her legal rights as a citizen of the country. She continues to argue how the need for a legal status was not part of 'God's initial design': *'OK. God created this world and did not make any boundaries, it is us humans who made the boundaries, […]. We should not have any passports, we should not have any visas or things like that. We should go freely to every country. […]'.* She idealises a situation where movement from one geographic area to another would be easily attained without any official or legal requirements. She continued once again by highlighting the benefits of having a legal right to abode in a country, she said:

> *'I think citizenship is very important. When you are having a citizenship you become loyal to the country as well. [...] When you have got citizenship you can go to all the professions and government departments. If you do not have citizenship you do not have a right to apply for those posts. I think citizenship is very important.'*
>
> **Shia 3**

This interviewee thus suggests that legal citizenship ensures loyalty of citizens and the eligibility for jobs. Her understanding of citizenship seems to fall into two categories; one with no restriction of mobility, and another where the acquisition of citizenship ensures the right to services and to obtain jobs.

To some ethnic minorities who had migrated to the UK, citizenship is not a permanent status but depends on the geographic location in which an individual finds herself. One Sunni participant was of the view that citizenship is a formal document indicating the part of the world in which one resides, but she had a religious take on it too, she said:

> *'It is just a symbol of the place you live in, it is just a piece of paper telling you which part of the world you are living, or where you came from. Originally I am from Pakistan, so I have been living in the UK for 20 years so yes I would say, now I am a British citizen because I am living here and this is my homeland. But when it comes to citizenship, I would say, citizenship, there is no citizenship, we are all servants of God. Yes we have made the different cultures and we follow the different religions and have made the different rules of our own to some extent, that we can get away or we can dodge the things, but to me I just believe in one thing no matter which part of the world you are living and you have just got one thing to worry about, you came in this world a few days as a journey, you are returning back to your destiny and there is only one person and it is God.'*
>
> **Sunni 3**

Her comments are similar to those of Shia 3, who stated that 'God created man free but boundaries are made by humans'. These statements introduce a creationist point of view; the religious belief that humanity, life, the earth, and the universe were created in some form by a supernatural being or beings (Isaak, 2000). In relation to the notion of citizenship, a creationist view forwards the notion that we are all equal before God and that any differences in citizenship status on earth are man-made.

Although these participants were referring to formal or legal citizenship, they also highlighted how the concept is multi-faceted by including rights and responsibilities, a sense of belonging and creationist perspectives. Further, the responses of the ethnic minority women suggest that acquisition of citizenship has provided them with more security in the UK. They also implied that religious citizenship connotes equality irrespective of geographical location, ethnicity or faith.

5.2.3 Community/belonging

Some participants in our study talked about the term citizenship without referring to any legal aspects. They shared the view that citizenship primarily connotes a sense of belonging to a community or society. Their discourse suggests that citizenship enables an individual to be part of a community, thus confirming feminist theorists' position that the concept of citizenship includes both a sense of belonging and community participation.

One Anglican participant commented that belonging to a community provides a sense of citizenship, she stated:

> *'I suppose it means just belonging to a community, yes belonging to a community. We all belong to a community because of where we live, yes*.'
>
> **Anglican 5**

Her comment indicates that we cannot isolate the concept of belonging from the understanding of citizenship. Belonging may however take different forms. A Sunni participant suggested that contributing to the community defines citizenship by saying:

> *'I think just being a decent human being and you know, putting back in to the community.'*
>
> **Sunni 4**

As mentioned by some of the women, citizenship bears responsibilities; this Sunni woman is also stating that contributing to one's community is part of her understanding of citizenship.

Another Sunni woman was proud to belong to the UK, she said:

> *'to me citizenship means being proud of where I am from, being proud of my country, being proud of the Queen, some people look at me really strangely when I say that, but being proud of being British and a British Muslim*.'
>
> **Sunni 5**

This interviewee is equally proud of both her nationality and her religion. She suggests that other people, ethnic minority and non-Muslim, may find it surprising to hear that she is proud of the Queen of England and of being British, as if being British and a Muslim at the same time cannot easily co-exist.

As mentioned above, Anglican 6 stated that efforts have to be made to ensure that immigrants are not excluded within communities. A Shia participant also suggested that the successful integration into the society by immigrants themselves provides a sense of citizenship. She said:

> *'Citizenship, oh belonging to the society, like integrating you know, being part of everything, from not the lowest levels but you know, all levels of society. We should respect this country because you know, for people coming in […] I have met some ladies, oh I have known them what, 30 odd years, still can't speak English you know. But you have to know what is going on you know.'*
>
> **Shia 4**

Her comments indicate that immigrants also have to be responsible for integrating into their adopted country by learning the English language.

On the other hand, one Pentecostal woman's interpretation of citizenship, reflects a belonging or close relationship with God. She stated that:

> *'I think for me it, I would say I was on a journey, my citizenship is definitely in heaven, that is where I see it. Wherever the Lord wants me, I will be happy here, I would find it very hard to leave here [...] I've lived here for 42 years. But yes for me citizenship, if you had asked me that five or 10 years ago I wouldn't have, but now I say citizenship definitely with the lord.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 1**

This participant takes the debate of citizenship into the afterlife, where she would belong to God, similar to comments by Sunni 3 and Shia 3 where they argued that citizenship is determined by a higher being, God. These participants thus explicitly linked a notion of citizenship with their religious beliefs.

5.2.4 Participation

Other participants' understanding of citizenship was about participating in political or social activities that might improve the quality of life of all in the society. One Pentecostal commented that:

> *'I think citizenship, to me is about every individual having a place and playing a role, hopefully a positive role, to the benefit of society generally.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 4**

A Sunni participant also argued that participating in the political process at the local level and being proud of the country is her understanding of citizenship. She said:

> *'Citizenship to me means participating in the political process, voting, making sure that my vote counts. Whether there are other political processes in place, for example, in the local area you have a neighbourhood watch system and things like this, at the local level getting involved. Strangely when I say that, but being proud of being British and a British Muslim.'*
>
> **Sunni 5**

These comments indicate that the concept of citizenship is also reflected in active participation in community issues. To be an active citizen varies as represented by our participants, one preferred environmental issues, while others emphasised social or political issues. In summary, engaging in all aspects of the community was understood to be good citizenship practise.

However, some of the participants did not immediately understand or relate to what we meant by the word citizenship, which confirms the argument that the concept of citizenship is abstract (Lister, 1997, 2003; Siim, 2003). When the researcher tried to explain further, one participant stated that:

> *'I don't have much idea to be honest, I don't know what you mean exactly.'*
>
> **Shia 5**

Overall, the responses suggest that citizenship is understood in two contexts, at the structural or institutional level (i.e., political citizen or national status) and the practice or community level (i.e., belonging and participation). Citizenship was thus broadly understood to encompass status, participation or belonging. Also, there were no distinctive differences between the religious faiths. However, there were differences in the understanding of citizenship in terms of those who have *acquired* British citizenship; these women perceived their legal status as having the same rights as everyone else in the country; including the right to services and employment.

5.3 Nationality discourse

Although the UK is a country which comprises four nations, England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, all of its citizens are referred to as British. In our study we explored how participants constructed their nationality; they were asked 'How would you describe your own nationality?' We found that participants' nationality was multilayered, as they identified with the legal definition and also with their ethnicity, race or religion.

5.3.1 British as a legal requirement

All the participants mentioned that they were British, but there were some differences in their responses. Interviewees informed us that on most official forms you are required to indicate if you are 'British', while identities such as 'English', 'Scottish' or 'Welsh' are not included as optional response categories. One participant gave an example with marriage certificates, she said:

> *'My nationality. It is fascinating because I do, well I prepare couples for weddings, we have to fill out a lot of legal forms and one of which is nationality, and we are not allowed to put English. You put British if that is their nationality.'*
>
> **Anglican 3**

So, people have to tick 'British', which overlooks the four national political regions which make up the UK. Despite this, one English participant did not use the official term 'British' of identifying with the country but described herself simply as English. **Anglican 4**. This interviewee thus preferred to be identified with her national identity within UK, instead of the overall nation-state identity.

5.3.2 Cultural heritage

The length of stay in Britain had influenced how some of the ethnic minority women in our study presented themselves to us. A Pentecostal participant stated:

> *'So I would say I am, I regularly go back and forth to India, because I minister there, but I would say I was very much British to be honest, been here too long.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 1**

This comment suggests that she has become more British over time, so being British is not a static identity but a fluid and developing identity.

A Shia participant viewed her acquisition of British citizenship as a significant moment and considered herself British from that point and onwards:

> *'I am a foreigner who came to England a long time ago, applied for nationality to become a British citizen.'*
>
> **Shia 3**

This interviewee suggests that becoming British occurs at a specific moment in time, which differs from the interpretation presented by Pentecostal 1.

A Sunni with Pakistani heritage also argued that she did not identify with Pakistan because she has been living in the UK all her life. She said:

> *'I am British. I suppose I am from Pakistani origin but I am British, I have lived here all my life, I don't know anything else really. I don't identify with Pakistan, not really, don't go there.'*
>
> **Sunni 4**

She acknowledges her cultural heritage, but identified with being British because she has lived in the UK all her life.

These interviewees' comments depict the fluidity and multiple meanings of national identities; they all identify with the British nationality, yet they also make reference to their cultural identities as being different from their national identities.

Another participant argued that her length of stay in the UK has not changed her identity. She said:

> *'I have been here more than I have been in Iran, definitely, but I still see myself as Iranian.'*
>
> **Shia 5**

Similarly, a Sunni participant also held the opinion that in case of any misfortune, she would consider herself as Pakistani irrespective of the fact that she was born in England. She said:

> *'I was born in England but my parents are from Pakistan, so if anything happens I am a Pakistani. Naturally you think I am a Pakistani.'*
>
> **Sunni 2**

These two interviewees accept their legal status as British but preferred to be identified with their cultural heritage, suggesting that they have stronger bonds with their cultural heritage than with their current national and legal status as citizens of the UK.

5.3.3 Race and religion

Some participants, including both ethnic majority and minority women, did not only identify with the country (the UK), but also included their religion or race as important signifiers of their own national identities. They stated:

> *'I would say I was British, white British.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 2**

> *'As far as I am concerned I am Black British.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 4**

Another included her religious identity; '*A British Muslim*' **Sunni 5**

In our study, nationality was largely constructed by the research participants on the basis of status as prescribed by law. However, the responses revealed a distinction

between those who describe themselves as being British by birth and those who describe themselves as having become British. The comments of the last group reveal that national identity is not fixed but changeable, depending on context and circumstance. A plural construction of nationality was also identified, where participants included their race, ethnicity and religion in the construction of their national identity. This shows that 'what it means to be British' in a multicultural society is a complex issue.

5.4 The British identity

Participants were asked to share their opinions about whether they felt British. They responded to the question, 'Do you feel British?' As indicated above, the responses revealed two main positions, those who have acquired British citizenship and those who were born British. Also, all the participants who shared the opinion that they perceived themselves to be British, identified with a specific ethnic group, either as English, Iranian or Pakistani. However, for some interviewees their race was a barrier to them feeling British. This section discusses the representations of Britishness made by interviewees in our study.

5.4.1 Being English and/or British

Only ethnic majority participants in our study self-identified as 'English'. One participant emphasised her Englishness as well as her Britishness:

> *'I am probably almost as English as you can get actually, if you want to work it out. I go back several generations. But I still think of myself as British.'*
>
> **Anglican 2**

On the other hand, another participant stated that she was English but preferred the label British because that makes her nationality more inclusive. She said:

> *'Yes, I think English is a little bit, although I am I suppose technically English, because I was born in England, I don't know, I think British is a little bit more, a little bit more inclusive.'*
>
> **Anglican 6**

A third participant argued that she belonged to God's kingdom, which she perceives as multinational, and preferred to be called English rather than British. She said:

> *'I belong to the Kingdom of Heaven and that is multinational. And that is my first and foremost allegiance, yes. But I was born, I am English. In fact I like English better […] Why do I like English better, I don't know.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 5**

She presents a paradox, she believes the kingdom of God is multinational but prefers to identify herself as English, which Anglican 6 describes as less inclusive.

Another Anglican was more explicit. She stated:

> *'British means England, Scotland and Wales altogether. I am English first because I was born here, and I am British on a wider basis. If you have to relate yourself to a worldwide area, then I am British. But I am English first.'*
>
> **Anglican 4**

These comments by white women in our study show that they all relate to their 'English' identity, yet they also embrace their Britishness. They wanted to highlight their specific ethnic (national) identity; their distinctness from being Scottish, Welsh or Irish.

However, one Pentecostal white woman expressed her dislike of the various definitions of being 'British' often listed on official forms. She argued:

> *'I feel I am, yes just a British person. But I hate the whole thing of the British, that whole colonialism kind of feeling. I hate that and wouldn't ever want to associate myself with anything like that, the whole sort of, I am British. I think people who are born in Britain are British. It is not anything about being white, it is about, I describe myself I suppose as British, but they make you tick these boxes, are you white British or black British. I am British, I am just somebody who lives [in the UK] and wants to give something to this country.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 2**

This interviewee draws our attention to the fact there are different racial definitions of being 'British', and that the term 'British' is also associated with colonialism and the British Empire. She clearly wanted to distance herself from the understanding of 'Britain' and 'British' as having to do with empire.

5.4.2 Becoming British

As discussed above, some of the white women in our study reflected on their 'English' identity before associating themselves with the term 'British'. Similarly, some of the ethnic minority women also reflected on their often mixed cultural heritage. One Sunni woman stated:

> *'My origin is from India, so I am of Indian origin, yet I am a citizen, British Citizen.'*
>
> **Sunni 1**

Being identified as British and as a Muslim was preferred by a Sunni participant who also acknowledged her Pakistani origins, she stated:

> *'[I am] A British Muslim. Although my parents are from Pakistan, my father was actually born here, my mother is from Pakistan, and I relate myself more to Britain and being a Muslim than being from Pakistan. Some of my friends from a similar age say British Pakistani Muslim or Pakistani Muslim, but I myself would class myself as British.'*
>
> **Sunni 5**

Another Shia participant in her response pledged her loyalty to the UK:

> *'I like this country, I would love to live in this country, I would appreciate the good, the benefit for me. I will provide my help wherever and whenever it is needed for this country, as a British citizen.'*
>
> **Shia 3**

She is thus emphasizing her appreciation of being accepted as British. The comments of those who have acquired British citizenship also echo the multiple national identities that were exhibited by some of the white participants in our study. The difference is that the white women identified with an ethnic-cultural group within the UK ('English'), whilst the ethnic minority women identified with ethnic groups outside the UK (Pakistan, Iran, India).

5.4.3 Not British

Some of our interviewees, on the other hand, did not feel British, mainly because of their race. These participants preferred to identify with their cultural heritage more than with British identity, because they felt culturally different from the majority of UK citizens.

One participant who migrated with her parents to the UK had the view that her mind-set is more Asian than British because she was socialised with Asian values. She described herself as:

> *'I am an Asian, I will always be an Asian you know and I think all the years of your life, whatever is here will always be part of you, OK. Because I was nine years old when I came, […], I am [...] between the old and the new and a lot of my thinking, I have to think twice, my children are totally very much westernised and their thought pattern, not what they do but their thought pattern is totally different. With me there is still I would say part of me is still very much of the old do you know what I mean, in the traditional things like that, certain things.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 1**

She also depicts the challenges of having a hybrid identity, combining Asian culture with western influences.

Another Shia woman also held the view that although she was British in legal terms, her culture does not make her British. She said:

> *'Sometimes I feel that you know, because I have been here for so long, it is only right, I am living here I am working here I have got my family here, everything, it has got to be. But I know I am not, I am only British by name. I live here and pay tax, do work, everything but truly I am not because my culture is different.'*
>
> **Shia 5**

These comments from our interviewees also reveal the challenges of having a hybrid national identity; they were British but yet do not feel British because of their strong ties with another culture.

Historically, being British has never been associated with only one identity, as the country comprises four distinct nations; England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Yet, as mentioned previously, for legal purposes all citizens are identified as British. Thus with an influx of different ethnicities from different nationalities UK is a truly multinational and multi-faith country. All participants in this study stated that legally they were British, yet there were some participants, both ethnic majority and minority women, who preferred to be identified with their cultural identities or ethnicities. This suggest that in the UK being British is accepted as a legal identity

but some individuals prefer to be associated with other aspects of their identities; thus their perception reflecting a hybrid nationality. Therefore citizenship is talked about by women in our study both as a legal status and in relation to cultural or ethnic identities.

Another finding is that a majority of those who have acquired British citizenship acquired it in England, yet none referred to themselves as 'Black English' or 'Pakistani - English' an indication that they are identifying with the country and not the 'English' identity. We also observed differences in how they identified with their faiths. Muslim women clearly felt a need to emphasise both their religious and national identities, and often referred to themselves as 'British Muslim'. However, none of the Christian women used the term 'British Christian'. This could be a reflection of their privilege position of being part of the majority faith in the UK. The Christian women, including both ethnic majority and minority women, apparently did not feel the need to identify themselves as 'British Christian'.

5.5 Religious citizenship

We were also interested in how religious citizenship might be conceptualised by religious women. Therefore we asked interviewees in our study about the relevance of religious citizenship with the question 'Do you think it makes sense to talk about citizenship in the religious arena? Why/why not?'

5.5.1 Religious citizenship as prescriptive in both religions

Some of the participants argued that it is relevant to discuss religious citizenship as both the Bible and the Qur'an were said to mention the concept of citizenship.

A Pentecostal argued that if citizenship is defined as contributing to society, then it is relevant to discuss religion in relation to citizenship. She said:

> *'The Bible talks about citizenship, it calls us citizens of heaven. Citizens of heaven even though we are living on the earth. I think it depends on your definition of citizenship. If citizenship is being a part of and making a contribution to, then yes.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 4**

So contributing to society as a religious person justifies a discussion of religious citizenship. She also highlights the understanding of religious citizenship as both other- worldly (heaven), and this- worldly (earth).

Similarly, an Anglican participant mentioned that being a responsible citizen is a requirement in the Bible, she argued:

> *'Yes I think so, […] in the Bible, Paul tells us to be responsible citizens and do what you are supposed to do. So yes from that point of view […] Yes, that we should be responsible citizens, it is part of being a Christian that as well as obviously believing in God you should be equally responsible citizens. The second commandment is to love thy neighbour as thyself, and part of doing that is obviously being a responsible citizen and looking out for your neighbour and doing the right things, so yes, I think being a Christian does mean you have to be a responsible citizen.'*
>
> **Anglican 4**

She is suggesting that being Christian necessitates that one becomes a responsible citizen; thus to her religion and citizenship are intertwined, as Christianity prescribes what a citizen should do.

Likewise, Islam was also said to provide a guide for citizens. One Shia participant explained:

> *'Islam has guidelines for citizenship, for working, for studying, for bringing up your babies, for everything. For many areas of your private life it has many guidelines.'*
>
> **Shia 1**

This interviewee represents Islam as a prescriptive religion which offers specific guidelines for everyday life. Another Shia woman also said:

> *'Citizenship is giving you the right, you can live in any country you want to, and Islam says you follow where you live, the rules and regulation of where you live. So you need to respect those countries' rules and regulations. Islam strictly tells us these sorts of things. And if you are living in a Christian country you need to follow those rules, the country's rules and regulations.'*
>
> **Shia 3**

She reemphasises the religious prescriptions provided in the Qur'an for the respect of laws in a given country. The interviewees' comments indicate that in both books,

the Bible and the Qur'an, there are prescriptive rules for the behaviour of citizens, thus for them it is relevant to conceptualise citizenship in religious terms.

Elimination of geographical boundaries with religion

Many of the Christian participants in our study shared the view that religious citizenship breaks down barriers, especially national boundaries. Their responses suggest that religious citizenship might render legal status within a country less important.

One Pentecostal argued that nation states have introduced boundaries, she stated:

> *'I think [the nation state] has separated people OK and I think people need to see people, even Christians have to answer to themselves. Everybody needs to come out of their box and see things the way God sees them. […] to me we need to, I mean for me I have learned quite a lot. We need to come out of the box and really to love other people you need to see the way God sees them, and that is very, very important. And for me, because I work with people from different backgrounds, […]. I see them as people you know and, who are precious to God.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 1**

She suggests that people should overcome boundaries created by differences, as all are equal before God. In the view of this interviewee, religious citizenship implies equality in the sense that God values all human beings equally.

One Anglican participant also argued that religion was linked with good citizenship. She stated:

> '*I think it is because my Christian faith, again going back to understanding it is God's will for people to have life and life in its fullness, [...] means that I think everyone needs to be a part of that and to do their bit for everybody to flourish, for everybody to have fullness of life. So I think the two are hand in hand, people in faith have got to have a care about good citizenship, and that this society is working and working for all; and so yes.*'
>
> **Anglican 3**

Her position suggests that religious citizenship might introduce more neighbourliness and social commitments within communities.

Another Anglican also shares the same views; she narrated a strategy adopted by her Parish to reach out to others in her community. She explained:

> *'If I can talk from the Church of England's point of view, our mission is to go out to evangelise and to reach people. In the past it hasn't worked because we have expected people to come to us, to come to church. You can't expect young people to come to our church and services; it is all hocus pocus to them. […] So we are having a youth church, it is being funded by the diocese and we hope for good things there. But that is all part of the community you see, and part of citizenship as well, getting out in the community and doing things for each other.'*
>
> **Anglican 5**

Another participant also argued that being more inclusive is one of the obligations for Christians, she said:

> *'Oh yes because I mean one of the things, well certainly within the Christian religion, I don't know about other religions, I would imagine they are the same, but certainly within the Christian religion there is an expectation that you will be active in the world around you or in your local community. And I think that is part of being a citizen so I think that yes, it is an important debate.'*
>
> **Anglican 6**

Her comments suggest that it is an expectation for a Christian to be actively involved in his or her community. She is associating religious citizenship with active participation in community issues.

A Shia participant, on the other hand, tried to explain the relevance of religion to citizenship and the priority religion is accorded by using the concept of water. She said:

> *'Yes I think it is, as I told you previously, I think religion is like a water moving through different countries and each country has different, is like a different container and it takes the shape of that different container. But the water is the same but sometimes it is very cold so it freezes, somewhere very hot you know. So it is like, I think religion is more, it is like you know.'*
>
> **Shia 6**

She suggests that the extent to which religion influences a country differs.

5.5.2 Linkages between religion and citizenship

Linkages between democracy and religion are being discussed in contemporary debates by authors such as Habermas (2006), Kymlicka and Norman (2000),

Spinner-Halev (2000) and Weithman (2002). The term 'religious citizenship' appears, however, to be of a more recent coinage, its usage gaining momentum alongside the development in citizenship theory towards an increasing number of distinctions between different citizenship dimensions such as ecological, technological, sexual, and others (see Isin and Wood, 1999). In response to the question 'Do you think it makes sense to talk about citizenship in the religious arena?', some participants in our study questioned the appropriateness of bringing the two concepts, citizenship and religion, together. Others argued that some conditions have to be met before the two concepts could be fruitfully linked together.

One participant made links between her Christian faith, obeying secular laws, and having an emotional attachment to where you live. She argued:

> '*Yes and no. Yes because if we go by what I defined it as before as living by the laws of the land and having a passion for where you live, then if you apply that to religion then it is living by, and Christianity, it is living by what the Bible teaches and having a passion for that isn't it, so yes in that sense. But no in a sense that if you say citizenship in the way that it has been used more of late, you have to earn it you know, you have to do something to achieve it. For example in Britain […] you have to earn it, whereas with Christianity I believe you don't have to earn it, you just have to ask forgiveness and believe in God. So no in that sense.*'
>
> **Pentecostal 3**

She highlights challenges to the notion of equal religious citizenship by referring to limitations that may be produced by formal citizenship rules. The process of becoming a Christian does not depend on one's immigration status within a country, and in this sense Christian religious citizenship is open to all. Formal, legal citizenship status, on the other hand, is non-inclusive, in that it cannot be obtained by all.

A question was also raised in terms of whether the concept of religious citizenship would create divisions between communities or bring different religious communities together. One Sunni participant argued:

> *'Only if it helps us to understand each other. I think if you are going to use it to drive wedges between communities then no. But if it helps you to gain better understanding of each other's communities then yes include it. But you know at the end of the day we are all striving to be better citizens, or that is what we should be doing, and you know if we are from different cultures and different backgrounds, if we don't know enough about each other to help us to*

achieve that aim, then perhaps we should include some sort of, I don't know, educational programme or whatever to do that. But as I say, there is so much negativity that goes in to these things and I really don't think it is necessary. I think there is almost like a hidden agenda by the media and the government you know, why stir up all this negativity.'

Sunni 4

She is reflecting on the presence of different cultures, religions and ethnic groups in the UK, and how a holistic concept of religious citizenship could be achieved in a multi-faith country.

The dilemma of multi-faith was also raised by one Shia participant who argued that religious citizenship was relevant as long as individuals are not forced to take up a particular religion and both religions, Christianity and Islam, are regarded with equal values. She was of the view that:

'They can be, as long as it is not forceful you know. You can just show who you are, be a good person and then if they think, oh well if she is a Muslim and she can be good. That is what I am saying you know, you are a good person, not just Islam is wonderful, Islam is this, because then from what you see Islam OK can be good, but then Christianity is good as well because they are all God's you know, children. […] so they can't put down Christianity to say Islam is better. They have their beliefs, a lot of it is exactly the same stuff, except you know who has put extra bits. So if, Islam to me it is important to be a good person and I think with that I can show myself and Islam.'

Shia 5

She is thus suggesting that people of different faiths, including Christians and Muslims, can be good citizens. Her comments could be a result of the negative portrayal of Muslim communities after the 9/11 attacks in New York, or anxiety over Christianity perhaps being suggested as a 'better faith' for 'good' people. Similar to Sunni 4, she reflects on the negative image of Muslims carried by the media.

Further, some Muslim participants in our study shared the view that the two concepts, religion and citizenship, were not so easily linked due to a potential to create further differences in status. One Sunni participant argued that religious citizenship might introduce social classes based on a criterion of how committed

people are to their faith. She primarily associated citizenship, including religious citizenship, with status. She stated:

> '*Not, well again I don't believe in that, because in religion I don't think you can make the citizenship, because you have got so many different believers and the different faiths and the different levels. Because as I said, sometimes I am so tired and I fall asleep and I miss my prayer, but there are people, no matter what happens they don't miss the prayer at all, and there are people that their time it goes more in prayers than in running their life, or going out for living. So again those are three different levels, and what citizenship are you going to give to them, low class, middle class, higher class. So in religion I don't think citizenship makes any difference you know.*'
>
> **Sunni 3**

So, she conceptualises citizenship, including religious citizenship, as a notion that creates differences in status between different people.

Overall, the discourse on religious citizenship by participants focused mainly on how religion might be interpreted in terms of a legal definition of citizenship, with the exception of some responses that dwelt on participation and belonging. Some interviewees immediately thought about legal status in connection with the term 'religious citizenship'. They seemed to invoke their regular conception of citizenship as legal *status*, and when applied to the religious sphere they seem to associate citizenship with the possibility that unequal in status could be accorded to different religious communities, such that one religious faith would have a higher status or be seen as 'superior to', or 'better than', another faith. Such an inequality in status was clearly disliked by our participants. Research participants were also concerned with how people of different religions perceive each other in terms of participation and belonging. For example, the notion 'religious citizenship' was thought of in more inclusive terms in the sense that all religious believers (regardless of whether they are Christian or Muslim) were perceived to be united in a shared community of faith. Interestingly, our respondents do not seem to think of religious citizenship in the form of equal rights for members of various religious communities. This could be associated with the fact that none of the participants mentioned that they have ever been denied the opportunity to participate in any religious activity. Furthermore, there does not seem to be a sense amongst our participants that followers of the Christian faith, or Christian communities, are accorded more rights than followers of the Muslim faith, or Muslim communities. It seems that the interviewees also take for

granted, and accept, the fact that Christianity has a special status as the official religion of the UK. However, it could also be that this issue was silenced, or not talked about, simply because we did not raise it as a question in our interviews.

5.5.3 Conclusion

Women in our study talked about citizenship as status, participation and belonging. Citizenship was first and foremost associated with the legal construct, and only secondly were other layers of the concept, such as belonging, ethnicity and participation, included. Our interviewees elaborated how legal, political, social, cultural and religious citizenship practices are part of their lives in terms of legal status, voting in political elections, participating in the work force,; engaging in community activities; ethnic identities, and practising their religious faiths. The various dimensions and perspectives discussed confirm feminist arguments against the classic view of citizenship as limited to legal and political rights. Nonetheless, the importance of acquiring legal citizenship in the UK was also emphasised, as a means to equal access to services and employment.

In general, how citizenship was talked about also revealed that the concept is fluid, dynamic and contested within the majority and minority ethnic groups. There were no distinct differences between the groups in terms of preferences related to identifying with their ethnic background; many participants demonstrated hybrid identities where national identities are meshed with ethnic and/ or cultural identities. The responses also revealed the importance of legal status to ethnic minorities who emphasised their acquired legal status in the UK, where some value the right to call themselves British. However, there were other ethnic minorities who, due to their cultural heritage, do not feel British because they were not white. Therefore these findings confirm the feminist notion that citizenship must not only be debated in terms of legal status, but other social and economic perspectives have to be included as well (Lister, 2003).

Religious citizenship was also talked about in relation to similar themes; legal status, belonging and participation. Religious citizenship was argued by some women in our study to be prescriptive in both religions, Christianity and Islam, where the faith provides guidelines about how to be ‘good’ citizens and participate in their respective

communities. Some of the interviewees, on the other hand, talked about a perceived incompatibility between a legal citizenship construct and that of religion, as they feared 'religious citizenship' might introduce divisive tendencies within communities and/ or discriminate against those who have not acquired the requisite legal documents of residing in the UK. Rather than talking about how every religion ideally should be treated equally, these respondents feared that a link between citizenship and religious faith would imply further inequalities between religious communities.

5.6 How Multiculturalism is talked about

5.6.1 Introduction

In 2000 the then Prime Minister of the UK, Tony Blair, stated that blood line alone does not define national identity, and that Britain is shaped by a mix of different ethnic and religious origins.[48] This statement suggests that the political elite of the country accepts its multicultural make up and differences. Yet, a growing concern of the influx of immigrants in the UK has resulted in a review of legislation regarding the acquisition of citizenship in recent years. As mentioned in chapter 1, in 2009, the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act was passed. The Act is meant to simplify immigration law, strengthen borders, and extend the time it takes to gain citizenship in the UK. In our study we explored how participants talked about multiculturalism and its relevance to their lives.

5.6.2 Discourse on multiculturalism

Our study sought to investigate participants' opinions on multiculturalism. We began by first asking 'What does the fact that people from different cultural backgrounds are living together in society mean to you? Or what does multiculturalism mean to you?'

5.6.3 Different cultures and faiths

Interviewees in our study talked about multiculturalism neither as assimilation nor integration, but as an *understanding* of the 'other' culture and faith and the benefits that can be generated from living together in society. Many of the participants highlighted the advantage of having a mix of different ethnicities, and how they could

[48] http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/693591.stm, [accessed March 29, 2010].

contribute to community cohesion. For instance, one Pentecostal's understanding of multiculturalism was that of accommodating other cultures. She said:

> '*Multiculturalism, it is a coexistence, an amicable coexistence and mutual acceptance of people from different nationalities and ethnic groups, cohabiting peacefully with one another and appreciating and understanding one another's differences.*'
>
> **Pentecostal 5**

She thus emphasises the 'amicable and peaceful' coexistence of different cultures.

The presence of different cultures was also deemed as a positive phenomenon. A Sunni participant observed:

> *'It is very positive. In Leicester you have seen all sorts from all over the world and it is nice to even live together, like in one street you would see so many [different people]. Like in my street you would see so many people living from all over the country and the way we live it is good to come home to, live with nice families, that is good.'*
>
> **Sunni 1**

She expresses a favourable attitude towards living in a multicultural community.

A Pentecostal also highlighted the advantage of the different cultures in terms of music, clothing and food. She stated:

> *'… multicultural means that we benefit from, I love the fact that you can go in to Leicester and you can choose to eat a whole gamut of foods, I love different fabrics from different, you know I love sari fabrics and jewelled fabrics and all those kind of things you know, I like African jewellery. I like to be able to absorb and I love different music from different cultures as well. […] I am inspired by Africans, Africans' faith, their faith and they put us to shame in terms of prayer, it is always the Africans who are here doing the half nights of prayer until 3.00am, we are all asleep the whites. And I think those brothers and sisters really challenge me you know, really challenge me and very much so.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 2**

She is thus talking about cultural benefits, including the experiences of different foods and music, and about admiring the religious practice demonstrated by specific ethnic groups in her community.

Similarly, the diversity of Leicester was deemed as very positive feature by another Sunni participant, she said:

> *'I love it, I love Leicester, […]. Coming from a small village, […], I have also lived in London but that was a bit too much for me, when I was studying. I love Leicester; I don't think there is any other place I would like to live in. If I go to X I can have an Indian onion 'baaji', I can go to X and have 'mojo' chips and sweet potato from the Afro Caribbean community. In the area where I work we have an Afro Caribbean society, a Bengali society, now we have a Somali development agency as well, and I am meeting new people all the time, making more friends.'*
>
> **Sunni 5**

The coexistence of different cultures enables her to experience other cultures, including different foods and the opportunity to interact with other ethnic groups.

Another participant was also of the view that multiculturalism provides the opportunity to learn about other faiths, but she questioned the agenda of extremist Muslims, asserting that such Muslims have misinterpreted the Qur'an. She commented:

> *'Multiculturalism, multi faith really and it is very, well being in Leicester we know what it is like and yes I embrace that, because we are all different. I mean as my brother says, in South Africa, the rainbow, we were talking about rainbows, that was our theme last night and yes I welcome the difference. Because we have such a lot to learn from each other you know, different cultures, different things. And that is why I don't get upset that the extreme Muslims want to take over and rule the world, but that is their aim, but their Qur'an doesn't say that, it doesn't say that you have to kill everybody else you know.'*
>
> **Anglican 5**

She favours the concept of celebrating other faiths, but rejects what she perceives to be the Islamisation agenda of some Muslim extremists.

5.6.4 Accommodating the 'Other'

Another strand of discourse identified among our participants was that of expressing an accommodation of 'the other'. One Anglican commented on the different experiences of multiculturalism depending on one's location, she said:

> *'In Leicester, well we practice multiculturalism a lot. Particularly, it is interesting because it is far more a concept in the city than it is in the county*

[…] I mean there are some areas where there are mainly white, and I would think certainly around here the majority is. In the city centre in some areas the majority is definitely not white. And from a faith point of view, [there are] probably not a lot of Muslims living around here or very many Hindus. Certainly in the city there are huge numbers. And I think the more we get on with them and understand their point of view; the better life is going to be for everybody.'

Anglican 2

She indicates that understanding each other is a pre-requisite for getting along and living together as a community. Also, it seems that the expression 'we' implied white and Christian people, while 'they' were taken to mean non-Christian and non-white people.

Her comments suggest that there is a gap between the different ethnic groups and faiths. This was also identified by another participant as the relevance of multiculturalism, and as an opportunity to understand differences. She said:

'It is important, when you have got different people living around you, you get a chance to understand each other, to meet different people, to meet different, you have got a chance to have a good cohesion. We meet other people, we go to their festivals or their events, we understand what they wear, the food, you discover so many things when you are living in a multicultural society. It is always good, diversity is always good.'

Shia 3

Thus, frequent interactions with other ethnic groups are seen as necessary for understanding each other in a multicultural and multi-faith community.

5.6.5 Politically correct

Others, however, were of the view that multiculturalism is a political rhetoric, rather than a social reality. Some of the comments reveal the tensions underlining the debate on multiculturalism. A Pentecostal argued that the concept of multiculturalism implies to ensure that all citizens abide by the law, but the contrary happens instead according to her. She said:

'I think, it is supposed to mean trying to ensure that people in different cultures are not disadvantaged in the host culture. Trying to ensure that people see themselves reflected in the life of the community of the society. That is what it is supposed to mean. I think what it has actually come to mean is being politically correct. I think that is what it has come to mean and I think people on the surface might appear more tolerant but I think that tolerance is based

on fear that they might be sued. I think the spirit of it was good but I think we tend to live by the law of it.'

Pentecostal 4

Hence, multiculturalism is perceived as political correctness, as opposed to actually living together and understanding each other.

Another participant also had the opinion that multiculturalism encourages the notion that some cultures are superior to other cultures, she argued:

'Multiculturalism? It means that we have a lot of ethnic people, people from different ethnic backgrounds living in society. Sometimes I think it means particularly with English being very bad at putting ourselves first, it means that we have to try and put all of them first and fit in with them instead of them fitting in with us. If we move to Spain we wouldn't expect them all to start serving Roast Beef and Yorkshire pudding. So it means a society that has different factions in it, but it should still be whatever that society was in the first place.'

Anglican 4

Her comment suggests that multiculturalism is seen as something threatening, as undermining an alleged 'English way of life'. So, majority society should prevail - without being mixed up with other cultures and without changing. Similar to Anglican 2, this respondent seems to use the notions of 'we' and 'them' to mean white English people and non-white, non-English people, respectively.

5.6.6 What Culture?

Other participants, however, had problems with the concept of multiculturalism as it distinguishes between cultures. One participant preferred to consider all individuals as God's creation. She commented on the uniqueness of Leicester:

'[…] Actually people, as people, I don't see their colour, you know, I wouldn't say they are Muslim, they are that, you know. They are people whom God created and God loves and regards them, they are not Christian. Because none of these people [are] born Muslims or Sikhs or Hindus, they are just born, and other people have made them in to that and labelled them and drummed things in to them, do you know what I mean. So God created everybody. I don't care where people come from, they are people, they are loved by God.'

Pentecostal 1

She suggests that multiculturalism highlights differences rather than promoting equality among different faiths, and that everyone, regardless of faith, is born equal and created by God.

Another participant explained her difficulties with the concept of multiculturalism. She did not perceive herself as having any culture. She said:

> *'Multiculturalism. [...] I like the idea of having a mix of cultures. The one thing that I worry about sometimes is that whether actually it is not working like that. Perhaps diversity is better and multiculturalism is a bad thing. Because sometimes it almost seems like, if you are trying to keep your culture distinct, then you must be setting up barriers against other people in order to do that, and I am not sure it is very good for people you know, it is not good for our country perhaps to have these barriers. [...]. Which kind of makes me think, well that is kind of implying that a culture is a minority thing. […], well what would I say if someone said, you know, what part of your culture is, what would you regard as English culture. Apart from the fact I sort of came up with tea, tea drinking and afternoon tea and sandwiches with the crusts cut off. You know, we have got no national dress, no national costume and anything like that, so I found I couldn't really come up on that.'*
>
> **Anglican 6**

She describes multiculturalism as creating barriers between people with different cultures living alongside each other, versus celebrating diversity as a mix of cultures and integration of different cultures in society. The interviewee reflects on the concept of culture being used to describe minority cultures ,excluding the 'English' culture as 'the English' allegedly do not have any 'culture'.

Thus the talk on multiculturalism among participants in our study reveals two dimensions, the legal and political dimension, and the cultural dimension. Multiculturalism was perceived to provide the opportunities to learn from other cultures and faith within communities, including the different ways of worship, culinary experiences, music and dress. This suggests an interest in experiencing and understanding other cultures. However, some participants revealed tensions in their responses where the majority, either English or Christian depending on the context, feel they have to try and accommodate the 'other' to ensure community cohesion. It appears such participants are resigned to the fact that the 'other' has to be tolerated so as to avoid being labelled 'politically incorrect'.

5.7 Relevance of multiculturalism

The main focus of our study was on religion, therefore participants were asked to respond to the relevance of multiculturalism to their religious practice. The question was, 'Is multiculturalism important to you in your religiously based work?'

5.7.1 Multiculturalism as a religious principle: 'Heaven is multicultural'

Some participants, both Christians and Muslims, shared the opinion that multiculturalism is prescriptive in their faith and thus relevant in their religious activities. One Pentecostal quoted the Bible, she said:

> *'Yes I think it is very much, it has to be. You know it says in Revelations, behold I stood and saw a multitude in heaven before the throne, of every nation you know. That is what, our churches need to be a reflection of what is going on in heaven. Heaven is multicultural, we should be multicultural shouldn't we.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 2**

She indicates that churches have to be tolerant and celebrate cultural diversity, and that her religion is inclusive and open to all.

Some of the Muslim participants also highlighted directives from the Prophet Mohammed. One Sunni participant argued:

> '*Yes it is. I mean it was right from the word go you know, when the Prophet moved to Medina he established a system whereby the Jews and the Christians and the Muslims could all live together in harmony there and he always said, be good to your neighbours, it doesn't matter what colour they are, what creed they are, what religion they are, neighbours have the right over you. So it doesn't matter where you go to you know, you respect one another. So multiculturalism is, I mean Islam is a worldwide religion, it is not just Saudi Arabia, it is worldwide.*'
>
> **Sunni 4**

> *'[…] Yes because I mean in the Qur'an there are guidelines like society is made up of Christians, Jews, how you are supposed to respect their values and they are allowed to have their religion and follow their practises, as long as they are not contravening [...] Islamic laws. Like it would be too much to allow, I am not sure about alcohol, no I don't think, you know what I mean. A religious practise can be in an Islamic society, especially if [...] it is Christian or Jew because we believe in the same God, so there is no contrary there. So multiculturalism, yes, there are guidelines like how society can live together, different backgrounds yes, so it is not an issue.'*
>
> **Shia 4**

Hence, she is suggesting that all religions have to be tolerant and respect other faiths.

One participant had the opinion that worshipping with members of only one nationality was not appropriate:

> *'Definitely, I couldn't be in a church where it was just all one nationality, I would find that difficult, you know, because that is not the way God made it, the Minister you know. And the same with the Indian church, I would find that difficult because in India I can accept that, but here what is the reason. Why do you separate, separate because of a language, nothing else, that language [is a] barrier because they can't understand. If they can't understand they can't put the word into practice [it is] as simple as that. But to separate people for any other reason, even their culture, I don't see it is a Biblical reason for it.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 1**

She is also highlighting a prescriptive rule in the Bible of worship as inclusive of different cultures.

5.7.2 Religion as a component of multiculturalism

Embracing multiculturalism was also deemed as relevant by participants to convert people of other faiths to Christianity. One Anglican woman commented:

> *'Yes, because […] as Christians we are called to spread the word of Christianity, but if we don't, if we put up a barrier between us and somebody else who, just because they say they are Hindu or Muslim or Sikh or whatever else, we are not going to spread Christianity. But we do need to understand we have a lot in common with these people, it is not all completely different. In fact I think our Bishop has been on record saying, we have more in common with people of other faiths than we have with people of no faith.'*
>
> **Anglican 2**

She suggests that the church has to take an evangelical approach and thus has to embrace other cultures.

Similarly another Anglican also said:

> *'Definitely because I think Christianity is an extremely multicultural faith. Yes, I mean the identification, even Christianity within this country embraces within it a huge range of cultures. I mean it kind of goes back to how far the church is, how good the churches are in responding to this is another matter. But I think it jolly well ought to be. I would say even in these villages, tiny villages*

which would seem to be very monochrome mostly what have you, there actually is a diversity of cultures present actually within that. So yes it jolly well ought to be because we are a worldwide, yes we are a multicultural, again that hasn't always been, the church hasn't always necessarily projected itself in that way, or promoted itself in that way. […].'

Anglican 3

So she sees the embracing of multiculturalism or diversity as a Christian obligation.

Multiculturalism was also perceived to enable one to understand different cultures. One Pentecostal stated:

'I think it is vitally important […], because even as Christians people have misconceptions you know, and when you are Christians and you start with people from different cultures, you begin to appreciate and understand things that you have thought about different cultures, they fall away because it is not, you know, you are brought up with a whole sort of things about them, you don't want to do this, you don't want to do that, or they do that and they do that.'

Pentecostal 2

She repeats the theme of multiculturalism ensuring the understanding of different cultures, including a focus on Christians from different cultural backgrounds.

Multiculturalism was also described as relevant to Islam. A Sunni participant highlighted the routines adopted to accommodate other cultures, she said:

'We do yes. Although our prayers and our religious observations that we have, the five prayers we have on a Friday, although we don't change those to suit the other sects, e.g. the Shia sect, the way we do them is quite similar but we wouldn't change it just for Shia Muslims. But for example if, at the moment there are some Shia Muslims, there are some Somali Muslims who are Shia Muslims, and they are using these premises to teach their children, so we have allowed them to do that and it is fine.'

Sunni 5

She highlights how different cultures worship in a common space as an example of how multiculturalism is practiced.

Another Shia woman also argued the relevance in the Friday prayers for meeting other people. She said:

> *'Socialising with other people is very important, it is a very big department, Islam, so to socialise with them. We say our prayers on a Friday and it is very important. Everybody is meeting each other on Friday prayers to understand each other's problems. And to share the problems as well. So this is very important, socialising, that is very important.'*
>
> **Shia 3**

The Friday prayers therefore are not restricted to a particular group, but are open to people of various cultural backgrounds.

5.7.3 Challenges of multiculturalism

Other participants, mostly Christian women, highlighted the challenges of achieving multiculturalism or diversity in their religious practices. One participant emphasised the class and ethnicity/ race of attendees at her church, and also what she saw as the Church's inability to reach other cultures. She said:

> *'[…] I think really when you are talking to someone from the Church of England, if you are honest, most of the people you will meet in the Church of England will be middle class white people. And we are not very good at reaching to other cultures, other groups. […].'*
>
> **Anglican 6**

She is reflecting on her own group privilege as white and middle class and her church's difficulties in attracting 'others' to their Service.

Another Anglican participant, however, had a different view of the difficulties in reaching the 'other'. She focused on the strategy adopted, and argued:

> *'Well yes because, […], if I can talk from the Church of England's point of view, our mission is to go out to evangelise and to reach people. In the past it hasn't worked because we have expected people to come to us, to come to church. You can't expect people to come to church, particularly young people, that is why in X we are building a youth church. […].'*
>
> **Anglican 5**

She is suggesting a change of attitude is required in order to reach out to the 'other'.

A third Christian participant's response dwelt on appropriate clothing choices of the 'other'. She said:

> *'I think it does in as far as there are aspects of people's culture that is a part of them. […]. As long as people dress modestly, what does it matter what they wear. As long as they are modest in terms of their dress, it was what kingdom culture calls for. It doesn't say men have to wear trousers and women have to wear skirts. I like the diversity, I like the different things that people bring, as long as it doesn't clash with or try to counter kingdom culture.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 4**

She introduces a different religious term, that of *'kingdom culture'*, a term that is used by some Christian communities to describe Christian behaviour within a largely secular society.[49] It seems not only class, race or culture could be challenges to multiculturalism; an individual's choice of clothing, if it does not conform to majority ideals, could also contribute to the labelling of a person as the 'other'.

Yet, one Anglican argued that there is no relevance of multiculturalism in religion. She stated that:

> *'To some extent, yes, I think it is important that different faiths should have a dialogue with each other, because you learn from each other. So to that extent yes. But it wouldn't necessarily impinge or change the Christian faith, as such […] Not the basis of the faith, no. It may change somewhat perhaps the way you look at things or deal with things. Here in X we don't really have that kind of interface, we don't have a lot of multicultural society here. The majority of X is white Anglican. We do have some Indian and Chinese here, but it is very much the minority. If you compare that to somewhere like Leicester it is vastly different. […].'*
>
> **Anglican 4**

Multiculturalism is not relevant to her because she lives in a community where interaction with the 'other' is very minimal. This indicates that the talk about multiculturalism is more relevant to those who experience diversity in their community or congregation on a more frequent basis.

East Midlands, the location of our study, is more culturally diverse than most parts of the UK; yet the responses reveal that those with little interaction with other cultures and faiths, mainly because their communities are predominantly white, attach little

[49] http://www.kingdomculture.com/ [accessed April 13, 2010].

relevance to multiculturalism in their religious practices. On the other hand, interviewees with different cultural experiences in their community accept the relevance of multiculturalism to their faith and its practices. Our findings also suggest that the concept of multiculturalism as practiced in religion is mostly relevant for those who have a passion for other cultures or have experienced other cultures.

The talk on multiculturalism by participants did not reveal any issues related to gender. Participants discussed the concept with regards to group identity in terms of ethnicity and faith, without identifying issues concerning their private lives and gendered issues.

5.7.4 Conclusion

The talk on multiculturalism by participants in our study suggests that even though the presence of 'other' cultures and faiths is largely accepted in the UK, there are tensions between majority and minority cultures and faiths. The 'other' seems to be tolerated by the majority, whites and Christians, but the majority also expresses concerns related to immigration, and to integration and community cohesion. Similarly, ethnic minority respondents also emphasise how they themselves, and their own ethnic and religious communities, seek to adapt and accommodate to the larger society in which they live. The existence of this type of discourse is likely to be related to a lack of direct contact and interaction between different ethnic and religious groups. However, being part of the 'other' did not exclude participants in our study from engaging in public activities, and any hindrance would have been construed as both illegal and discriminatory, and as 'politically incorrect', by ethnic minority and majority women alike.

5.8 Is religion represented as a resource or as a barrier (or both) to citizenship as practice?

We argued, in Chapter 2, that the notion of 'equal treatment' of women and men is a highly contested issue, not least within the women's movement itself, as different interpretations of what counts as 'equality' compete with each other. In relation to religious belief and practice, the question arises whether it should be tolerated and/or accepted that women are accorded less rights, status and privileges than men. We

therefore explored further in our study whether participants had experienced any barriers or advantages in participating in society as a result of their faith. We discuss how women in our study talked about faith as providing barriers or resources to their citizenship.

5.8.1 Religion as a barrier?

We first explored if women in our study had observed any barriers to their participation in society because of their faith. They responded to the question 'Have you or anyone close to you experienced any *barriers or limitations* in terms of participation in society due to your religious faith?'.

5.8.2 Perceived barriers

A majority of the participants, both Christian and Muslim, shared the view that they had not experienced any barriers. One participant argued that the perception that religion tends to be a barrier to participation is unfounded. She said:

> *'Yes I mean people think that […] if you are a Christian they see you as perhaps not as cool, that you are not, […] that you live a very boring life, that you live by a set of rules, that you don't know how to have fun. Those kind of things. And they see me as being, sometimes, no one has ever said that to me, but I think sometimes people think that my faith is a prop […] and restrictive, they see it because they don't think you are free, you just can't do whatever you want to do. I could because God has given me a free run, I just choose not to do because I know it is destructive to myself and other people around me.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 2**

This interviewee thus argues that while others, who do not share her faith, might perceive her religion as restrictive; she herself experiences her faith as providing her with a freedom of choice.

The restrictive behaviour was also experienced differently among the faiths. The view that within some Christian denominations, participation for women might be difficult, was expressed by one Anglican who said:

> *'Not in my experience with my religion. Again I am aware within Christianity and with Britain, some particular religious groups, some particular Christian groups for whom they will define the roles, the gender roles very clearly and curtail, that is where my feminism bit comes in, curtail what women are*

allowed and aren't allowed to do. And I think for them that would be a barrier to their citizenship as I understand it, but that has not been my experience.'

Anglican 3

She compares other Christian groups on constraining or limiting women's roles with her own group, which she perceives as providing freedom and choice for women. She also self-identifies as feminist, in the sense that she rejects any imposed limits on what women can or cannot do.

Similarly, being a member of the Church of England was deemed to be a position of privilege where barriers to participation are not experienced. Another Anglican stated:

'I am part of the majority religion, then no. Now it could be a very different question if you […] to people who are perhaps Muslim or even Jewish, you might find a different story. Because you know our society is actually set up in a way for Christianity, you don't think about it you know. We have Easter off, we have Christmas day off, Sundays are always days off so there is no problem in the Christian, we can observe the Sabbath if you like very strictly, the Sabbath being a Sunday to a Christian, and for most people there are no problems with that. But if you want to perhaps, if you are a Muslim and you wanted to go to Friday prayers, there could be a problem there. So I think actually because our society is based so much on sort of a Christian background, even though it is probably, it is not, I think it is much more secular than Christian now, it is not, my faith wouldn't be a barrier to me.'

Anglican 6

She acknowledges that her own religion is part of the majority faith in the UK, and as such she identifies as being in a relative position of privilege.

However, the Muslim participants did not share the perceived notion of barriers due to their faith, as mentioned by some of the Christian participants. For example head scarves worn by Muslim women have become topical in reference to Islam where some (non-Muslims) assume that it serves as a barrier to their participation. This study found other views. Some of the Muslim women had not experienced any barriers themselves, and did not deem the head scarf or hijab as a perceived barrier to their religious practice. They suggested that the head scarf makes the religion visible especially in the work place, but have not encountered any problems of

discrimination. One Sunni participant believes she has become more visible as a Muslim because of her head scarf. She said:

> *'No, I think again because I have worked for the same company since like I was at university and they knew me before I put the headscarf on and they knew what I was like then and I didn't change, it was just the fact that I wore a headscarf had made me more visible.'*
>
> **Sunni 4**

The head scarf thus reveals her faith to all her work colleagues, but otherwise she did not feel any different or experience any problems due to her wearing the head scarf.

A Shia participant also mentioned that her clothing choice has been accepted in her work place, but she also said that practices might vary and be less accepting in other countries. She observed:

> *'No, I can't remember anything. It is mostly about our covering and anywhere I have explained my limitation [...] they accept this. If it was in France I would say because they can't go to school covering. I don't know if they accept it or not but that was on the news a few days ago.'*
>
> **Shia 1**

She perceives that Muslim women might be constrained by their faith in other countries, whilst in the UK she has not experienced any limitation because of her religious practice in terms of her clothing.

5.8.3 Ethnicity as a barrier

Some of the participants in this study were of the view that their ethnicity serves as a barrier, and not their faith. One Pentecostal narrated her experience:

> *'I have had barriers because I am black rather than because of my faith. I remember making an appointment for a vacation job when I was at university and when I went into the room it was clear that the guy behind the desk was surprised that I was black. So things like that. But for me, as far as I was concerned, I had given my life over to the Lord and those barriers were not barriers to him. If I wasn't a Christian I don't know how I would be now. Probably a high achiever because in terms of my personality I would just want to prove people wrong, but at what cost.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 4**

She has experienced discrimination on the basis of race and ethnicity rather than on the basis of faith.

Another Sunni participant revealed that derogatory names have been used to refer to her friends, but she has never experienced such incidents:

> *'It has never happened, even when I was at school I never had that treatment. My friends used to get called names, Paki, but I never did. I have never had that kind of issue anywhere. I can't say I have had that.'*
>
> **Sunni 2**

She cites another example of indirect evidence of racism, rather than discrimination based on faith.

Language could also be a barrier if English is not the participant's first language. This has been the experience for one Shia participant. She said:

> *'Not because of my identity as a Muslim. Sometimes I think I have a language barrier, but not because of my identity. Language barrier because I think sometimes I can't express myself. It doesn't come easily for me, English is my second language. I have a language barrier.'*
>
> **Shia 6**

She has experienced discrimination because of her inability to express herself adequately in English, and not on the basis of her faith.

5.8.4 Other barriers

One research participant suggested that her physical appearance sometimes serves as a barrier:

> *'The only thing I do feel is, because I am little and I am blonde that is more the cause of having been looked down on, I think. Especially in the classroom because I am little, and I am female. A guy who walks in that is 6'4' automatically can command, at pre GCSE certainly … As a teacher, and I do think that. Especially when they tower above you and you are trying to tell them off. They often used to make me sit down. I have felt that more, that because I am only little I am a little bit more insignificant. But that wasn't the question really.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 5**

This comment reveals that other limitations, such as physical appearance, might also serve as barriers to participation.

However, one Muslim participant mentioned discrimination at her work place, due to the fact that her religion prohibits her to drink alcohol. She has therefore experienced exclusion in some social activities in the work place which has affected advancement in her career. She expressed her frustration:

> '*I worked so hard for companies but I did not get promotions that other people are getting. So your commitment is there, your honesty is there, your hard work should be there, but you do not get promotion. Because you did not socialise with them. I think this is always a barrier for a woman like me. Because I don't go to pubs, I don't drink with them, I don't socialise with them, I don't get promotions. I need to work hard to get a promotion. I need to raise these points with my seniors, why I am not getting any promotion. Where am I going wrong, OK. They have got no answers sometimes. They make excuses. So I can see that I make sure they are giving me some answers for that, but they are not the right answers.*'
>
> **Shia 3**

Her experience suggests that some activities that might facilitate career advancement are not accessible to some women as such activities conflict with their faith.

Religion was largely not perceived as a barrier by many participants in the study, however one gave an example in the work place which provided the insight that discrimination may be subtle and gendered because clothing choices and social interactions by Muslim women often follow Islamic principles. The findings also suggest that many of the participants in this study have not themselves experienced any barriers, but they were aware of the challenges some women were experiencing. It is possible their opinions are being influenced by the media, or that participants were prejudiced by the experiences of others. Clothing worn by Muslim women in the work place was deemed as an issue of identity rather than a barrier. Therefore religion was not a main barrier to participation as represented by women in our study. Rather, ethnicity, race and physical appearance were talked about in relation to such barriers.

5.9 Religion as a resource?

Participants were also asked if they had experienced any advantages in society because of their faith. They responded to the question 'Have you experienced any *advantages* in terms of participation due to your religious faith?'

5.9.1 No advantages to participation

Some of the Christian participants argued that they have not experienced any advantages, but acknowledged that adhering to the Christian faith was not difficult in the UK. The UK was perceived more as a Christian country, where it is not difficult to follow the principles of the religion. One Anglican argued:

> '*I don't think it is actually giving me advantages, but I think it is easier to follow the Christian religion in the UK, than it would be to follow more minority religions, because everything is set up for you, people don't question it.*'
>
> **Anglican 6**

She is acknowledging that the majority religion is privileged in the UK society.

Another Pentecostal emphasised the importance of freedom of religious belief in the UK:

> *'I mean all the advantages are associated with the advantages of my faith and the peace that it gives me. I think in terms of my ability to function within society, I am not sure that it gives me anymore or takes anything away. I don't see that it does, thankfully not in this country. I know many countries it would take a lot of rights from me, but in this country it doesn't.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 3**

It thus seems that these interviewees do not see their faith as providing an advantage in the UK, due to the fact that they belong to the majority Christian faith.

5.9.2 Advantages

However, a majority of the participants, both Christian and Muslim, identified their faith, ethnicity and education as advantages that have enabled them to participate in society.

5.9.3 Religion

The ability to contribute to community through the church was deemed an advantage by some Christian participants. One Anglican outlined how she uses her skills:

> *'In helping the Church of England committees and what have you and so on, and in my village, various community sort of efforts where I live as well. And I think general care, I worship here in this village, so in the parish that I worship in as well. A lot of the finance side I do obviously affects the whole diocese and so I get out and about Leicestershire quite a lot doing that as well.'*
>
> **Anglican 2**

Also, making others aware of the faith professed was deemed an advantage by one Pentecostal, she said:

> *'Yes, because sometimes people will open up to me and tell me stuff, they might be more vulnerable with me because maybe part of my Christian faith is that I am very, I care about where they are at, you know.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 2**

After 9/11 many governments have developed strategies to reach the Muslim community, and such initiatives have also been embarked on in the UK. These initiatives were viewed as an advantage for Muslims, one Sunni explained:

> *'Yes, because of the Terrorism Act and post 9/11, the government agenda is to crack terrorism and to crack anti-Islamaphobia and things like that and that has actually worked to an advantage for the mosques because they are able to do a lot more things than we would have been able to, not would have been able to, but had more potential and backing from government and councils to do a lot more events, open our doors.'*
>
> **Sunni 5**

This interviewee is thus suggesting positive financial implications for mosques from government community cohesion programmes initiated post 9/11.

One Shia participant also suggested that identifying with the Muslim ethnic minority has enabled her to become a facilitator:

> *'Yes, like I have got more chance to serve my community because I am Muslim, because I am from Pakistan. I can even fight for more rights for my community; I can even have more good contacts with the people who are service providers, who give the best services to the community. I think there are some advantages and some disadvantages.'*
>
> **Shia 3**

Therefore, identifying openly with a minority faith is perceived as a positive attribute which might attract some benefits.

One participant argued that being a Muslim also meant you are not to adhere to secular values, and that no one will suggest otherwise for fear of being regarded as politically incorrect. One Shia narrated her experience during her training:

> *'Advantages, I tell you one that I had, to me [it] was important and that was my acupuncture course, that really was, because of having to do the qualification, because there are so many points in everywhere. On the first year it was hands and feet, on the second year it was the body point and I could always say, I am sorry I can't do that because I am a Muslim. I wasn't ready to undress. I still don't do it in front of anybody, no way.'*
>
> **Shia 5**

She was exempted from undressing as part of her training course; the Islamic prescriptive rules on nudity therefore helped her avoid embarrassment.

5.9.4 Ethnicity and education as a resource

5.9.4.1 Ethnicity

Having an ethnic minority background was also perceived as an advantage in the work force, one Pentecostal said:

> *'I believe so yes. Career-wise being black has probably worked for me rather than against me. But I choose to see that as the favour of the Lord really. Yes I think I am at a distinct advantage being a woman of faith.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 4**

She attributes her career advancement to her faith in God, and not to anti-discrimination policies which stipulate equal opportunities for people of ethnic minority background in the work place.

Being English and a Muslim enables a Shia participant to assist other non-English Muslim women. She explained:

> *'[…] I think yes I mean I hope I have been able to help other people sometimes, like when they have been struggling with things like with forms, or people send bureaucratic things, they will come to me and ask me you know, I sort of can ask people that way. Advantages for myself, I mean I have been*

offered jobs I think, specifically because I was, yes I have been offered jobs when was it, some of the community centres sometimes, they have offered me jobs because they have seen me as English to help other people. […] they would see it as an advantage, me being Muslim.'

Shia 4

She had benefitted because she is English and Muslim, an example of how the majority ethnic group could also serve as a resource for the minority ethnic community.

5.9.5 Education

One Anglican participant also suggested that religion enabled her to advance her education mainly through the support of Christian groups. She stated that:

'I was really spurred on in my religion by being able to go to university and find a very active, encouraging group of Christians [...] I met with a wonderful group of people, very accepting of me, encouraging of me. I saw some wonderful role models in the chaplains who were encouraging of my faith. And they really took me forward and encouraged me forward. So again that was, it wasn't so much the fact I was a woman but because I was in a context where higher education was encouraged, my parents were able to send me there, [...]. So it is more those kind of circumstances. Now I am aware that being a woman authorised, an ordained minister early on, much more attention was paid to you because you were one of the very few, and whether that was as, meant perhaps I had more opportunities and more encouragement than perhaps my male colleagues, as a consequence of being a minority in a group, to date, that might be the case. I think it is a mixture really.'

Anglican 3

When opportunities open up for women, it can be an advantage to be a woman as you are being urged to take on new opportunities.

In general, the identity of being a religious woman has been of benefit to participants, as have their ethnicity and education, which all enable them to contribute to their communities. Thus, religion was not perceived by participants in the study as a barrier, but mainly as a *resource* that enables women to participate in various activities in their communities.

5.9.6 Conclusion

Our findings have revealed that religion can be a resource or a barrier depending on the situation or context; also, it is experienced differently by ethnic majority and minority women. It appears some participants' identity as members of Islam, a minority faith, is benefitting their communities through policy programmes of social cohesion initiated by their Local Councils. This argument could be advanced similarly for ethnicity. To attain a community goal, for example reaching minority ethnic groups, individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds would be encouraged to participate, however to advance one's own individual ambitions there would be subtle barriers. Nevertheless, it seems that for the ethnic minority women in our study, religion is a resource in relation to their group identity. For individual identities, on the other hand, there are subtle barriers which are gendered and 'raced'. The inability to participate in social activities because it is not religiously appropriate for a woman was given as an example hindering career progress. However, religion was largely talked about as a resource in the lives of both Muslim and Christian women. Furthermore, the ethnicity and education of some of the women were also represented as resources.

This study has provided the insight that gendered citizenship cannot be narrowly defined in terms of legal or political status. The different concepts that we explored; citizenship, nationality and religious citizenship, revealed that women in our study talked about the legal definition as well as issues related to identity, participation and belonging. Citizenship practices talked about included participation in elections by voting, and engagement in community and church or mosque activities; some also mentioned the opportunities to interact with other ethnic groups and the ability to join the faith of their choice. Interviewees in our study were found to conceptualise the concept of citizenship as multi-faceted and broad.

The notion 'religious citizenship' was new to our respondents; they had not thought about religion before in relation to citizenship. However, many of them found that it would make sense to talk about religion in relation to citizenship as *practice and belonging*, as their faith-based community participation and activism would be an example of. To be a good citizen and a 'good Christian' and a 'good Muslim' was basically the same for our interviewees: they include showing love and care, respect

and tolerance, and engaging oneself within the community. We found that the interviewees' understanding of the notion of religious citizenship also included a specifically religious notion of an other-worldly context. They talked about citizenship both within this-worldly communities, and within other-worldly contexts such as heaven. Both Christian and Muslim women emphasized that all human beings are equal before God.

In a similar vein to how citizenship was talked about in more general terms, religious citizenship was also understood in terms of status, participation and belonging. In terms of status, the interviewees revealed a tension between the ideal notion that all religions should be treated on equal terms, and the fear that any talk about 'religious citizenship' could imply in practice that religions were treated differently, with some religions being discriminated against. Some interviewees seemed to think about l*egal* status in connection with the term 'religious citizenship', while others were more concerned with how people of different religions perceive each other in terms of participation and belonging. Hence, religious citizenship was not perceived first and foremost as a means to ensure equality between faiths within the community, but rather as an abstract construct which could potentially create more divisions between religions. It therefore seems that any conceptualisation of religious citizenship should emphasise the equal status and opportunities of all religions and of all believers within various faith traditions, together with issues of participation and belonging.

6 ANALYSIS - GENDER EQUALITY

6.1 Introduction

The place of women within religious belief and practices has been a contested issue for feminists since the nineteenth century (Morgan, 2002). Within the Christian tradition many more women are performing functions that have traditionally been the preserve of men, albeit some denominations have more success than others. The literature on changes within the Muslim tradition is limited but advocacy for changes by Muslim feminists is well documented (Hussain, 2007). In our project we explored the discourses of religious women on gender equality. We ask whether religious women find feminism and women's movements relevant to their lives, thus exploring their concern, or lack thereof, with women's rights and gender equality.

6.2 How is gender equality and women rights talked about?

Gender is a social construct referring to roles of and relations between men and women (Connell, 2009). The response by women in our study in relation to the question 'How does the term gender equality relate to your own understanding of the relationship between women and men?' varied. We identified various discourses concerning gender equality in our data material, including a discourse that located gender equality within the prescriptive notions concerning gender relations that can be found within the Qur'an, a discourse that talked about gender equality as sameness (in the form of equal roles for women and men), and a discourse that talked about gender equality as difference (in the form of different but complementary roles for women and men).

6.2.1 Gender equality as prescriptive gender relations based on the Qur'an

Some of the Muslim participants understood the term gender equality in terms of religiously prescribed gender relations. One participant argued that Islam ensures equality by prescribing different roles for men and women within the family; where the man should provide the family income, while the woman takes care of children and household chores. However, changes in the roles, due to work commitments or

economic pressures, were attributed to the breakdown of family relations. The Sunni woman argued:

> *'Islam brings equality. […] The husband has to go out and earn and provide, and the woman's duty is to look after the house and look after the children, Now what is happening in this, 21st century, husband doing night shift, wife doing the day shift, they don't see each other. Then trouble starts, when they see, something […] going wrong, they argue, affecting children, children get fed up and start going out. […] Again the balance has gone, the quality of life has gone.[…] So it is not the family bonding, it is not, when you want to understand the quality of life, then unless you put the balance back'.*
>
> **Sunni 3**

She reflects on the challenges of today's need for both partners to be in paid employment outside the home, as compared with the historical past.

Another Muslim woman focused on prescriptive rules within Islam regarding inheritance and house work. She had the opinion that Islam ensures more rights for women than for men, with women having no financial obligations towards the family. The Shia participant explained her opinion about inheritance rules:

> '*In this case we have more rights than men, in Islam. When somebody dies, this is just one example, if they leave money or property it is left to the children, isn't it, who is left. In Islam, if you get it as a lady it is yours. But if a boy gets it, it is for his family. You can keep yours, nobody could force you to spend it on your family, but men can't keep it, they have to spend it on their family and their wife'.*

The interviewee indicates that men have more financial obligations towards their families than women.

She goes on to talk about women not having any obligation to take care of children and perform house work.

> *'The other thing is, as a mother myself, when I breast feed my daughter I could charge my husband. I could take him to court, you could forgive or just forget about it, but if you want to charge him for his role to support you. I could charge him for housework or if I don't do it so he has to pay somebody to do it, or he has to pay someone to breast feed his baby, or look after the baby. Nowhere in the world, in no religions do you find all these points giving to the lady. You could charge your husband for anything you do. Even bedtime.'*
>
> **Shia 1**

She seems to be using these examples rhetorically, in order to emphasise that women are privileged within Islam.

Her argument stands in contrast to the view forwarded by the first quote in this section, indicating that equality between men and women are religiously prescribed where women have the responsibility of taking care of children and the home. This Shia interviewee is suggesting that she could ask her husband to compensate her for roles in the home and child care. Her comment also suggests that in Islam, women are treated much better than men, thus the concept of equality does not arise as women have more rights and privileges than men. However, Badawi (1995), a Professor in Management and Religious studies at St. Mary's University in Canada, suggests that the teachings of the Qur'an dictate that the male inherit twice the inheritance of the female as the male is financially responsible for all female relations, sisters, daughters, mother and wives; females inherit less but are under no obligation to spend it on themselves or their families. The female is allowed to keep her inheritance, but its value is less than that given to her male counterparts. Badawi's argument supports the understanding of interviewee Shia 1, but he emphasises that the value of the men's inheritance is higher than that of women's. Therefore, the argument of more privileges for women is contextual depending on the financial obligations within a particular family.

A second Shia participant drew attention to the role of women as witnesses in legal cases as prescribed in the Qur'an. She argued that using the eye witness account of two women to equal the eye witness account of one man is to follow the teaching of Islam, and that it does not imply that women are not treated equally with men. She stated:

> *'In the Qur'an it does say for example if you are in the court as a witness, the testimony of two women is equivalent to the testimony of one man. And the reason for that is, because women are more emotionally swayed. Whereas the man they are saying perhaps he is not ruled so much by his heart as by his head. So there are things that people could say, you are an equal; you are saying two women equals one man; that is not true. It is just to cover things and be on the safe side. So something as important as testifying if it is somebody's life. So it is like not to put so much responsibility in a way. It doesn't mean putting them down or anything, but it is just like it is quite a big*

responsibility to testify and it is like if shared like it is easier in a way. I don't see that as unequal treatment'.

Shia 4

Her argument suggests that women witnesses are more emotional; and thus by implication less led by rationality and less objective than men. She continues by giving polygamy as another example, where equal behaviour of men and women contradicts the teachings of Islam. She said:

'For example a man can have four wives, you say why are you putting women down, why can't women have four husbands you know, it is ridiculous. I mean a woman can only have one husband because of the children you know, you need to know who the father is and it doesn't make any sense, more than one husband, because of the family unit. But saying that, men in the law, in the Qur'an are allowed up to four because of circumstances, because it can happen that there is a time of war or there is a time that women are surplus in society and what do they do, they need support.'

Shia 4

She thus suggests that polygamy does not imply unequal treatment of women because in some circumstances it is deemed a necessary for men to have multiple wives. The two examples she gave indicate that the ratio of women to men in marriage and in court cases is prescribed as an unequal ratio as far as it falls in line with the prescriptive guidelines in the Qur'an.

Also, her comments are based on the perception that all women are emotionally swayed without considering the differences in mental capacity of individual men and women to handle legal issues. Her position is very likely to be a subject of debate. For example, Badawi (1995) suggests that the notion of using two female witnesses in law and courts of law are generalised and thus misrepresents the rule. He argues that both genders are entitled to equality before the law and courts of law by referring to verses in the Qur'an 24: 6-9 where both women and men by bearing witnesses by oath have to make five oaths. In business or commercial transactions, however, two women witnesses are equated to one male witness account, as women were deemed inexperienced in financial issues. Badawi (1995) however, was of the view that this rule is not an act of worship which must be observed exactly to the principles, but it is the duty of the judge to ascertain the credibility of witnesses; as a female graduate with a business degree would be a worthier witness than an illiterate male with no business education. Wadud (1999), an Islamic Studies

Professor at Virginia Commonwealth University, also agrees with the position that the call for two women per one man as witnesses in financial contracts should not be regarded as a general rule for women's participation. Yet, some Muslim participants in our study accept a particular interpretation of the Islamic legal tradition, of two women per one man, without questioning its adequacy or relevance in contemporary times. This suggests that their measure of equality is not based on secular gender relations but on a particular interpretation of the Qur'an.

6.2.2 Gender equality as difference or sameness

Other participants' response to the question 'How does the term gender equality relate to your own understanding of the relationship between women and men?', focused on a recognition of perceived differences between women and men, and the need for an understanding that both women and men should be treated similarly, but not necessarily equally, in various contexts.

6.2.2.1 Gender equality as based on difference and equal value

Many of the women in our study focused on the different biological make up of women and men in their understanding of the term gender equality. Findings suggest that some women are still using gender as a euphemism for sex, male/female. One participant was of the opinion that many people fail to appreciate what she perceived to be important differences between males and females. She argued that physical differences between women and men were indicative of different roles for women and men in society. She said:

> *'I don't think that outside of Christ the genders recognise that God created men male, with characteristics that women don't have. I think men are designed to, they have naturally more physical strength, for example. That is undeniable, why would a woman try to compete with a man generally speaking, in a physical arena, when anybody with any common sense knows that he is bound to win in the physical arena. So to answer your question, gender equality, I don't think there is any such thing. I think there is a huge potential for it in the church, but there is a lot of learning and a lot of faith in God's ability to do what he wants to do before that happens.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 4**

She is suggesting that gender equality, based on her faith, is yet to be achieved within the church because many have failed to recognise the relevance of God creating women differently from men.

Another interviewee also referred to the biological differences between men and women by using an example from the Qur'an, on the issue of female witnesses. She said:

> *'Gender equality, in the holy book it says men and women have got equal rights onto each other. But it also says because women forget more quickly than men, I am not talking about individuals but in general, when you look in general, women forget easily. So Islam says then you need to provide the evidence, you need to provide two women as witness. But the rights are equal rights. This does not mean that women have less rights and men have more rights. Physically men are built differently and are stronger, which is true. If you look at the physique of a woman and a man, the two are different ways that God created us. Otherwise their rights are equal.'*
>
> **Shia 3**

She seems to present a paradox where women and men display differences in physical and mental capabilities, yet have equal rights. Also, similar to the previous Muslim women's comments, she accepts the notion of two female witnesses for one male witness.

Other participants' responses to the question also emphasised biological differences between women and men. One Anglican interviewee argued on the basis of physical ability, she said:

> *'Well such as, if I wasn't strong enough to do a job, or I wasn't, you know, it is a bit like saying you know, good idea if men had babies. Well they can't, it is not possible, and if I needed to be a strong man lifting heavy weights for a job, I couldn't do it so it is not on. But on the other hand there are some things, because I have an ability with numbers and figures, that I can do better than other people. I am also partially dyslexic, so if you asked me to be a secretary for a job, it is just not on. But that is not gender but it is to do with physical ability. Now on the other hand, if you turned around and told me I couldn't be an accountant just because you are a woman that would bug me.'*
>
> **Anglican 1**

Her comment suggests that she accepts restrictions to certain professions if it is based on physical strengths but she might reject such a notion on the basis of her intellectual abilities and her gender.

Similarly, a Pentecostal participant also argued that females have to focus more on their particular intellectual abilities as women, rather than trying to copy what men do. She argued:

> *'If it is not authentic, it is not real, a woman can't be as good at being a man as a man can be, and vice versa. I think women haven't used their strength in terms of just being women. Women are much more intuitive, they are better thinkers, we think things through better and if women would see that if we put those skills to work in the workplace it might take us a bit longer, but it would get us to where we want to get, rather than trying to be a hard hitting hardnosed male. Gender equality I think can only happen if the sexes understand each other and I don't think you can get such a thing as gender equality outside of the church but I don't think the church demonstrates it very well.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 4**

For this interviewee, being a man and being a woman are two very different things, and they do not overlap. She suggests that an understanding of gender differences is necessary in order to appreciate the equal worth of men and women and their particular gender based strengths and qualities.

A silenced issue among participants is that of women's capabilities. Their arguments generally portray women as fragile, and as weaker than men, thus marginalising physically strong women whose strength might not be in their intellectual abilities and who could equally perform duties or tasks that would require great physical strength.

However, some interviewees also shared the opinion that when men and women play different roles, it does not make sense to talk about gender equality. Two Shia participants argued:

> *'Gender equality. I don't think it is, we are not talking about equality, it is two different things. When you have two different things you can't talk about equality between those things. Men and women are two different creatures, they have different feelings, different talents, different powers. When you say women cover, men don't cover, it is not equality.'*
>
> **Shia 1**

> *'Gender equality, it is not. I would never, you can't say it is equality because we have got different roles. We are built for one role and men are built for another role.'*
>
> **Shia 4**

Such views in effect essentialise women and men and the roles they can have in society by suggesting that their different social roles are rooted in natural and biological differences.

However, some interviewees' understanding of gender equality dwelt on equal treatment and respect irrespective of one's sex. These participants accept the notion that women and men are biologically different, but argued for equal treatment. One Sunni participant's opinion reflected on biological difference and the need for equal treatment, she said:

> *'It is, you know people think that all rights have got to be the same, I don't think that, I think it is OK for us to have different rights but still be equal. Because you know, fundamentally men and women are different and by their very nature you know, the fact that women bear children and are more nurturing, they will have different roles to play, but that doesn't make them any less equal than men. I don't think a woman has to act like a man to be regarded as an equal you know.'*
>
> **Sunni 4**

So, she is highlighting different natures, roles and rights but arguing for equal value and worth.

Her opinion was echoed by a Shia participant who said:

> '*They are different but they must respect the difference. I think that is the equality for me.*'
>
> **Shia 5**

A Pentecostal woman emphasised that despite biological and social differences between women and men, it would be just or fair for men and women to have the same rights:

> *'I guess it is both genders having the same rights and same amount of respect and same amount of opportunities, would be my understanding.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 3**

She is emphasizing the same rights and treatment for women and men.

The responses also highlighted the question of stereotypical gender roles within the family. One Pentecostal interviewee also argued that the gender of an individual

should not dictate what he or she could achieve but instead the competencies of actions should be the deciding factor. Her argument introduces a different notion of equality rooted in a sameness discourse. She argued:

> *'I would describe it as if anybody has a gift to fulfil a role that their gender should not be a determining factor in them fulfilling it. Gender should not be an issue with regard to your calling, your role, finding fulfilment. It mustn't be "You can't do that because you are a woman", or "You can't stay at home and look after the children because you are a man". I have a colleague and she is Head of Department and her husband, when the children were little, it was him that was the house husband. I think that is great. So yes, equality in the sense, I am not saying that there are things that women tend to do and that men should do, because maybe the men don't, I have to be careful what I say now! For instance, serving refreshments after the meetings, it is a team of men and women; it is not perceived to be women that do that, which is great, because anybody can make tea. I can't see in the church that there is a distinction made and there shouldn't be. But it was interesting when we had pastoral training last year, it was a series of four Saturdays, people were asked if they would come to the pastoral training, but the majority of them were women that were asked. So I don't know if the majority of pastoral needs to be women because traditionally we are more open about our problems, whereas maybe a man would tend to keep things buttoned up. I am not sure.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 5**

She is saying that there are not any reasons why women and men should not perform the same roles in church, in society and in the family. Her comment also suggests that role reversals in some circumstances are appropriate and should be encouraged.

6.2.2.2 Gender equality as sameness through equal opportunities

Other participants, both Muslim and Christian women, understood gender equality to largely mean equal opportunities for both women and men in a number of different contexts. They commented:

> *'It means that men and women should be treated the same, paid the same for doing the same work, and given the same opportunities.'*
>
> **Anglican 4**

This interviewee focuses on opportunities in the labour market, where women are still earning less than men for the same jobs.

A Pentecostal woman emphasised that despite biological and social differences between women and men, it would be just or fair for men and women to have the same rights:

> *'I guess it is both genders having the same rights and same amount of respect and same amount of opportunities, would be my understanding.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 3**

She is emphasizing same treatment for women and men.

A second Anglican also said:

> *'I think it comes down to women having the same opportunities as men and also I guess having the same responsibilities as well. But I think that sort of goes together. I know that is quite simple.'*
>
> **Anglican 6**

She also acknowledges that there are challenges in actually providing equal opportunities for women and men.

A Sunni woman also said:

> *'I think it means opportunity for both of them, men and female. I don't know how to put that. Because we are given the same status as well, so I think it is more or less equal as well. Because no matter what, we will treat a daughter in a nice way, I am not saying we treat bad or anything, but because, I don't know because I think they are equal to me, my daughter and sons. And like nowadays we do treat all the same.'*
>
> **Sunni 1**

This interviewee points out that sometimes men and women might be treated differently. She mentions how she relates differently to her daughter, but emphasises that both children are of equal value to her.

The presence of barriers to achieving equality between women and men was also identified by some interviewees. Another Sunni participant stated:

> *'What gender equality would mean to me is a society in which women could do, literally speaking as well as in practice, they could do anything they wanted. There wouldn't be any barriers. But unfortunately obviously there*

are people out there who don't agree with that and because of that there are, and not just for Muslim women, but all women.'

Sunni 5

She acknowledges that there are people in society who would not encourage gender equality.

Many participants expressed their understanding of gender equality as an abstract concept, but some participants also reflected on the *practice* of gender equality. One Christian participant had the opinion that gender equality has already been achieved, and that there is a tendency for some women to push extreme agendas that might render men powerless. A Pentecostal woman had the view that gender equality is being advocated by women who wish to dominate men for their personal reasons. She argued:

'I actually think it is pretty equal now. A part of me worries that it will go to the other extreme where men will be totally minimalised and women would be the powerhouses, and I actually think scripturally that is wrong. And I think if that happens there would be issues. I think it is wrong when you see churches where it is like almost an all female leadership and their husbands are sort of like pathetic little creature that follow behind them. That actually makes me really cross, I feel like rousing the husbands and going, come on rise up, you have got a role, you have got gifting you know.'

Pentecostal 2

These two interviewees suggested that gender equality has already been achieved and that feminists are rather pursuing an agenda to control men. They thus see feminism as arguing for matriarchy, or the inverse of patriarchy, rather than for gender equality. For these women, there seems to be a limit as to how far women should push for leadership positions within the churches.

A second Pentecostal woman's understanding of gender equality was associated with women's unfulfilled ambition and discontent. She said:

'It is about females. I think it is, again I would say it would differ with individuals. It all depends what dreams people have, do you know what I mean. For me I was content with my life, God I just thank God that God has blessed me. I am married, I have children and God has blessed me in the home, so I am content. I think other women who have these dreams, and the dreams don't get fulfilled and I think then that can be a struggle. If you have to stay at home with the children and you don't want to stay at home, you

want to have a career. That would be kind of difficult. And I think I am different.'

Pentecostal 3

She acknowledges that women have different ideas about what 'the good life' is supposed to be. Depending on the individual, it could include working outside the home. Her comments also indicate that the discourse on gender equality might be perceived as a means by some women to achieve unfulfilled ambitions.

The discourses on gender equality among participants in this study reflected religious, economic and social issues. The discourses did not include political issues such as policy change, but included elements which referred to equal participation. Issues such as equal opportunities and respect suggest the need for women to participate equally with men, thus breaking down barriers which hinder women's participation in society. There was also a sense of caution where gender equality was considered an agenda to disempower men, where men for instance are made to play minimal roles in the church.

6.2.3 Conclusion

The data material has revealed that religious women think in many different ways about gender equality and gender roles. Some participants' understanding of gender referred to the sex (male/female) of the individual. These participants argued on the basis of biological differences between women and men, and suggested that such differences have implications for the social world. This finding highlights how the term 'gender' in some contexts has become a euphemism for the sex of an individual. There were no distinctive differences between the responses of Christian and Muslim women. To some extent some of the participants argued for a comparably equal value, rather than an absolutely equal value, of women and men. This preference could be as a result of the alleged biological differences between women and men and the different gender roles based on prescriptions rooted in faith and belief.

Nevertheless, the responses indicate that participants talked about issues involving both equality as sameness and equality as difference. While equality as sameness implies that both women and men should be able to inhabit and perform the same

roles and take on the same responsibilities, equality as difference implies an acceptance of unequal but complimentary roles of equal value. In terms of gender roles in Christianity and Islam, a concern for the equal value of complimentary gender roles was evident among some of our research participants. Thus, in advocating for gender equality in religious practice, which implies a negotiation and changing of patriarchal structures to ensure women's participation, it might be useful to acknowledge the importance of gender equality as difference, as well as gender equality as sameness. This suggests that there needs to be a continual discussion of what we mean when we talk about gendered citizenship and gender equality. Feminist advocates might argue that gender equality means sameness, and that the goal is to make sure that women and men actually share the same opportunities, roles, and responsibilities. The lived realities and preferences of some of the religious women we have interviewed, however, suggest that gender equality is also thought of in terms of complementarity between women's and men's different roles and responsibilities. Ignoring the perceived differences between women and men which were observed by our interviewees would perhaps imply a failure on the part of the women's movement to recognise some religious women's views and experiences. Policies promoting sameness might not necessarily be promoting the interests of these women.

Responses from our study suggest that the agenda for gender equality was largely regarded as desirable; however, the concept of gender equality was interpreted in different ways. Whilst a majority of the women argued for complimentary roles and equal value, others argued that women and men should enjoy the same opportunities and be able to occupy the same roles in society at large, within religious communities, and within the family. Those who argued for equal opportunities, rights and responsibilities were measuring women's current situation against a male status quo, in which women are still not enjoying the same rights and status as men. On the other hand, some interviewees also cautioned that a further pursuance of the gender equality agenda might imply an understanding of gender equality as matriarchy rather than patriarchy, as in their view equality between women and men has already been achieved.

6.3 How are feminism and the women's movement talked about?

As noted in Chapter 2, religious and secular feminists continue to debate feminism and religion, whilst the former chooses to engage religion in an attempt to change gendered practices, the latter rejects religion on the basis that it perpetuates the patriarchal system. In general, when asked about feminism, participants in our study related feminism with women's rights and the fight for women's empowerment. However, many interviewees preferred to distance themselves from feminism because they associated it with negative issues.

6.3.1 Discourse on Feminism

Participants' opinion on the concept of feminism and its meanings were sought to gain an insight into how religious women perceived feminism. They were asked 'What does the word 'feminism' mean to you?'

6.3.1.1 Feminism as women's rights

Many of our interviewees associated feminism with women's rights. They argued that feminism was a medium used to advocate women's agenda and causes. One Anglican participant stated her enthusiasm for confident women who are not afraid to voice their interests in public, she said:

> *'Standing up for being a woman. I like that! Standing up for being a woman.'*
>
> **Anglican 4**

A Shia participant also associated feminism with women's rights in society, she stated:

> *'For a woman and fighting for their rights, right rights you know, their proper place in society. Not wanting to be like men. That is maybe my misunderstanding of the word feminism.'*
>
> **Shia 6**

She wishes to clarify what feminism means to her by stating that it does not imply or mean 'wanting to be like men'.

She was not the only participant who was unsure of the meaning of the word feminism. Furthermore, some interviewees also expressed misgivings about the term. One Pentecostal woman observed:

> *'[…] the word feminism kind of brings to my mind people who are very concentrated upon women's rights, wrongly or rightly, I might be wrong in that. But perhaps overly so. Who perhaps may be going towards the point of believing that women have more rights, which I don't believe. But possibly not now, but more so that they are very, perhaps, focused on women's rights and that sort of thing.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 3**

She believes the concept of feminism is pursued by individuals advocating for women's rights, or possibly more rights for women than for men. Shia 6 and Pentecostal 3 both imply that the notion of women's rights and feminism might go too far. They underline that women should not have more rights than men, and that women should not try to copy men's behaviour or status either.

On the other hand, an Anglican participant highlighted what she saw as a misrepresentation of the concept of feminism by saying:

> *'Oh feminism. When I hear it used you can kind of hear it used negatively or aggressively, to mean women promoting themselves and their rights inappropriately. So part of me when you hear feminism and feminist, that is part of the baggage I come with. But it is just to do, feminism, to do with women I think and, to do with women and feminism, exploring all that is to do with women I think, the female gender. Again I know it has been used as a kind of an active advocacy, kind of pushing for women's rights.'*
>
> **Anglican 3**

She suggests that the term sometimes attracts negative images of women advancing issues in an aggressive manner.

For some participants, it seemed that their understanding of the concept of feminism had been largely shaped by the media. One participant reflected on her understanding of feminism based on feminist advocacy material; she explained:

> *'Actually it makes me think of a postcard that my friend has got, something like, I have no idea what a feminist is but all I know is I get called one whenever I act in a way that is not completely consistent with being a*

doormat. And I must admit it makes me laugh, but I think there is something in that'. So she associates feminism with assertiveness.'

Anglican 6

She was also conscious of the fact that feminism has a bad name among some people, but she embraces the concept despite the negative connotations the word might elicit with some people. She continued:

'I think it is used now as a term of, insulting term you know. If you are not prepared to just go along with the status quo, if you want to mess with the boundaries of a woman, then it seems to be a way that people can almost dismiss you, you are just a feminist, you just want to cause trouble. I think there is that negative connotation to it. I would think I am a feminist, although a lot of perhaps people who thought about it a lot more would probably say that is pretty pathetic of me, because I haven't really thought about the subjects deeply. And I must admit I do take a lot for granted, what a lot of early feminists have done, a lot of the ways that they have opened doors that have opened for me, I have gone through quite happily and not really thought that this was because of earlier feminist work. I am sort of, I think I am quite proud when other people sort of say I am a feminist, even if they do mean I am a trouble maker.'

Anglican 6

She appreciates what feminist have done for women and is proud of their achievements, and she seems proud to be labelled by others as 'feminist'.

The media also has influenced the understanding of feminism for one Shia participant. She associated feminism with a film she saw:

'A late film maker, she was a feminist. I have got some of her movies here actually, she is making films in this direction, feminism, and in her films women are very smart and they are very talented and men are stupid and they don't have education and just shout and scream over women, and the women in her movies although they are very clever, they are not successful because of the stupid men. When you say feminism I just remember her.'

Shia 1

Her understanding of the concept was shaped by a film which portrays the superior talent of women as compared to men, thus indicating that the perception of feminism is also shaped by the media.

6.3.1.2 Feminism as 'too extreme'

Some of our interviewees shared the opinion that the feminist agenda is to dominate men; some Muslim and Christian participants in this study objected to such an agenda. One Pentecostal alleged that feminism is about the control of men, she said:

> *'Feminism to me means, the words that I associate with that are more like people who, almost like, they would like women to be the dominant species and men to be down here. That men are only there to be used for when they need them, to produce children etc. I just think of images of women burning bras and all this sort of freedom to an extreme, where there is no moral conviction. You can do whatever you want. It is sort of get freedom and run with it and do whatever you want to do.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 2**

She associates feminism with women who want to control men and the advocacy of liberal ideas that are de-coupled from any moral conviction.

A second Pentecostal was also of the opinion that current feminist have an agenda to dominate men. She argued:

> *'I read an interesting article in the paper at the weekend about a new appointment at Westminster she was all for the men staying at home and everything. She is obviously quite a militant feminist. I am not sure but obviously she feels there is a place for that. But it is interesting that was once fighting for equality might now have crossed over the line into fighting for dominance. Do you see what I mean? I think in some spheres that is the case. There are feminists that were not content with equality but want dominance.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 5**

She is implying that the idea that a man should take on caring roles in the home is characteristic of a militant feminist view. Her comments also reveal another example of the influence of the media in shaping the perception of the feminist movement. She believes feminists want to dominate men.

One Sunni interviewee disliked the idea of 'women trying to be men'. She said:

> *'I don't think I would go with the feminist movement, because I just think that they probably want to be more like men.'*
>
> **Sunni 4**

She thinks feminists take on male characteristics, which she does not endorse.

Some participants were also of the view that the concept of feminism draws women away from morality and godliness. For example, a Pentecostal woman had the opinion that feminism is about elevating the status of women higher than that of men, which was perceived as ungodly. She argued:

> *'There is an element of male bashing in it. I think it is ungodly, it is ungodly from the point of view that it is not just about elevating women, it is about putting men down as much as it is about elevating women, and that is the unfortunate aspect of it. I understand why some women might feel that they have had to get extreme, I don't know if feminists see themselves as extreme, [...] But I think it is remarkably counterproductive, there has been a net backlash to it and I think it has caused a lot of men to be dishonest about how they feel and how they interact with women. So on the one hand they look as though they are being conciliatory, they look as though they are giving the women opportunities, but on the other hand they are sitting behind closed doors and putting invisible barriers in the way. In that respect, if you look, I think the old boys' networks and old boys' clubs, women are excluded from so many of the higher echelons of things, so I think there has been a backlash, I think in many quarters feminists aren't taken seriously, and I think for the majority of women they are too extreme. I think they lose a lot of women on the way.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 4**

She seems to suggest that there is a backlash against feminism in its extreme form, and that men continue to dominate but behind closed doors, implying that men are still in control. A case can thus still be made for fighting for women's inclusion. She is also saying that there are no reasons why women and men should not perform the same roles in church, in society and in the family. This indicates that she embraces the advocacy of feminists on gender equality.

Similarly, an Anglican participant had the view that the feminist agenda is too radical, she said:

> *'I think it rather means that a lot of women are going overboard the wrong way. I like to be treated as a woman and I think that a woman does have a place that is different from that of a man. And it is only when it comes to actually using the skills that you have been given, as you know a gift from God, that if you are denied the ability to use those gifts, then there is something wrong in the relationship. I think despite that you know, there are differences between men and woman and we should respect those differences.'*
>
> **Anglican 2**

On the one hand she sees the differences between women and men as God given, but on the other hand any denial of opportunities for women raises problems.

From the responses it was also evident that some participants did not understand the word 'feminism'. Their lack of understanding could be attributed to English as the second language of some of the ethnic minority participants in our study. Therefore, the researcher had to explain what the concept meant by saying 'feminism is about the advocacy of women's agenda'. One participant commented by saying:

> *'When God created woman, feminism is with us. You cannot separate feminism from woman. Woman is born feminine, when you say woman you mean feminine. A female. Why we say female, because feminism is there. […]. She has more attraction, more colourful, more entertaining probably. Feminism to me is not stopping me going into any profession or stopping me in my practical life. I can be more feminine and be practical as well.'*
>
> **Shia 3**

Her comment suggests that her understanding of the concept is how to be feminine, and that women should not be denied equal opportunities on the labour market or in other spheres of life because of their gender.

The interviewees' talk about feminism focuses on the rights of women and the perceived freedom achieved for women. Some participants had the opinion that the liberal ideas advocated by feminist were ungodly, and that the concept of feminism is being used inappropriately to undermine men. This raised the question whether the freedom to participate in all spheres of life can in some ways be seen as detrimental to women's own interests. Also, the findings indicate that the discourse on feminism forwarded by participants in our study included negative connotations. It was generally acknowledged that the feminist movement has obtained a lot for women, but a majority of our interviewees still shared the opinion that the concept of feminism has unwanted 'baggage'.

Further, the analysis of the interviews revealed few differences in the ways feminism is talked about; however, a distinct difference identified was how feminism was talked about as an agenda for female dominance. Many Christian participants

shared the opinion that the agenda of feminists is moving towards matriarchy, this suggests that agendas which are perceived to seek control over men, rather than promoting gender equality, are not readily embraced by religious women. The women's movement therefore has a task in communicating with religious women about its goal to promote gender equality rather than the dominance of women over men. Interviewees reveal a very narrow understanding of feminism as only a small minority of feminists have advocated women's superiority over men. Most feminists have argued the equal value and equal rights of women and men in order to challenge to subordination of women.

6.3.2 Feminist as a label

The study further explored if religious women would label themselves as feminist. Participants were asked to respond to the question: 'Is feminism in your understanding of the word something that you identify yourself with at all, if so, how?' Our data revealed mixed responses. A majority of the participants did not want to be labelled feminist mainly for its negative connotations and not for what it has achieved for women, whilst others preferred to take a cautious distance. A few participants, on the other hand, were happy to be associated with the achievements of feminists, and were not influenced by any negative connotations.

6.3.2.1 Rejection of the feminist label

Some of the participants did not want to be labelled feminist because they associated it with lesbianism. One Pentecostal commented on her experience with a feminist:

> '*No, I am not a feminist, I don't like that word feminism I just, […]. I think often women who are gay, because I actually minister to a woman who is quite a strong feminist and a lesbian and I actually thought, I actually felt she had a lot of bondages, she had a lot of confusion, she had a lot of negative feelings towards men, she had a lot of distorted images in her head. She wasn't balanced, she wasn't a free woman at all.*'
>
> **Pentecostal 2**

So her view of what is an inappropriate sexual relationship for a woman, lesbianism, influences her view of feminism.

A Shia participant also associated feminism with lesbianism, which she argued is unacceptable in Islam. Yet she acknowledged the achievement of suffrage and equal pay by feminists. She stated:

> *'No, no way. […] The connotations are rather strident, […], very sort of like out there and I am afraid you get a lot of connotations with lesbianism, which is something that is so abhorrent to us, we hate that so much, that would be a big thing. Because feminism seems to be, they seem to go together. I mean I may be totally wrong but that is what I have picked up, how I feel you know. I mean equal pay, voting yes that sounds good, all women should want that. But it depends how far you want to go.'*
>
> **Shia 4**

She is constructing a collective Muslim 'we', which allegedly is unified in its view of lesbianism as a sin. Yet, there are of course many Muslim homosexuals, but their sexuality, or rather other people's view of their sexuality, might undermine their sense of belonging within the Muslim community (Haqq, 2000; Yip, 2008). Also, on one hand, she associates feminism with lesbianism and it being something bad; on the other hand she associates feminism with 'good' things like women's right to vote and equal pay. The responses associating feminism with lesbianism, suggests a labelling of advocates for the political and social rights of women as advocates of sexual preferences.

Other interviewees also shared the view that there is a danger of the feminist agenda being 'too extreme', and they preferred an 'equality agenda'. A Sunni participant also suggested that the feminist agenda is not relevant in the 21st century.

> *'No I don't really. It kind of gives, I think women, we can sometimes overdo the feminism and glass ceiling, and we are not getting this. Sometimes I feel sorry for the poor men! I don't think in the 21st century, in my personal opinion, I don't think it is relevant any more, we should be moving on and progressing and looking at equality rather than saying these are our needs. I think we should be saying we are a society and these are our needs.'*
>
> **Sunni 5**

She is suggesting advocacy should not be focused on women-only issues, but on social justice for all.

A Shia participant preferred women's rights issues but had the opinion that sometimes feminists could be 'too radical' with their agendas. She said:

> *'No. Not so much no to be honest no. I don't know, sometimes I think it depends on what subject you are looking at. I don't want it to be too much you know, if it goes too far I think perhaps not. Even though I am for women, I mean if I see if there is a family, I would always stick up for the woman. Perhaps you could call me feminist, but I don't like to be, I just like to have the right. It depends I suppose from the men's point of view, they might say I am, but I don't think, I just like the rights and equality.'*
>
> **Shia 5**

It seems she is happy to accept the label 'feminist' if it represents women's rights and equality issues.

Hence, it appears the reasons for some participants distancing themselves from the label 'feminist' is to do with a perceived conception of sexual orientation and the pursuance of agendas as too radical or as a quest to humiliate men.

6.3.2.2 A cautious distance from the feminist label

Some participants were however undecided if they would like to be labelled as feminists or not. Although they identified with the movement that has advanced women's rights, they had the opinion that there were too many prejudices associated with the concept of feminism. Some of the comments were:

> '*There are negative associations with that word, but I would like to fight for women's rights, put it like this. Feminism has negative associations, I don't like that.*'
>
> **Shia 6**

> *'Because I am kind of saying you know I am not burning my bra, I am not what have you. And yet on the other foot in so many ways, actually I am, because I rejoice in what I am able to do and allowed to do and what I am, and what my other women do. And by the nature of the fact I am a woman, I guess I do identify with it. It is tough, I hope this is useful, […].'*
>
> **Anglican 3**

> *'I think in some ways our religion is very feminist, because it does promote women's rights and it fights for women's rights and it says you know, you have these rights. It is very pro women in that respect. But I don't know, feminism it has just got bad press I think, it has got a lot of negative connotations now.'*
>
> **Sunni 4**

This interviewee thinks that Islam promotes the rights of women, and even suggests that Islam is a feminist religion. At the same time, however, she notes that the concept of feminism has been given a bad image by the press.

The comments by these women, Christian and Muslim, reveal that the rejection of or scepticism towards the label 'feminist' is primarily because it has been given a bad image in the media. These women seem to support the feminist agenda of women's rights, but are also careful to distance themselves from the label 'feminist'.

6.3.2.3 Feminist! Oh Yes

Some other participants had, on the other hand, a strong positive conviction on the concept of feminism and were willing to be labelled as such. One Anglican responded:

> '*As a feminist? Yes, I wouldn't mind being described as a feminist. I have always thought of myself as being one … Because I don't see why women should be less than men. And I think before the 1960s or that kind of era, they were subsidiary. During the war they weren't, women and men were very equal, because men went off to fight and women did all the work in the factories and what have you. And then the men came back and took over everything again. And the poor little women had to go back to being nice housekeepers. And that I don't think was right. So yes, I would like to think of myself as a feminist. That is why I admire people like Pankhurst, the Suffragettes, who fought for the vote for women, I think they are excellent women, strong women.*'
>
> **Anglican 4**

Thus for this participant, feminism meant equal voting rights and equal opportunities in the labour market.

One participant had the view that she did not deserve to be called feminist as compared to what other women had achieved, but would like to be labelled as such. However, she also mentioned that the label feminist might not be a compliment but used rather as a derogatory word. She said:

> '*I am not sure I kind of justify being identified as a feminist in some ways, when I think about what other women have done, but yes I don't mind it if people call me a feminist, even if it is obvious they mean it in an insulting way, I think it is a good thing to be.*'
>
> **Anglican 6**

This interviewee indicates she would like to be called feminist irrespective of its negative image.

Similarly, a Sunni participant also had the opinion that feminist are women who do not follow stereotypical roles, and she was comfortable being labelled as feminist because she valued independence. She stated:

> *'I am a person that does my own thing, I come and go and please myself. I am feminist in a way, I am my own person. Men don't say you have to do this, you have to do that, I do what I want to do.'*
>
> **Sunni 2**

Overall, both Christian and Muslim participants in our study were embracing women's rights and gender equality. They distanced themselves, however, from the label 'feminism'. Some participants displayed unease with the concept and rejected certain aspects which they alleged belittled men. They associate some feminists with 'going too far', or being too radical, including bra-burning and lesbianism. The latter point, the association between feminism and lesbianism, was a problem for some as gay and lesbian relationships are seen as unacceptable from a religious point of view. This finding suggests that lesbian Christians or Muslims could find it difficult to make their sexual preferences known for fear of being excluded or discriminated against. Despite distancing themselves from the label 'feminism', many of the participants seem to embrace some fundamental parts of the feminist agenda, including women's right to vote, women's right to employment, equal pay for the same job, and women's right to education.

Further, the responses to the question did not suggest any distinct preferences between the two religions, therefore the findings are indicative that the decision to be labelled 'feminist' does not depend on the religion adhered to or ethnicity.

6.3.3 Discourse on women's movement

Participants were asked about their perception of the importance of the women's movement; the question was 'What is your understanding of the importance of the women's movement in general?' Suffrage and women's empowerment were the emerging themes from their responses.

6.3.3.1 Women's movement as facilitator for suffrage for women

Some of the participants' discourse on the women's movement focused on the first wave of the women's movement, where suffrage was one of the major issues on the agenda. They acknowledged the achievements and challenges faced by the advocates. The achievements of the women's movement to ensure women had a right to vote, including some of the challenges they faced, were narrated by an Anglican participant:

> *'I mean I know it started very early with Emmeline Pankhurst and I know that the Suffragettes actually suffered an awful lot you know, and I must admit I kind of always use my vote, because I think they did such a lot and they suffered such a lot for me to get it, that you know it is kind of like my responsibility to make the most of that chance. So that is the early movement. I must admit the later movement, sort of in the '60s and '70s, I know very little about. I mean I know all the things that sort of were in the media you know, about burning bras and sort of these women who were making a lot of trouble and I mean obviously you get that, because the media, they were trying to break down the barriers that the media and the men, the people in power were very happy to have there.'*
>
> **Anglican 6**

The interviewee says that she knows more about the first wave of the women's movement than the second wave. She has a positive view of the first wave struggles and achievements, and she also highlights how second wave advocates were using radical tactics in order to achieve their goals.

Another Anglican woman mentioned that the women's movement advocated the acceptance of women as individuals with agency just as men, she said:

> '*Well the right to vote doesn't involve anything other than accepting a person as an individual and I think that is right, I think women are as much an individual as men are. I don't believe that I am my husband's chattel, which is where it came up from.*'
>
> **Anglican 2**

A Pentecostal interviewee also highlighted how the women's movement has positively affected her life, she said:

> *'Well I guess it is because I wouldn't be where I am without it, I wouldn't have the rights and you know I wouldn't be able to work as I can or vote as I can without it. I guess it is not something I think about an awful lot you know, it is*

not something I sit and think how grateful I am for it, but you know thinking about it I wouldn't, I perhaps wouldn't have the same liberties that I have now without it.'

Pentecostal 3

These responses demonstrate that the women's movement's advocacy on suffrage and women's right to work has not gone unnoticed among the interviewed religious women. The above comments were made by participants from different age groups; one interviewee was very much aware of the events in the 1960's and 1970s while another respondent knew more about the first than the second wave of the women's movement. Several respondents emphasised that they have benefitted from the achievements of the women's movement.

6.3.3.2 Women's movement as associated with women's empowerment

Other participants focused on how the women's movement has supported women's empowerment in society. The responses from participants suggest that one of the results of the women's movement is how women gained confidence to assert themselves. One Anglican participant summed up the transformation by saying:

'*I think it is important and it did make a big change in women's lives, women started thinking for themselves and didn't have to refer to anybody else to say 'Is that alright with you dear', kind of thing. So I felt quite empowered by the women's movement, yes.*'

Anglican 4

She suggests that the women's movement made women aware they could be less dependent on men.

The existence of a women's movement was also deemed as relevant to ensure that women's issues are addressed politically. A Shia participant stated:

'*I think it is important because it shows they are alive, if there is a movement it means they are asking for change and they are asking for correction. If there is no movement there is no life, yes it is important, I would go for it.*'

Shia 6

From these comments it can be concluded that the discourse on the women's movement by participants in this study dwells on its achievements for the status of women in society and their participation in civil, political and economic activities.

6.3.4 Women's movement and faith

The activism of the women's movement in the UK in the 1960s and 1970s focused on gender equality in the political, economic and private spheres, with little attention to religious issues (Nyhagen Predelli et al., 2008). There seems to be little, if any, literature available on the impact of the women's movement on religion. To explore how the activities or the agenda of the women's movement has impacted on women's faith, participants were asked to respond to the question, 'Has the women's movement had any effects on your faith, as you see it?'

6.3.4.1 Religion as static

Some of the Muslim participants shared the view that the women's movement has had no influence on Islam. One Muslim woman had the view that Islam has not been affected by the women's movement and argued that once the Islamic teachings are followed, she is comfortable with any social changes. She argued:

> *'Nobody will be able to change it, nothing has changed. Islam is Islam and people who are good Muslims they always abide, they go by the Qur'an and Hadiths. So that doesn't change. So I don't think it has any influence on Islam itself. But they are to do whatever they want to do, that is fine according if they are balancing Islam and their work, so I don't think there is a problem really.'*
>
> **Sunni 2**

This respondent views Islamic teachings as fixed and unchangeable, but she is prepared to open up for social changes as long as the Islamic teachings are followed.

Another Muslim participant was also of the view that the changes in gender relations, namely working women or the quest for gender equality, must not be interpreted as changes in the religion. She stated:

> '*Affected Islam, not in, not in, I don't think so. Not unless of course those who sort of just look in one direction and say, women have to sit at home and don't do anything. I guess for those it could, but what about the right of the woman and again it is the men who would say that. The woman should be just as free as men, just as equal. Because again I believe, I mean that really comes to me that we are all, each individual is God's creation so God has something there. I can't say I am better than you or you are better you know, you are no good because my family is better. Because your colour is different. But God has created all of us, woman, ugly, beautiful, there must be a reason behind*

it. But we are all God's creation and it is God, it is not so much the religion. Religion is there, but it has put me a lot closer to God if you know what I mean, I see God a lot more than Islam.'

Shia 5

The women's movement is not seen, by this participant, as having impacted on Islam; rather, she believes Islam allows for gender equality and women's right to work.

6.3.4.2 Secular influences on religiously prescribed gender relations

On the other hand, some participants could not rule out the impact of secular debates on religion, and the agenda of the women's movement was seen to have affected all facets of society. Some interviewees highlighted changes in gender relations and practices in their own religious organisations, and suggested that these changes might have been influenced by the women's movement. A Pentecostal woman had the opinion that it must also have affected the church, but she talked about the impact in rather negative terms suggesting families and relationships might have broken down because of women's demands. She said:

'I think it must have, it must have, even if it is just to the point of view of women in the church and how they see themselves. Unfortunately, in many respects unfortunately, the church is driven by the way the world sees and behaves rather than the other way round. So there is no need to think that the women's movement didn't have some impact on women in the church. It is hard to know how many families and relationships suffered as a result of women's more aggressive attitudes, but I don't see how it could not have had an impact, if other things were having an impact.'

Pentecostal 4

She acknowledges that the influence could not be avoided as the church is part of the society.

The agenda of the women's movement was also identified to have influenced cultural values. One Muslim participant argued that the women's movement has affected Muslim countries and cultures, but not the Muslim faith. She tried to distinguish between the cultural practices of different Muslim countries. She also gave an example of the head scarf and how it is used in different countries,

emphasizing that in her view, Islam itself does not specify the extent of covering. She said:

> *'Of course, yes. There is something else I am going to point out. You know Islam is something and culture is something else. We have many countries, they are Muslim, but they don't do religious rules the same, completely the same, because culture is influence in the religions as well. But we are Muslim, people in Saudi Arabia are Muslim as well, and the ladies can't drive over there. I am 32 and as long as I remember women could drive in Iran. So I think like covering face it is not religious at all, if somebody looks at somebody with a veil and says "Oh they are a Muslim, that is why they are doing this", this is wrong. Because in Islam you could open up your round face completely without any make up or something that shows up your face. Many people are doing it, so it is different from country to country as well. I think here and [in] other Christian countries you also find it different, the Islam.'*
>
> **Shia 1**

A Pentecostal woman emphasised the achievements of the women's movement in terms of changes in labour market, and suggested that a change in labour laws also affect the employment policies of churches. Her response to the question, 'Has the women's movement had any effects on your faith, as you see it?', was:

> *'It must have had, I guess. It just have had. Certainly with regard to employing people, the employment laws apply to churches as well as anybody else. So they couldn't put an advert in a Christian magazine we want a male Youth Leader, although I don't know whether they do. Can they get away with it?'*
>
> **Pentecostal 5**

Here she gives an example where the church has to comply with secular state laws in recruiting workers.

The argument for women priests and bishops was also suggested as one of the influences of the women's movement. An Anglican woman commented that people who have argued against women priests and vicars have associated gender equality with secular values, and that such values should not be allowed to impact on the church. She stated:

> *'Oh yes, I think that the big, that has been part of the argument against women priests and women bishops, is that we are just following secular trends, one of which has been the women's movement.'*
>
> **Anglican 3**

The literary work of religious feminists was also argued to have introduced alternative theological perspectives. One Anglican participant explained that women and men have different preaching styles, and that women bring new and added dimensions to the role of a priest. She narrated her experience:

> *'Well I think, I think it is beginning to because you do have feminist writers in religion and I mean really of course it affected them in the fact that it improved, and I think women do bring different agendas, you know a different view-point to the role of a priest. In fact it was quite interesting on the training, we had a male priest who was teaching us about preaching and he was saying, that sometimes you just have to kind of stand up and say, you must do this and you mustn't do that. And it was very interesting, we had a discussion afterwards and the men were sort of quite comfortable with something that you should stand and say, you must and you mustn't and you will. But the women were saying, no it should be, we must and we mustn't. And it was really very strongly along gender lines, these ideas of how you should talk to people and I think that that comes through as well with women priests.'*
>
> **Anglican 6**

A Shia participant, on the other hand, gave an example of how the women's movement has influenced the Islamic nation of Iran, she said:

> *'Positive things, like voting, Islam also says that a woman has an equal right to vote as well. You can see in Iran that men and women both vote, there is nothing wrong for a woman to go and use her vote right, it is the woman's right as well. Similarly more women in government in big posts, such as in health department and in education department. I totally agree that a women's movement are bringing positive impacts on the community. You will see more bus drivers. In the '70s how many bus drivers were women? Did you see any?'*
>
> **Shia 3**

She attributes the presence of many women in male dominated professions in Iran to the influence of the women's movement.

However, another Shia participant pointed out how the achievements attained for women by the women's movement have increased their responsibilities as working mothers and wives. She argued:

> *'I would say it has probably, because I know in a way a lot of feminists would say, oh you poor Muslim women, oh look what you have to wear, oh look you*

have to stay in the house and clean the kitchen. I turn around and say, look at my poor mum, she had to come home from work, she had to clean the house from top to bottom, she had to feed my dad, look after my dad, bring us up and for what, because she was supposed to be equal to him you know. And she was just run ragged you know. Definitely I defend, I defend that and she was absolutely exhausted and it is quite sort of like having to do everything, because they feel the pressure. You have got to be a modern woman, go to work, got to do this, got to do the house, your kids have got to be immaculate, they have got to go to this club, that club, you have got to drive them here, you know. You can't do everything, you can't no so I mean you know.'

Shia 4

Her argument is on the basis that feminists would argue that women should be able to work outside the home. Although she defends women's rights to work, she asserts that women might be working double shifts as they are also taking care of housework and children.

6.3.4.3 Removal of barriers

Some Christian participants argued that the women's movement has facilitated the recognition of the competencies and capacities of women in faith, resulting in the removal of barriers that prevented them from holding some positions in the church. The Church of England was used as an example where women have been given increased roles.

Some of the Anglican participants highlighted the role of women priests as an example of the impact the women's movement has had on their Church. One Anglican said:

'I suppose it has in some way, certainly in the Anglican church, women have started to play a bigger role and taken more positions of power, so to speak. In other faiths obviously that has always happened. If you are looking specifically at the Church of England then yes, I would say it would have made a difference.'

Anglican 4

She acknowledges the impact the women's movement has had in supporting women obtaining more prominent roles in the Anglican Church.

A second Anglican participant gave another example of the impact of the women's movement on the church. She said:

> *'The women's movement, well in a way yes, with the ordination of women yes. But then again you had a very extreme group that put a lot of the clergy off, they went a bit too far. But you know you do get the fanatics that do spoil any proper issues. But I think that the genuine ones, they have sort of chipped away and they have got their voice heard. And now we are getting more and more women Ordinates which is good, which is good.'*
>
> **Anglican 5**

However, it was also mentioned that not all Christian denominations allow increased participation of women, even in roles which they had been playing for a long time. A Pentecostal interviewee argued that things have changed and women's participation is more visible, and that women are not only preaching to other women, but also to gender mixed audiences. She explained:

> *'Yes I suppose so because I think that women began to be recognised more and it took a long while for that to work through, but I think there is, there are still church denominations like X where women are very much, and basically the whole of that church set up is very male dominated, it is all about commitment, men serving the Lord. […] Possibly, I mean at the end of the day I think you will always have women who taught the Bible, but it might have been with other women to children, whereas today it is not, you know, it is perfectly, it seems to be acceptable and understandable if a woman gets up and preaches in the morning, to a whole mixed [congregation], but I think women have always done the same roles, they have always done the same things. There would have been women who understood the scriptures as well, but they just would have used their gifting in a more low key way. Whereas, today women are getting a chance to actually used their teaching gifts in a more mixed setting or in a more high profile. [...].'*
>
> **Pentecostal 2**

She implies that activities in which women were previously engaged behind the scenes in the church, are now made more visible.

The responses suggest that participants attributed some of the changes in gender relations in both faiths, Christianity and Islam, to some of the efforts of the women's movement, such as the recognition of the increased roles in the churches and increased participation in employment of women. However, the achievements were also argued to have increased women's responsibilities as participants in the work force and as home makers, and thus adding to 'women's burden'.

6.3.5 The women's movement and private life

Participants were further asked to reflect on how far the women's movement has had any influence on their lives; they were asked 'What about your own personal life and beliefs - have you been influenced by the women's movement?'

6.3.5.1 No influence on private life

Some Muslim participants, who earlier had expressed that they do not see the importance of the movement, were emphatic that the women's movement has had no influence on their private lives. One Muslim participant argued that the movement has had no influence on her life as freedom for women are enshrined in all religions including Islam. Moreover, she stated that women have to abide by the prescribed gender roles of Islam, especially the role of leading prayers, which is limited to men. She argued:

> *'Again you know, […] different religions, again every single religion has given the power to women as freedom. […]. But in [Islam] they say, you are the living creature and you are entitled, everything as a man. Only the few rules what God has made it for you, you should do it within that limit you know, you can go and work no problem right, you can become a leader. But then again you become a leader but that does not mean you are going to perform the pray. You can be a leader, [...] but you cannot perform the pray. You are going to perform the pray behind the men, men are not going to perform the pray behind you, because you are leader it is not going to happen.'*
>
> **Sunni 3**

She is highlighting an important limitation on women's roles in Muslim congregations- no preaching to male-only or to gender - mixed audiences by women. This is a limitation to gender equality in Muslim congregations, together with the gendered division of space within mosques (Nyhagen Predelli, 2008).

One participant, with Iranian heritage, did not appreciate the value of the agenda of the women's movement, and emphasised that the right to vote and rights of women had been attained in Iran long ago. Thus she did not see the relevance of the women's movement to her life. She stated:

> *'I don't agree really in this movement. In Iran we have the right to vote from ages ago, I always vote, I have my own political views, but like thinking about women's society in this case, we are going to define our rights, I don't think*

there has been any ignoring about, at least in my own family, my husband's family, and in my own house. Maybe there are some ladies that feel their rights have been ignored so they need to think about it or maybe attend to one of these movements. Personally I don't see a reason for it.'

Shia 1

It seems she does not perceive a role for the women's movement in the 20 - first century, as all the basic rights have allegedly been achieved for both men and women.

Another Shia participant suggested that the agenda of women keeping their own identity was not relevant to Muslim women as they do not change their names upon marriage. She explained:

'*[…] the women's movement makes a big fuss and hoo hah about being a Ms, or keeping their original name. In Islam they never change their names, you never change your surname.*'

Shia 4

She suggests that the advocacy for married women to keep their maiden names is not relevant to her.

One Sunni woman valued the women's movement only in relation to voting rights for women; otherwise it had no relevance to her. She stated:

'What, apart from getting the vote. No. As I say, my life is governed by my religion and the set of values that I take from my religion and to be honest I don't need anything else. I don't need people to tell me how to think or feel or whatever, I have got this set of values and it works for me and I don't need anyone else to tell me what to think.'

Sunni 4

She acknowledges the achievement of the women's movement on suffrage but prefers to be guided by her faith.

6.3.5.2 Change in gender relations

A Pentecostal participant argued that the women's movement has influenced gender relations in marriage, pointing to both her own and that of her parents' marriage, as having been affected by the women's movement:

> *'So yes I guess it has affected the way probably that I interact with my husband, because I know that is just talking about my family background, but my mum wouldn't have been allowed that role had it not been for women's movement, because there would have been pressures upon my dad to a assert a certain amount of authority over his wife, and he would have been looked down on if he allowed her to you know talk too much or do too much. So that obviously has a knock on effect on their relationship and so it does with the way myself and my husband interact, so yes.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 3**

She appreciates the impact of the women's movement in marital relationship where women are accorded more respect and freedom.

Another Pentecostal woman mentioned both the benefits and additional responsibilities as a result of the achievements of the women's movement. She said:

> *'So obviously I am benefiting from a lot of campaigning and fighting in the past, although I did read a book about ten years ago now about the trap of trying to be a superwoman and how some of the ardent feminists had backtracked and said actually, instead of being confined to having one role, they now have two lots of responsibility, and so in a sense that brought a yoke of a different sort, and a pressure. I am not sure that it has necessarily made an impact on my religion, I don't really know what went on 50 years ago in churches.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 5**

This interviewee acknowledges the positive impact of the women's movement, but also comments on the double burden women carry as a result of the feminist agenda.

6.3.5.3 Inspired choices

Half of the participants, both Christian and Muslim, were of the view that the actions of the women's movement serve as inspirations and have provided opportunities which previous generations of women did not have.

One Anglican argued that the agenda pursued by the women's movement has enabled her to obtain a profession in a male dominated subject and gain independence. She said:

> *'I think so because I think that really what they have done has sort of paved the way for me to have the opportunities that I have. I mean at one point, and I don't go back a very long time ago, I wouldn't have had the chance to go to university at all, let alone to study statistics or something, a male subject if you like. And also of course I wouldn't have had the opportunity to work, or I might have been able to work until I married, of course I haven't married so I would still be able to work, but I know there is an awful lot of changes, not just in religion but also in life.'*
>
> **Anglican 6**

Advocates of the Women's Movement were also seen as role models of change. A Sunni participant stated:

> *'I think it has empowered my knowledge to be able to go to other women and say to them "Look, these women in the past, they didn't have the voting rights we had today, they didn't have these facilities, they didn't have childcare, look what they achieved, why aren't you achieving, why aren't you doing something. If not for yourselves, for your children". In particular Muslim women, when you come to them with that tactic, make them think and they think for our children and for your daughters.'*
>
> **Sunni 5**

Further, the women's movement was said to have ensured the presence of more women in education and the health sector. One Shia participant explained:

> '*Yes it is very important, […] definitely. […] And throughout the centuries, from [the] '50s to this decade, women have done a lot. […] always in favour of the women's movement for their rights in education, in government yes, we need more, I would like to see more women in government, in education, in health.*'
>
> **Shia 3**

One participant, an Anglican woman who was a teenager in the 1970s, was sympathetic to the issues pursued but felt the advocates were a bit extreme. She conceded, however, that the 'extreme actions' were a means to an end. She stated:

> *'That never bothered me at the time. Yes I would never have burnt my bra or stuff like that, […] Fair enough, yes, yes I agree with it to a point but I wouldn't have gone to extremes that they did. Winning the vote all those years ago, yes, but you see they had to go to extremes to get through to these men, who had been brought up, I mean you are banging against tradition and it was a*

big thing. But it worked well in the end, but as I said, you have to go beyond the boundaries to come back, to settle for something. But by getting things like equal pay I think was a good idea. Because if two people are doing the same job then they should be paid the same. But they are now using the argument that women, well they are going to leave and have babies, but you see now not necessarily. Women are choosing not to have families, there is choice there, so yes.'

Anglican 4

She highlights the achievements of the women's movement on suffrage and equal pay. She also mentions an argument against equal pay for women which would be based on the fact that many women start families and take career breaks, but she suggests that such an argument is not valid as many women also choose not to have children.

Overall, when participants in our study talked about the women's movement, their discourse centred on its achievements in relation to suffrage and women's empowerment. The role of advocates within the movement were appreciated, however our interviewees revealed differences between their responses. Suffrage was mainly the focus of the Christian and ethnic majority participants, whilst the Muslim and ethnic minority participants focused on empowerment. Perhaps Christian and ethnic majority participants deemed civil and political rights as more important, as they were a precursor to other achievements, whereas the Muslim and ethnic minority participants' focus suggest the importance of other issues such as equal pay and education for women.

Further, responses on the impact of the women's movement on both religions also revealed differences. Some Muslim participants shared the view that it had no impact on their faith. It appears their arguments focused on the possible impact on theology, as they seemed to have interpreted our question in this way, but it could also be that some participants perceive the activities of the women's movement as an affront to the teachings of Islam which has prescriptive roles for women and men.

Nonetheless, some of the participants, including ethnic minority Christian and Muslim women, shared the view that the women's movement has had some impact. The Christian women acknowledged that the women's movement affected society as the church is part of the social structure; whilst the Muslim women emphasised the

movement affected the culture and value systems in the various countries but not the faith. Ethnic majority Christians, on the other hand, argued that gender relations have changed in the church where women have been given increased roles in the practice of the faith, such as lay preachers and vicars. Some also shared the opinion that the women's movement has changed the lives of religious women. The findings also show that the women's movement has facilitated a process where changes have been introduced for women to participate more in society and within their religions organisations.

Considering their personal lives, half of the participants, both Christian and Muslim, commented that they believed the women's movement has contributed in ensuring that they have choices in their lives; e.g. to vote, to employment, opportunity to be in male dominated professions, education, and an increased number of women in politics. However, some were not too sure of the influence the women's movement has had on their lives. They admitted the work of the women's movement enables them to vote, but also emphasised that it has resulted in women having to play additional roles and take on further responsibilities. Some Muslim participants had the opinion that the women's movement has no influence on their lives as they regard themselves as only influenced by Islam, whilst others related to their country of origin which they argued had always ensured the rights of women.

6.3.6 Conclusion

Feminism and the women's movement were associated with women's rights and women's empowerment by participants in our study. Both phenomena were perceived to have changed gender relations in society and to have contributed to the increased participation of women in education and politics. Women in our study expressed clear support for women's equal rights and opportunities. The women's movement was also perceived to have changed cultural values which many welcomed. However, the achievements were mainly deemed historic, or a thing of the past, with the current agenda being regarded by some as irrelevant or bordering on matriarchy. Some have also taken the achievements for granted and did not appreciate the relevance of the women's movement and feminism in contemporary times. One distinct finding was that feminism was a term many were uneasy about mainly because of the prejudices associated with the word, unlike the term 'women's

movement'. Perhaps the current absence of a clearly identifiable and collective agenda of the women's movement, and the continual public discussion of various contentious issues, such as abortion, parenting, and divorce, have influenced some of the participants' perception of feminism as extreme or radical. There has also been a general backlash against feminism, combined with a widespread perception that gender equality has been achieved (Banyard, 2010), which is likely to have impacted on our interviewees' perceptions of feminism and the women's movement.

There are several important findings to emphasize from our study; among them the fact that many religious women support major items on the women's movement agenda, such as equal rights and opportunities for women and men. On the other hand, many religious women do not identify with the concept of 'feminism', and many view the women's movement as too radical. Feminist women's movement organisations therefore seem to have a challenging task ahead in communicating their agenda to religious women who do not feel that their concerns regarding women's rights and equality are served well by feminist organisations.

6.4 How are gender relations practiced in the religious context

Religious organisations may sometimes produce barriers to or actively limit the practicing of equal citizenship for women and men, while at other times they may offer formal and/or informal opportunities for more gender equal citizenship practices. Scholars have identified various features of religious faiths, including Christianity, Islam and Judaism, as patriarchal and oppressive to women, but other dimensions have been interpreted as conducive to the 'liberation' or 'empowerment' of women (see, e.g., Brasher, 1998; Ahmed, 1992; Davidman, 1991). The concept of religion has two dimensions; what religion 'is' and what religion 'does' (Woodhead, 2007). Our study sought to identify how gender relations are practised within the two faiths, Christianity and Islam, by women who participated in our study. We started by exploring what motivated them to participate in their choice of religion and we look at the gender relations and the changes they have observed within their specific religion. We further examined whether they represented their religion as fixed, flexible or both, in relation to gender.

6.4.1 Motivation for adherence to religion

When participants were asked 'What motivated you to start attending this Church/Mosque?', we found that a majority of the women who participated in the study had been socialised to be either a Muslim or Christian. Only two of the participants had converted to another religion, or changed their Christian denomination. Additionally, the responses suggested that for the Muslim participants their participation in organised prayers depended on the availability of women-only spaces in the mosque, an indication that space is more gendered in Islam than in Christianity.

6.4.2 The converted

Although many of the interviewees in our study still adhere to the faith they were socialised within during their childhood, some had made choices in their adulthood to convert to other faiths. A participant who converted to Islam mentioned that she was raised in a Christian family although Christianity never played a major part in her childhood. She narrated:

> *'Yes. I was born a Christian but my family background was very, I wouldn't say, it was atheist in the sense that we were never taught about Christianity, but we weren't brought up to discount Christianity. […] And then I met Muslims and I just researched in to it and I just found it was absolutely perfect, the best way I wanted to live. So I converted and everybody telling me it was a phase and it will pass university with a typical scenario. […].'*
>
> **Shia 4**

It appears the interviewee, made a choice between her childhood faith and Islam, thus her conversion to the faith was not imposed on her but something that met her needs.

One Pentecostal interviewee revealed that she was socialised as a Sikh but converted to Christianity in her adulthood, she narrated:

> '*Yes I was born into Sikhism. I remember as a child us going for weddings or anything we were especially invited to. But it wasn't like every Sunday we must go, it wasn't anything like that you know. […] So I would say my dad was quite liberal in that way. Well I became a Christian just before I had my son, I told my husband, I said I have become a Christian now and he was fine with it.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 1**

This interviewee converted to another faith by her own decision.

Comments by these two women illustrate that, irrespective of the faith they were socialised into, they could make choices to change their preferred religions. Thus, the possibility of conversion into other faiths provides women with the opportunity to seek new and different meanings in their lives.

6.4.3 Socialised

A number of the participants in our study mentioned that their motivation to adhere to their religion, whether Christianity or Islam, began in their childhood. An Anglican participant narrated her experience by saying:

> *'I have always been to church. My parents sent me from the age of three to Sunday school, and I have never stopped going. I just felt a bond there and I have never stopped. I am 65 now so you know, it is just part of my life for such a long while. I think I had a break of about six years when I was first married, we moved away and with setting up home and everything we, my husband and I didn't go regularly to church. But once we moved to X, 36 years ago, I decided to go back and I have never stopped.'*
>
> **Anglican 5**

She indicates that she felt a bond with the church, a sense of belonging, so she had never left the main faith. Her response suggests that although she had left her first congregation due to the marriage, she has not left the institution, the Anglican church.

It appears the tradition of parents passing on their religion to their children was well accepted by some of our interviewees. One Sunni participant was happy with the choice of religion by her parents, she commented:

> *'I was born a Muslim, my parents are from Pakistan and [are] Muslim, and [I am] proud to be born a Muslim.'*
>
> **Sunni 2**

Another Shia interviewee also said:

> '*Yes, I was born a Muslim. Even if I wanted to choose I would choose Islam again*.'
>
> **Shia 1**

These interviewees refer to 'I was born a Muslim', thus suggesting a fait accompli. They are happy with their religion and with the choices made by their parents.

We also observed that some women from ethnic minority groups were introduced to their religion by their parents. One ethnic minority Pentecostal said:

> *'I have always attended, my parents attended. I attended as a child, I didn't have a choice.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 4**

She concedes that attending a church was compulsory for her as a child, reemphasizing the role played by parents.

Yet, one of our interviewees changed from the Anglican faith she has been socialised within, into a Pentecostal faith. She narrated:

> *'I was going to an Anglican, a big Anglican church in the centre of X, but my husband and I felt called to worship locally in X, […] Yes, so we started coming here about 13 years ago. And also we wanted more lively worship. […] So that is why we chose to come here.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 2**

Thus, this interviewee mentions that although she had been socialised as Christian within the Anglican faith, she changed to a Pentecostal faith.

The comment by our interviewees on what motivates them to attend a particular church or mosque mainly relates back to the type of religion they were socialised into as children. As adults, many are still adhering to the same faith, and still with the same institution, whilst others have changed faiths. Hence, these comments suggest that many people are attached to the institutions they were socialised into during their childhood.

6.4.4 Space as available and unavailable

The findings also indicated that for the Muslims who participated in our study, their motivation to continue attending mosque is based on the availability of a particular space designated for women.

One Sunni participant commented on the opportunity to participate in her faith because of the space provided in her mosque. She said:

> *'I've been attending this mosque since I was like 5 or 6 years old and we have grown up going to that Mosque. It was the Mosque that my dad went to and it was like our local Mosque. And then they got the money together and built that Islamic Centre, so by virtue of the fact that it is bigger now and it has got the ladies gallery, we naturally go there now. […] it is a proper ladies gallery, it is used for Friday prayer, it is used for all sorts of functions. […] There aren't that many in Leicester with a ladies gallery. Yes. We have got a youth club there, and they organise things for the children that attend, organise workshops, organise sleepovers at the Mosque in the Ramadan.'*
>
> **Sunni 4**

This interviewee lists the different spaces that her mosque offers from childhood to adulthood and mentions a 'proper ladies gallery', suggesting the development towards a more adequate space for women to participate in prayers and other activities.

The opportunity to attend women-only services seemed very attractive to women who attend this particular mosque. One participant narrated her experience:

> *'I just happened to go there one day, just to find out about the prayer times, to be honest. And I met the Imam who was a wonderful gentleman, compared to some of the Imams I had met previously, he was so open and saying to me 'Yes come in and I will tell you all about our mosque and the women's services' and I thought 'Oh women's services, that is a difference', obviously we didn't have those where I lived. We had a small room where the women could pray but that was about it. I found out more and more, I got to know the women who were organizing the activities, at that time it was an informal group really and I just got involved.'*
>
> **Sunni 5**

Her experience suggests that Muslim women cannot take for granted that there will be a space for them, that there will be special services for them, or that the Imam or other religious leaders, will be welcoming them. Thus, the leadership of the mosque also plays a vital role in ensuring that women have the possibility to attend the mosque.

One participant's motivation of attending the mosque was for the opportunity to learn and interact with her community:

> *'So many reasons, I think it is a learning process when you are going to Mosque, you are meeting new people, you are seeing people and then you are greeting the community and you are knowing your community and your circle of friends and circle of people is getting more wider. […] And then it brings your inner strength in a way, because everybody is different and everybody has a different way of understanding and a different way of believing. […] And that is what we learn from Mosque. […].'*
>
> **Sunni 3**

This interviewee appreciates the opportunity she gets to participate in her community through attending the mosque. The mosque therefore serves as a meeting place where women can engage in social events within their communities.

Similarly, space is also the issue for those who do not have access to a mosque, specifically the Shia women in our study. One participant explained how the lack of space has affected her:

> *'In Iran all mosques, they have got two levels, one level is for ladies and one level is for men. So it is one level it has been sectioned, two sections. So here [in city X] there is none that is why I haven't been*.'
>
> **Shia 1**

The lack of a designated space for women thus hinders her opportunity to worship with a congregation.

Another participant, however, was not happy with the political events at the mosque, hence her decision not to attend. She explained further:

> *'I like to, but I think the Mosque is a mixture of religion and politics, I believe in religion but I don't believe in politics, because I think that people who are in top of the religion misuse the religion to play politics, I don't know, misuse, how can I explain. Because of the mixture of the politics and religion, I don't like that, that is why I don't go to Mosque.'*
>
> **Shia 6**

So, even if space is available, it is not given that Muslim women will attend, as other factors might influence their decision.

However, the issue of space was not only expressed in terms of physical structure, but also in symbolic terms. For one participant her motivation for converting into the Islamic faith is the opportunity to express herself in the type of clothing she wears, she stated:

> *'[…] in those days as soon as I converted, it was the hijab that really attracted me, it was one of the first things that really appealed to me. Because I had always been quite shy and I don't know, I had always felt something uncomfortable going out feeling that people were looking at me, or feeling pressurise to conform to a certain shape or wear certain clothes. I remember at school people picking on your clothes or laughing at you, but with the hijab, you are covered, nobody is going to analyse the shape of your body you know, and there is sort of a uniformity, a sort of identity, looking for an identity. And it is just so easy. You are wearing this identity and it reminds you of your behaviour and how to behave. […] that was one of the great attractions. […].'*
>
> **Shia 4**

Wearing of the hijab provides a symbolic bodily space for women where they will not be judged by their shapes or sizes. Nevertheless, Muslim women might experience that they are frequently being judged in negative ways by non-Muslims due to their choice of clothing.

As religion was part of the participants' socialisation in their childhood, it had also influenced their value system and how they perceive their lives. The findings of our study have also provided an insight into how 'women only' space can also provide meaning, particularly to the lives of Muslim women. The Muslim participants, who had a space in a mosque, expressed the value it has made in their lives as they could use the space for multiple purposes including sports, whereas Christians in our study did not express similar sentiments. Most likely, Christian women took the availability of the space they have in the church for granted. If it had been taken away from them or questioned, it would probably cause indignation or they might call on local authorities to rectify the situation.

6.5 Religious figures to admire

Participants in our study presented their faith as underlining the moral codes that shape their behaviour, and most of them were socialised during their childhood into their respective faiths. We sought to explore their views on gender relations by first asking about the religious figures they admired. The question we asked was: 'Are

there any women in your religious tradition that you admire? (Historical or contemporary figures) Why do you admire them?' We further asked 'Are there any men in your religious tradition that you admire (historical or contemporary figures? Why do you admire them?' We present their responses based on their religious affiliation, as the data revealed distinct differences. For the Muslim women historical figures they admired were the Prophet Mohammed, his wives and daughter Fatima. Many of the Muslim women admired the Prophet for his leadership and shared the opinion that his wives serve as good role models for Muslim women. The qualities admired in contemporary religious female figures were their commitment to prescriptive gender roles and their ability to participate in various sectors of the society. Christian interviewees, on the other hand, admired individuals both historic and contemporary, including non-Christians, for their strength of character, compassion and integrity.

6.5.1 Admired Muslim Figures

Female historical figures admired by Muslim participants in our study were the wives of Prophet Mohammed, Khadijah and Aisha, and his daughter Fatima. The Prophet's wives were described as good roles models for women to emulate because they were believed to be good wives, good housekeepers, respectful, and to possess entrepreneurial skills. The life of Khadijah was argued by some Muslim participants to invalidate the notion that Muslim women should not work. Aisha's role in compiling the hadiths was also highlighted. The historical male figures admired by Muslim women in our study were the Prophet Mohammed, Ali ibn Ali Talib, son-in-law of Prophet Mohammed, and Ayatollah Khomeini, a past leader of Iran. These men were all admired mainly for their leadership roles and charisma.

The characteristics of contemporary Muslim women that our participants admired included the extent of their knowledge of historical issues, how eloquent they were on issues related to Islam, and their participation in community issues and interactions with other faiths. They identified family members and public figures in the UK and Iran. They admired these Muslim women's ability to play active roles in society, for example as managers of public agencies, or as lecturers, and they admired their knowledge of the hadiths. The roles that Imams or other mosque leaders play as educators and/ or as counsellors were qualities admired in

contemporary men. There is a distinct shift of admiration of historical and contemporary figures. Historical females were admired as models of the prescriptive gender roles of the faith, whilst contemporary females were admired for their abilities to combine prescriptive roles with other secular activities. Whereas male figures, both historical and contemporary, were admired for their leadership qualities.

6.5.2 Figures admired by Christian women

Christian interviewees admired individuals, not necessarily Christians, who had strength of character, compassion and integrity. The historical figures admired included both Biblical figures such as Mary and Esther, and other religious women in society including the missionary women Patricia St. John, Mother Theresa, and Susanna Wesley, mother of John and Charles Wesley. The non-Christian women admired included the suffragettes, such as Emily Pankhurst, and other historical women like Joan of Arc and Elizabeth the 1st. Unlike Muslim women in our study, who always mentioned their admiration for the Prophet Mohammed, only one Christian participant mentioned Jesus Christ, a leading figure of the Christian faith. Male characters admired were King David, a Biblical figure; Francis of Assisi, a missionary and saint; and the Reverend Cleaves, an Anglican priest. These men were admired for their evangelical work, compassionate qualities and inspiring roles.

Contemporary women most admired by Christian interviewees were female vicars who showed strength of character during the controversies of female ordination in the Anglican Church. They also admired women who were eloquent and assertive. For example, the actresses Joyce Huggart and Joanna Lumley, who are not primarily known for their religious beliefs, were mentioned because of the roles they have played in social issues. Similar to Muslim participants, many of the Christian interviewees admired leaders of the Church, including Anglican leaders such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Archbishop John Sentamu. These men were admired for the roles they play in the society and their strength of character. Nelson Mandela was also identified as a figure with similar qualities.

The data on the kind of religious figures admired by participants in our study revealed similarities and differences between Christian and Muslim participants. All the qualities admired by the interviewees related to their faiths; compassion, strength

of character, integrity, respecting their leaders, good mothers and wives, and adhering to the prescriptive rules of their faith. Many of our interviewees admired their respective priest, vicars or Imams because of their inspiring roles. They also admired leaders, in the Bible for Christians and the Qur'an for Muslims participants; however the Muslim women were more consistent in their admiration of Prophet Mohammed, his wives Kadijah and Aisha, and his daughter Fatima. Christian interviewees, on the other hand, admired different figures in the Bible and missionaries such as Mother Theresa. Within contemporary figures the data revealed distinct differences. Muslim women in our study admired contemporary women who fitted into the traditional role of a mother and wearing the hijab yet holding a secular job or responsibility. The Christian participants on the other hand admired women for their strength of character or compassion and not necessarily their faith or their gender roles.

Overall our findings suggest that both female and male figures who possess religious knowledge or have held important historical roles in the development of a faith tradition, are viewed as role models by our participants. Furthermore, abiding by the prescriptive rules of their faith is important to Muslim women in our study, whilst for some Christian women their admiration for individuals is not based on their faith but on their general strength of character.

6.6 Practice of gender relations

To explore their religious activities, participants in our study were asked 'Do you have any specific roles in your congregation? Or can you tell me about the types of activities you are involved in/participate in within your religious community?' The findings suggest that the majority of the participants, both Christian and Muslim, were actively involved in various aspects of their faith in both religious and social activities with other members. However, the Christian participants were involved in some of the religious practices such as preaching, leading in worship or pastoral care, whereas the Muslim participants were engaged in more women-only activities at the mosque. This section presents how women in our study practise their religion. We discuss their comments based on gender-mixed and women only activities.

6.6.1 Gender-mixed activities

Activities in which Christian women participated in their respective churches varied. Gender-mixed activities highlighted were activities that included men, women and children. Some of the Christian participants had leadership roles which included involvement in the leading of the worship. One participant mentioned that she has training as a 'Lay Reader' by saying:

> *'Yes I do. I am what is called a Reader, or sometimes called a Lay Reader, which is someone who is not ordained, so I am not a Priest, but I have received training so that I can carry out certain services and I can preach. In fact anyone can preach but the Priest would have to be there to sort of hear what they said, whereas they don't have to be there with me because they know I have had the training, I know in theory what I am doing. […] that is my main role, […].'*
>
> **Anglican 6**

Thus Christian women, even those who are not ordained, can be given the opportunity to preach to the congregation.

Another Christian woman also explained her role in the worship team and the other social activities she was involved within the church:

> *'Yes, I am involved in the worship team and I am also head of a prayer ministry and deliverance ministry and I do the majority of that, so I am quite involved with that. So yes I suppose, I get involved in the seniors, where we do our holiday at home, I help to organise that. So I help organise events and things.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 2**

Her comments indicate that a woman could be involved in both the traditionally preserve role of men in the leading of the worship and at the same time play the roles of care provider for seniors in the church.

One Christian participant had a role in the leading of the worship in addition to participating in meetings with women and children of the church. She explained:

> *'[…] I am on the prayer team, I help lead the prayer team about every six weeks on a Tuesday. I am on the Children's team, so I help out at what is called King's Kids, I am on that rota. I also supervise, if you like, Single Mum's News. There are quite a few single mums in the church and we get together periodically, like on Saturday with the women's meeting, but I am looking after one or two of the single women's children, so they can go.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 5**

Another Christian participant also described her role in the church and her membership in the social group:

> *'Yes, I am Director of Music for the parish here, obviously we have two churches in our parish, […] I run the choir and I run the music groups etc. But then I am also involved with Mothers' Union at the church.'*
>
> **Anglican 4**

This indicates that many women play multiple roles in the church.

Other Christian interviewees, however, were not involved with the worship but participated in the organization of other aspects of their religious institution. One participant narrated the different positions she has held in the church by saying:

> *'From my teen years I used to be, I was a Sunday school teacher for six years and I helped to set up a Brownie pack, […] And then I got involved with Mothers' Union […] But yes I have always felt there is a need to do as well as be.'*
>
> **Anglican 5**

She has been involved with both training and charity work within her church.

Another Anglican woman also mentioned the different boards that she represents in her church:

> *'[…] I represent the parish at the Deanery level and the Deanery at the Diocesan level. , I am on the project management committee […] and I am on the rural management committee, which is the retreat house.'*
>
> **Anglican 1**

Her comments also suggest that women are contributing to the strategic decisions of their churches at different levels. The activities that some of the Christian women participated in imply that women are involved at various levels including the leading of the worship and other social activities within their churches.

6.6.2 Women-only activities

Some of the participants, however, were engaged in women-only activities. The responses revealed that more Muslims than Christians were engaged in women-only activities. One participant explained the shared responsibility policy adopted by the

Islamic Centre Women's Association, where each woman plays a role at a given time.

> *'Because I am, like we all chose to be an equal part, like you have got a role and that is called ICWA, Islamic Centre Women's Association. So that is, we didn't want to sort of upgrade or downgrade ourselves, so we just formed a group and said, right we are all in it, nobody is the chair, nobody is the vice or whatever. So we are all working as equally.'*
>
> **Sunni 1**

This suggests that the group preferred to have a horizontal and egalitarian structure, in order to ensure that women volunteer on an equal basis.

The interviewee goes on to talk about the mosque's sports activities which are also highly gendered:

> *'As a group, like me and my sister in law we both are a regular, we deal with the sports, because we have got a Mosque sports centre, like we do opening closing, we manage the sports centre for women over, it is for 16 and over, girls. We charge a fee of £1 for two hours and that money goes towards the Mosque, because we are using the facilities. So we are giving an opportunity for the women to come for sports, because normally there is no sports for women. We don't need any experts in sports, we are all there just to do physical exercise maybe, just to have fun.'*
>
> **Sunni 1**

The Association, with the help of the women volunteers, is providing sports facilities for women who previously only had the option of using non- Muslim facilities.

Another Muslim participant also highlighted how women learn about new issues in the women's group in the mosque. She stated:

> *'Well say you are in one class and you are learning about something, and you know a bit of the knowledge and I know a bit of the knowledge and [...] and the sisters, all the women, [...] today's topic is this. We are going to talk about this, we are going to learn about this and then it is the whole group there is learning. So we get, every fortnight one topic, we are going to learn about this today or we are going to learn about this today you know, even though we are doing the things, but whether it is the right thing or the wrong thing and what is best possible way we can achieve and make it better.'*
>
> **Sunni 3**

Another Sunni participant was of the opinion that women's-only space has resulted in a change of how women view the mosque. She said:

> *'So I think our Mosque is quite unique from that perspective, that we have got a very good Imam actually, he has always included the women, he has nurtured sort of like the youth and involved them in that so we are very lucky. So in terms of whether the women are doing anything differently, probably not. The only thing I would say is, now we have got our own dedicated ladies' gallery, it means that the Mosque is much more accessible to us than it was perhaps before, because we don't have to, because we know that space is ours, that is ours regardless.'*
>
> **Sunni 4**

The designated women-only space has introduced an important change in women's lives, as they can now attend the mosque to pray and to socialise.

There was another example of women-only activities during general meetings at the mosque, where women took on the roles of cooks or carers of young children. One Shia participant explained:

> *'[...] every week somebody is responsible for the food and catering and for women and men, we all go there and then it is in sections, the men doing their own and we give service as well because they are not coming to the kitchen. That is the role, everybody has at least one every two months. Some ladies are teachers for some of our children, they are not real teachers, they haven't been trained to be teachers, but they are all here for the same reason, like for studying or whatever and they can teach Persian language, you can bring your children, and another person could teach something else.'*
>
> **Shia 1**

The women-only activities by some Muslim women in our study imply that Muslim women to a large extent are engaged in traditional women's roles, for example cooking and caring for children. However, within their women-only activities they have designed activities where they engage in sports and discussions of topical issues of interest amongst others. They have thus been able to utilise the space provided at the mosque to engage in various social activities.

Although many activities within Christian churches were gender- mixed, some activities were women-only. One participant explained that it is one of her church's policies to have same-sex counselling and prayer to avoid relational difficulties between women and men. She said:

> *'I lead a life group, and I have worked in the children's ministry before. I do work with women, I am part of the prayer group and anything else I am called on to do really. … It is really just giving advice or sharing or praying with. One of the things the church likes to do is try and keep men ministering with men and women ministering with women, rather than mixing the sexes, couples working with couples, that sort of thing. … […] if people want prayer or people want counselling, that sort of thing, then the church tries to make it men with men and women with women, just to avoid some of the difficulties that can arise, let's say.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 4**

Therefore women or men only activities also exist in Christian churches.

Overall, in the data material there was a distinct difference in how gender relations were practiced within the Christian and Muslim faiths. Whereas the Christian participants were involved in both gender mixed activities and women only activities, the Muslim participants were solely involved in women-only activities. One possible indication is that gender relations are changing in both Christianity and Islam, but prescriptions about gender divided roles are more strongly adhered to by the Muslim participants in our study than by the Christian participants. As mentioned in one of the responses, where it is deemed necessary Christians also adopt the principle of gendered activities (women-only or men-only activities).

6.7 Changes in gender relations

Women in our study were further asked 'How do you view the relationship between the ideal role for women prescribed by your own religious tradition, and the roles that women have in today's society? Is there any conflict between the two, or not?' Many of the interviewees had observed changes in gender relations in relation to their faith; they mainly attributed the changes to the impact of developments in the secular society on their gender roles as Christians or Muslims.

One area identified was the acceptance of women in male dominated professions. An Anglican woman narrated her experience:

> *'It is certainly far more acceptable now for a woman to be an accountant. I believe I was the first girl to leave the school I was at to become an accountant, and I think that just shows how acceptable these days, I mean a lot of girls would expect to go in to the profession. And I guess in a way I identify with some of the problems that the female clergy have had over that period for the same reason. There are some men out there who are not particularly in to work for women, but as it becomes more the norm then it is an acceptable situation. So the profession has changed, I mean that is society changing rather than church attitudes I think.'*
>
> **Anglican 2**

She suggests that changes in society have affected the church. Similarly a second Anglican said:

> *'It is a lot better than it was when women were first made Priests. My impression is it is easing. It is still there obviously to a certain extent, because of the whole thing about women Bishops. And also really I can talk mostly about my local church because that is the one I am mostly involved in. And I think because we have got a woman Priest finally, after lots of argument, I don't think there is any, no one seems to see any reasons why a woman can't carry out any particular role she is fit for.'*
>
> **Anglican 6**

She is also stating that changes in society have impacted on the church, although gradually. For example, women priests are being more accepted today.

Some of the Pentecostal women have also experienced changes in gender relations. One interviewee narrated:

> *'I think women are accepted more in leading things, in demonstrations, in leadership. Before there were just males and you were as a helper and didn't have a position as a leader. For example you see in our church, if women did the role of a Pastor, they were never acknowledged as a Pastor you know, though they did everything. And yet now you know, they have been acknowledged, […] they can be a Pastor and not just a Pastor's wife, so things have changed over the time. […].'*
>
> **Pentecostal 1**

She also observed the recognition and acceptance of women as pastors.

Another Pentecostal also argued that women are now empowered; she stated:

> *'No they have not been sidelined in any way. I would say that since the new Pastor has come, perhaps there has been more, yes for instance his wife is working alongside him, side by side preaching, training up to be a Pastor. We already had a lady before, X, she is trained and was invested as a Pastor anyway, she was Pastor in a plan church so, but yes I do think that there has been a slight change, that women have been more empowered.'*
>
> **Pentecostal 2**

She thus suggests that many women are empowered to become pastors. Nevertheless, there were some research participants who did not think there have been any changes in gender relations. One Anglican suggested that gender relations have not changed but acknowledged that the presence of women is changing how things are being done. She said:

> *'[...] Gender relations, I am not even sure that relationships are changing either. Again, we question with the statistics whether the balance is changing slightly, but I think the relationships are probably the same. It is how we are doing it and is that changing because of women being there, I think is key in those circles in which I move I think. I think relationships are good.'*
>
> **Anglican 3**

Her comments, however, suggest that gender relations are changing but it is likely that men still occupy the most responsible positions in the church.

A second Pentecostal woman was also of the view that there have been no changes in gender relations, but rather the activities engaged in are changing. She argued:

> '*Let me think. I think I could say no actually no, because when I first attended they would preach. I say no, I mean it is slightly more so now in that the previous Pastor and his wife, he was very much the Pastor and did a lot of the teaching and it wasn't particularly his wife's gifting to teach and to preach. She was more from the pastoral side in terms of looking after the flock if you get what I mean, visiting people that were ill and looking after people and finding out how people were. And that is who she was and who she is. Whereas the new Pastor's wife, her gifting is also in teaching as well. So I don't think it is a particular decision within the church to move women to the front and I don't think any woman would have been declined the opportunity in the past. So no.*'
>
> **Pentecostal 3**

She thus argues that women in leadership positions are visible depending on the church activities they are engaged in.

One Sunni woman argued that the secular world is influencing the behaviour of Muslim women. She said:

> *'[..] So it was lack of knowledge and lack of education. Because the person is not educated you see the difference. A very simple solution, you will see the difference, a person uneducated and educated. […].'*

She thus argues that the changes are as a result of women's education.

She continued by saying that both religions, Christianity and Islam, have prescriptive gender roles but that other gender roles have been introduced which are contrary to the 'authentic' faiths. She said:

> *'In Islam, in Muslim religion, everything is just like Christianity everything. Husband and wife, people, they get everything, everything. Only the difference is in Islam, is for women, women should be in the house looking after the children, looking after the house, cooking, cleaning, washing, that is woman's duty. Men […] So his duty to go out for food, clothing and shelter, for him and his wife and kids. And protect and love and care. That is the basic rule Islam creates. But after that the creation is our own made rules, now a woman should do this, a woman should do that and a woman should do this. It is not written, it is not written anyway. So the debate comes again and it is still, still there are, there are Muslims, they are still doing it, but the Muslim religion had given the power to woman that if she thinks this is all right and if she thinks she is being penalised, she could raise it and she could ask and she could leave. That religion allowed the woman. So yes time has changed, but then again it has changed both ways. I see so many Muslim women, girls, when it comes to fashion, they are doing it regardless of whether we are allowed or not.'*
>
> **Sunni 3**

She seems to think that the prescriptive gender roles in Islam have changed with women now working outside the home, and with some women also not wearing what she regards as appropriate Muslim clothing.

Similarly a Shia woman also suggests that men are not following the prescriptive rules, she explained:

> *'But people are changed now. I said to you we are not following Islam as we should follow it. There is no harm sharing the homework or housework with your wife, there is no harm in it. But our men become so arrogant now, they think women need to be oppressed. If you look at the Muslim families, you*

would say men are the leaders. Islam says men and women have got equal rights on to each other, OK. But men's responsibility is to go out and bring in money and feed the family and women's responsibility to look after the house and look after the children.'

Shia 3

The interviewee suggests that Muslim men are shirking their responsibilities to their families as prescribed by the Qur'an. She continues by arguing how Islamic states are failing the poor and needy, and suggests that the UK government, which is not Islamic, has better welfare policies. She continued with her narration:

'I was just telling you that in this country if the husband dies, obviously, if the woman becomes widow and they have children, the government pays you for the children. Also you get benefit as well. If you talk about this country, I think they are following more Islamic rules than the Islamic countries. I can assure you that this government, not all the European government but especially England, the UK government, is following more Islamic rules practically than Islamic countries are. They are paying for people who are not working, this is what Islam says. They are paying the pensions. I am quite certain that they need to learn things from the UK, how to give a right to a normal person. In Muslim countries you have no rights, if you have no money and no rights. If you are a poor person you have no rights. There is no justice there is no nothing. No good education, no good health, only if you have got money everything is for you. This is not Islam, is it.'

Shia 3

Another Shia woman focused her argument on how Muslims are portrayed in the media. She narrated:

'Oh yes it is very different, [...]. I would say that when I became a Muslim, I mean if I was getting any looks or any comments it was purely because […] they had never seen it, they were ignorant of what it meant. I don't mean ignorant in the negative sense, ignorant in the sort of like, oh why is she wearing that you know, that is weird. But now obviously with all the history that has gone on especially in the last 10 years, oh no it is very different and I feel very upset sometimes. Because we know there are people on television, on new year who said, Muslims do this, Muslims do that, Muslims are suicide bombers and terrorists and all this, and then you have got you know people doing lots of stupid things in the name of Islam and you go out and you just sort of think, oh you know, don't pre-judge us by this minority. But there is nothing we can do, the image is there in the media now. They have only got to see the word 'Muslim' and the connotations of [that] you know, are horrible, they have got nothing good to say about us. And unfortunately it is a small minority that have damaged the call of Islam. […].'

Shia 4

She indicates that the UK society has changed towards Muslims; specifically there has been a lot of negative reporting carried by the media which is influencing perceptions.

She continued with an example of how the negative press has affected her by saying:

> '*And you do, […] I can get like some people, you can sort of see fear, not fear but like sort of, very much in trepidation or sort of like conscious pulling back when they see you, oh it is one of those sort of things. Oh definitely, definitely I am not as comfortable as I was*.'
>
> **Shia 4**

She mentions, however, that the treatment of Muslim women is not all negative, as she has observed an increased acceptance of women wearing the hijab. She said:

> *'But saying that in a way the numbers of people wearing Hijab, the numbers of people now out in a way counter balances that, because you are very much the norm now. Nobody gives you a second glance you know. So I mean you know there is two sides to it. But I think in a way perhaps I impose on myself a feeling like I want to apologise for what the media has like portrayed us as. I want to sort of say you know, we are not like that, honestly we are not. So if I get any chance, like in any situation to strike up a conversation with anybody, I will. That is why I feel it is important to be in the schools, to let the children see we are normal, we do communicate we are open to you know, we are friendly people and not you know this isolated group who want to cut themselves off and don't want to be part of society […] I think it is better to be assimilated and mixed. Because I think it will be a vicious cycle in the future. We need to be, Muslim ladies particularly because we are so visible, […] But I mean I just feel for Muslim women at the moment it is really important for us to be part of the society. Because otherwise they are going to take the media hype and isolate us.'*
>
> **Shia 4**

This interviewee is very concerned about the negative image portrayed of Muslims by the media. She is keen to demonstrate that stereotypical views of Muslims are unfounded by involving herself with non-Muslims. She is particularly concerned that Muslim women should engage themselves in society at large, thus demonstrating that Muslim women are as approachable and likeable as any other women.

The changes in gender relations observed by Christian participants, both Anglicans and Pentecostals, were in terms of the increase of female vicars and priests.

However, some Pentecostals were of the view that many women have actually inhabited leadership roles in the church, but their positions are now becoming more recognised. Muslim participants on the other hand, mainly shared the view that the role of women has changed, with many Muslim women working outside the home which is viewed as being contrary to the prescriptive rules. Their comments at times seem to be at variance with their admiration of Kadijah, the Prophet Mohammed's wife, who many described as a successful business woman in her time. Also, one Muslim woman highlighted the negative image of Islam carried by the media as a result of the actions of few Muslims; she was of the view that the bad image is damaging social relations with non-Muslims.

The continual encouragement of women to participate in activities at the Mosque and the increased number of women in secular employment were observed as positive changes which ensure that women participate in different sectors of society. Therefore, changes in gender relations are talked about differently, many Christian participants in our study focused on women's participation in the church, whilst many Muslim women focused on women's role in the home. These responses could be as a result of the limited role played by Muslim women at the Mosque, whereas Christian women are more involved in the church's activities. None of our interviewees, however, talked about patriarchal rules that were suppressive. It is possible that participants in our study had found informal ways of ensuring more gender equal roles within their churches or mosque.

6.8 Is religion represented as fixed, as flexible, or both? What aspects are talked about as fixed, or as flexible?

The issue of flexibility in relation to religious belief and practice can be addressed in several ways. We regard it as a matter of adapting faith practices and belonging to changing social circumstances. Here the focus is on the potential of religion to support or resist a range of different interpretations of religious doctrines, and of prioritizing some rather than others. This is relevant with respect to gender relations, since religious doctrines, traditions and practices have given backing to both gender traditionalism (gender segregation and hierarchy) as well as to more egalitarian gender views (whether complementary or equal gender roles). In this study, the

issue at stake is if and how the interviewees indicate an approach to religion as a flexible tool/resource or not. In particular, we are interested in their relation to patriarchal features of their faith tradition and community.

The concept of religion as a 'tool', or a 'dynamic toolkit' (Bartkowski and Ghazal Read, 2003), seems to connote rather strategic or conscious actions to accomplish something – to adapt prescriptions and/or practices to one's own interests or to changes within particular social contexts. It does not refer to less conscious or non-strategic behaviour, to gradual social processes of accommodation and change, and to institutional changes that are not easily and explicitly related to identifiable agents. Thus, we have used the notion of religion as a 'resource' instead of 'tool'. The challenge remains, however, of how we can capture the interplay between religion as a social institution and religion as a tool or resource for religious agents of change. We need to be able to differentiate between (indications of) religion as a flexible resource on the individual and community level and narratives of institutional change. We should also probably differentiate between direct or explicit references to the instrumental application of religion as a resource for change, and our interpretations of such uses.

The question as to whether religion is represented as fixed, flexible or both by participants in our study, seemed to depend on the individual and the changes she had experienced in her life. The expression '*I was born*' made by some women implies that they perceive their religion as fixed; whereas those who were socialised as Christians in their childhood but have changed into other faiths might share the opinion that their religion is flexible. Further, those who have converted into other religions might also perceive the opportunity to be able to convert to their religion of choice as a flexibility.

Participants' responses suggest that their respective religious institution provides them with a venue, and in some cases the only opportunity, to participate in the community, interact with others and engage in social activities. The main issue identified was that of space. For the Christian participants there were no restrictions in attendance or sitting places based on their gender, but for the Muslim participants gendered space was very important. Hence, there is a need for local authorities or

councils to encourage every mosque to have a place for women to enable them to use the space and to be actively involved in community issues. The issue of space was also expressed in symbolic terms; the hijab was mentioned as a clothing choice that enables one to avoid all the pressures in following fashionable trends. However, some participants were able to either convert to Islam or change their Christian denomination, thus giving an indication of some flexibility in terms of joining other faiths. For the Sunni participants who had a space in the Mosque, the activities they engage in suggest that the religion is flexible as the space enabled them to engage in other social activities which might not be available to some of them, for example women-only sporting activities. The data have revealed that religion could be used as a flexible resource to adapt faith practices.

In table 1, we present a preliminary effort to categorise how women in our study represent the different levels at which women are using their religion as a flexible resource. We consider issues mentioned by the interviewees according to the *level* (individual, community and institutional) and the *character* (explicit or implicit) of the elaborations.

At the institutional level the changes in the involvement of more women in the Christian religion reveals some form of flexibility of the male dominated Christian institution to increase the role of women. Nonetheless, gender equality has not been achieved as women are not part of the central leadership of these churches. For example, women cannot become bishops within the Church of England. Similarly, the provision of multipurpose space for women in the mosque also is indicative of how the religious institution can facilitate women's participation in sports, community issues and politics. Muslim participants also talked about fixed practices, such as only men being allowed to hold the position of the Imam in the mosque. Therefore, at the institutional level we can argue that there are signs of flexibility but some of the practices such as leadership, for Christians, and women-only activities for Muslims, are fixed.

Table 1 Religion as flexible

Level	Direct/ explicit	Indirect/ implicit
Personal level	Converting to other religions Leaving to other denominations	Studying the Koran Participating in organised activities, e.g. member of the Islamic Women's Centre Association
	Volunteering for activities	Being part of a group of people who share common values
	Researching other faiths	
Congregation	Accepting women priests	Encouraging more Muslim women to participate in the community
	Accepting lay women preachers	Women taking leadership roles in various activities, e.g. leading worship and as members of church management committees
	Accepting women leading worship and prayers Using women-only facilities at the mosque	
Institutional	Women lay preachers	Multiple roles played in Christian activities
	Women leading worship Women leading prayer meetings	
	Women part of church committees	
	Women priests	
	Space for Muslim women to meet and organise activities	Opportunities to organise activities of interest
		Empowerment of women to be involved in community and political issues

Indirectly the flexibility of the two faith traditions, Christianity and Islam, has enabled some participants in our study to play multiple roles. For example, some Christian women were lay preachers or led prayers, at the same time they participated in caring for children or the elderly or were members of committees; whereas for the Muslim women attending the Mosque, the venue is not only for prayers but to engage in other social activities such as sports and entertainment.

At the congregational level, the acceptance of women to be leaders of gender mixed worship in the Christian churches is an indication of flexibility. Similarly, a conscious effort by members of the Islamic Centre to provide space for women for multipurpose activities is a sign of flexibility of the functionality of religion. The space is not only used for spiritual purposes but also for other social activities to involve women more in their communities. At the individual level, we observed from the data that both faiths, Christianity and Islam, served various social purposes. What the religion 'is' (belief in God and Allah), has not changed, but what religion 'does' has changed in the sense that religious prescriptions about what women and men can and cannot do seem to be flexible. The gendered meaning of faith thus seems to be open to interpretation and therefore to change over time. Moreover, some participants have kept their Christian religion but moved to other denominations, whilst others have totally converted to another religion. Hence at the personal level, religion was represented as both flexible and fixed at the same time – flexible in the sense that one's interpretation of faith, and even one's religious affiliation, could change, but fixed in the sense that a particular faith was at any given time viewed as providing a set of guiding principles and values for how to live one's life.

Overall, we observed that patriarchal features of both religions are still dominant in the faith practices. The Christian interviewees represented how women are gradually gaining recognition of their activities in the church. However, none of the Muslim women in our study were engaged in leading the worship in the Mosque, yet the Sunni Muslims represented how the space allotted to them in the Mosque is shaping their religious practices. These Muslim women have the freedom to engage in discussions and activities of interest in their women-only space, which is

encouraging some women who otherwise would not have such opportunities to participate in other social activities.

6.9 Conclusion

The findings show that there are different and gendered patterns of women's and men's participation in religious practices, where men are more involved in doctrinal issues and in positions of religious leadership, while women tend to be more engaged in organizing activities that provide services such as refreshments, food, and caring for children. However, Christian participants indicated that women tend to be taking on increased leadership roles in gender-mixed religious worship, while Muslim participants talked about the importance of designated women's spaces within the mosque. The Muslim women in our study talked about how they participate in Friday prayers, but their participation is within a strictly gender-segregated space. Yet, our research in Norway (Halsaa, Thun and Nyhagen Predelli, 2010) demonstrates that a gender-mixed practice can also be accepted within the context of a mosque, as women are allowed to enter the space normally reserved for men. It is therefore not a given that worship practices within mosques will necessarily be gender-segregated. Moreover, there is evidence of increased participation of women leading prayers for women only (BBC, 2000) and one woman, Amina Wadud, led the first gender-mixed Friday Muslim prayers in New York in 2005 (BBC, 2005) and in Oxford, UK, in 2008.[50]

Interviewees from both faiths, Christianity and Islam, have all observed changes in gender relations with regards to their faith. Christian women have observed increased participation of women in traditionally male leadership positions in the church, whereas Muslim women have observed the participation of women in activities outside the home; for example doing paid work, the encouragement of more women to be involved in community issues, and the continual negative media portrayal of Muslims in general, and Muslim women wearing the hijab in particular. We also noted that despite the patriarchal features of the two religious institutions, the Church and the Mosque, women in our study are able to practice their faith using

[50] http://muslamics.blogspot.com/2008/10/amina-wadud-leads-prayeragain.html [accessed April 14, 2010].

the flexible aspects of gender relations within these organisations; therefore they did not talk about having experienced discrimination based on their gender.

6.10 Muslim Women's Clothing

In conducting this study, the issue of the propriety of covering was not a main topic of interest, however it was a recurrent issue raised by a majority of the Muslim participants. This seems to confirm Bartkowski and Read's (2003) argument that the hijab and the propriety of wearing a headscarf is an issue of ideological debate in relation to the gender discourse. Roald (2001) has asserted that a Muslim woman wearing a headscarf is likely to be seen by non-Muslims as a symbol of female oppression or as making a political religious statement. It seems Muslim participants in our study wanted to clarify such notions, as they raised the issue of covering as a response to different questions, either in relation to their motivation to attend the mosque, the importance of religion to their identity, or the current debate on their faith in the community. Although many argued that covering and the different forms it takes is their choice, the focus of their comments was on the relationship between their clothing practice and their identity as Muslim.

6.10.1 Religious motivation

In response to her motivation to attend the mosque one participant commented on the issue of wearing a headscarf. She stated that she does not wear the headscarf but that she dresses decently and only wears the scarf for prayers. She does not use it in her everyday life but believes she might do so in the future. She was asked whether wearing the headscarf was optional, and responded:

> *'It is not an option; we have to cover our hair. It is not an option. You know how things have changed over the years and people started making their own rules, no, it is not an option; you have to cover your hair. I think people who cover their faces say it is an option, only a minority cover their face, not the majority. It is probably how they believe in things. But covering your hair is not an option.'*
>
> **Sunni 2**

Her comments indicates flexibility despite the rule about covering your hair, she feels she is not yet ready to do so. So the prescription of wearing the headscarf is not viewed as an inflexible rule.

When asked why she did not cover her hair, she argued that:

> *'No because I told you my in-laws were not religious anyway, […] my sister-in-law says to me "I think it is time you started covering your hair". I will when I want to not because someone else is telling me […] if my husband said to me "Cover your hair" I would do it. But he doesn't say that. We will when we are ready. […] a lot of women wear scarves because they want to, not because they are being forced to. [...] People think as a society we are being forced to do this, nobody is. There might be a minority that have to, but the majority don't. … Yes, it is a matter of choice and what you think in there and what you believe.'*
>
> **Sunni 2**

She seems to contradict herself, but shows instead that her faith is flexible. She admits that she might use the headscarf if compelled by her husband thus suggesting that compulsion might be used for her to change her clothing. Or it might be her choice if she reaches the religious decision to change her clothing. She presents a paradox of stating that it is a choice to wear a headscarf, yet she could also be influenced by her husband's decision.

On the other hand, one White participant who converted to Islam stated that, for her, the hijab was one of the attractions to the religion, mainly to avoid the pressure of conforming to fashion trends. She mentioned that at the time of her conversion very few women wore scarves, and those who did were elderly women. She was asked whether she wore European clothes when she converted, she said:

> *'No in those days as soon as I converted, it was the Hijab that really attracted me, it was one of the first things that really appealed to me. Because I had always been quite shy and I don't know, I had always felt something uncomfortable going out feeling the people were looking at me, or feeling pressurise to conform to a certain shape or wear certain clothes. I remember at school people picking on your clothes or laughing at you and I saw that about Hijab, you are covered, nobody is going to analyse the shape of your body you know, and there is sort of a uniformity, a sort of identity, looking for an identity. And it is just so easy. Your behaviour becomes, you are wearing this identity and it reminds you of your behaviour and how to behave. So no it was perfect, that was one of the great attractions. I mean yes it was people were looking at me but in those days it was sort of, I don't care, […].'*
>
> **Shia 4**

She seems to view the hijab as liberating; as providing liberation from social pressure and from feeling gazed upon by others. She also links clothing to her religious identity.

In her response to the importance of religion to her identity, another Sunni participant also commented on the issue of 'covering'. She pointed out the differences in covering and related it to the cultural background. The headscarf was also said to be a form of identity, and she felt that the more religious she became, the more she covered herself.

> *'Islamic religion, there are certain parts of world that woman should not go out at all and woman should be covering herself from top to bottom and you shouldn't see her legs and therefore it is like, when it comes to that then I say no, […], I am not a strict Muslim. Because obviously I am wearing top and trousers, I wear a skirt, […] you are wearing the legging inside and you are wearing the protection and you are not showing your body. In a way when I look at my religion there is completely different clothing than what European countries are. Still we are Muslim, […] but still we are living in 21st century. So yes, it is like saying, my identity, […] but if you are looking at the one normal person and you wouldn't tell whether it is a Muslim, whether Hindu or Christian, you can't tell the difference of religion, but when I am wearing this you can automatically spot who we are, Muslim because she is covered. And […], I think my religion is put in a very beautiful way for symbol, as your dignity and your identity, […]. Also some Muslims they don't believe, they say now it is OK if you don't cover it. […]I used to do it now and then and then the past five years I am doing strictly what is right. Wearing a scarf and following my religion in the respect that you know it has gone a bit deeper now. I was following before as well, but now it has gone a bit deeper.'*
>
> **Sunni 3**

She highlights the importance of the religious dress code in relation to culture, suggesting that there is some flexibility in the extent of covering. However, there is also some form of inflexibility, in that a woman has to cover her hair, a point which Sunni 2 also emphasised, when she was asked whether she has become more religious and to what extent she will cover herself in the future.

The issue of compulsion to wearing the headscarf was raised again. She commented that:

> '*Yes, yes in a way that, not that somebody has forced me or somebody has told me, […]. It is like, I feel more bonded to it, feeling more involved in it and I enjoy it and I feel like doing it more. […] Yes there are issues important to me, because I am a Muslim woman and I should be covered, my body shouldn't be exposed. I am not covering as it is supposed to be, but I am covering as much as I can. Because, not because I don't want to but because I feel that if my heart is not clean, no matter how much I cover, it really doesn't*

make difference. And then it is my job, obviously I can't go myself in the long dress and going to work and in and out of the car. Another thing is that I should be balancing my right and wrong, giving the good guidance and teachings to my children, because again I will be answerable for that. […].'

Sunni 3

She highlights the practical issues of balance in the type of covering in her life in relation to her work and suggests once again the flexibility of the clothing choice.

6.10.2 Defence of the form of clothing

The extent to which women's covering is prescribed by Islam is a contested issue among both religious scholars and adherents. Moreover, Muslim women who wear either a headscarf, the niqab, or a burka in the West, have become a symbol of both women's oppression (for non-Muslims) and of religious assertiveness and pride (for Muslims). A Sunni participant, in her response to the importance of religion to her identity, commented that her religious pilgrimage to Mecca has changed her clothing choices. She explained:

'*I went for the Haj a couple of years ago and I started wearing the scarf after that, I never wore the scarf before that. So since then I suppose it has become more important to me, since doing the pilgrimage. But yes, it is important for me as a person*.'

Sunni 4

The pilgrimage she took had made her more religious, hence the clothing change.

She continued by arguing that a century ago women in the UK were fully covered. She said:

'*Even in this country, up until the turn of the century women used to dress modestly when they went outside, they used to have long skirts, they used to have the outer garments, they used to have a bonnet on their head and you know it was accepted norm. But they think they have progressed, well maybe they have but you know. They have forgotten that they were there as well*.'

Sunni 4

This position was also mentioned by one Shia participant who had the opinion that the issue of covering of the head is not unique to the Muslim faith, she said:

> *'[...] all religions, in older years, they all had something covering their head. It is not denying human rights, I believe. Some people just focus on these things.'*
>
> **Shia 1**

This comment indicates that social change takes time and that perhaps prescriptions about Muslim women's dress will also change over time.

Quite a few of the Muslim interviewees emphasised on the one hand the religious prescription for women to cover, while at the same time underlining individual women's right to choose whether they want to follow the prescriptions or not. A Sunni woman included the issue of covering in her response to the importance of the meetings at the mosque. She said:

> *'Often a popular misconception is that Muslim women sit at home, they are forced to wear the hijab. The hijab is their own choice, whether they want to wear it or not, but that doesn't mean they have to sit at home. You can go out there, you can volunteer. Making them feel more part of their society.'*
>
> **Sunni 5**

She appears to suggest that the wearing of a headscarf is not restricting women's participation in social activities.

Another participant, in response to question on the debate on religion within her community, had the opinion that the covering was more socially and culturally specific. She gave an example of her country of birth, Iran. She said:

> *'In our community, even back home […] the women are always covered up and the kids are covered up and […] it is a norm to do that and if I am there, which has happened to me, without a scarf in front of my brother in laws, I have been sitting down [and] one of the kids comes [and asks] , why don't you cover your hair. […] But it was strange for them, but for me it was, well if I do it here why should I do it there you know. I know, […] So you know it is a false, it is a false belief and a young girl of 18 who just got married, why don't you continue university, they won't let me go to university anyway so I might as well, my dad wouldn't let me. So that kind of a, not opening your eyes and just sort of, oh women have to be at home, yes there are. But in our, in my family no we don't have that kind of, you must. There is no you must. Know*

what you are doing you know, be a good person, it is more of who you are and don't hurt anybody, don't hurt your neighbour, it is true.'

Shia 5

She suggests that some Muslims portray Islam as inflexible, but points to herself as evidence that Islam is indeed flexible. She asserts that living in the UK for more than twenty years has influenced her ideas on gender relations by adopting more of 'the European way of life'.

6.10.3 Conclusion

The argument for wearing the hijab or the headscarf made by Muslim participants in this study is indicative that they want to state both its relevance (as prescribed by religious doctrine) and their *choice.* They do not want to be seen as being abused or coerced to wear the headscarf. Rather, wearing the headscarf is presented as a matter of individual choice. Their arguments also suggest that the headscarf has become a symbol of Islam in the West, and the participants were inclined to defend their faith by defending the headscarf. Furthermore, some of the Muslim participants felt they had to defend their choice of wearing a headscarf. This was apparent in their defensive arguments for the traditional view of covering as against some of the arguments that Islam was an oppressive religion for women, with the headscarf as a symbol. Also, the responses indicated that the extent of acceptable covering was culturally specific, as the interviewees did not agree on whether their religion prescribed the cover of the hair and/or face, or wearing the hijab, the niqab, or a burkah. Thus, by residing in a secular or pro-Christian country such as the UK, the issue of 'covering' will be a challenge as it is subject to different cultural interpretations among adherents to the Muslim faith, as well as among non-Muslims.

Some interviewees also referred to European clothing practices less than a century ago in an attempt to justify that there was nothing absurd about their clothing choices. It was agreed that the Qur'an encourages all adherents, including women and men, to dress modestly, and that various dress codes have been established according to different Islamic schools. Responses from participants suggest that the prescription is flexible; and the extent of covering is a result of their individual choice. Also, it was evident that as participants become more religious, the headscarf or covering was considered more seriously.

For some Muslim women, the headscarf serves as an important aspect of their religious identity. Within the context of modest clothing, women were making their own individual choices as to which clothing to wear. Further, in the narratives of participants the covering is not presented as an abusive measure, but rather as a choice that women make as a symbol of liberation and of religious adherence, not oppression. The Muslim participants in our study who do not use the headscarf also acknowledged its relevance, but talked about not being 'ready' to wear it. Also, they often associated the wearing of a headscarf with cultural practices in other (non-Western) parts of the world, thus suggesting that their choices or interpretation of the 'women covering in Islam' is being influenced by European values.

7 CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Conclusions

In this study we have asked whether and how women within Christian and Muslim faith traditions use their religious identities and practices to define and mark their identities as women and as citizens, and how religious organisations they participate in provide opportunities and/or constraints for their citizenship practice.

We conclude from our study that religion is a flexible resource that individuals can use to support their own identities, beliefs and practice, and as such it may have empowering effects. Religious identity and belonging to a religious community is of crucial importance in our interviewees' lives. The practicing of religion is viewed by the women as intimately linked with responsible behavior and a deep concern for the well-being of others. We have noted a high degree of participation in civil society through voluntary work for the particular congregation/mosque or the wider religious community. Our study confirms the important role of religion as 'social glue', and as a site of inclusion, participation and community cohesion. Based on these findings, we find the notion of religious citizenship to be meaningful.

Our respondents describe and clearly appreciate much of the impact of women's movements, and they support major items of the movement's agenda including women's rights, equal opportunities, and women's empowerment. However, they do not identify with the concept of 'feminism'. They demonstrate support for the ideal of gender equality, but in terms of complementary gender roles (and often with a focus on the family rather than the individual). Thus, their views represent an important challenge to the ideal of gender equality as 'sameness'.

7.2 Religion, identity and meaning

Religion plays a fundamental role in the lives of the women who participated in our study. The women's talk about what their religion means to them indicated that they attach a deep and significant meaning to the role of faith in their everyday life. All of our interviewees have a deeply personal relationship with their faith, and they have

clearly reflected a great deal about the meaning and importance of their faith. They attach a deep meaning of personal faith to their own relationship with God and to religious teachings, to their relationships with other people, and to their own situatedness and belonging within the larger community, including the nation in which they live.

Our study revealed that research participants displayed a 'plural integrated identity' (Østberg, 2003) and that they do a lot of 'identity work' (Anderson, 2000) when they talk about and present their own identity. Their religious identity was intertwined with their ethnic identity and geographical or national belonging. This was most clearly expressed by the ethnic minority women participants, who often expressed a hybrid identity with religious and cultural links to both Britain and their family's country of origin.

Moreover, our interviewees' construction of citizenship was based on a mixture of national status, the extent to which an individual participates within a community, and her feeling of belonging. Nearly all of the participants in our study expressed a great commitment to participation within organised religious contexts, and all of them imparted a notion of belonging to a religious community of believers. While at times the notion of belonging was related to a specific church or mosque, at other times it was related to the larger faith tradition (Christianity or Islam) to which they belong. Yet a third sense of belonging was expressed in relation to a joint community of believers across various faith traditions; that is, a sense of shared religious faith was invoked between Christians and Muslims, and between Christianity, Islam and other religions. Furthermore, participation and a sense of (not) belonging were also argued on the basis of ethnicity, where some ethnic minority women felt excluded or marginalised by the majority society. Thus, for some of the women who participated in our study, their ethnic minority status at times made them feel marginalised in comparison with white and majoritised women. However, ethnic minority women expressed a deep-felt sense of belonging to their own ethnic and religious community. Organised religion provides them with a 'community of faith' and opportunities to participate in civic activities organised by their Church or Mosque.

7.3 Citizenship

To construct more inclusive forms of citizenship demands processes of change in all facets of society, including religious practices. In this study we have examined women's religious identities and practices, and how organised religion can provide women with a platform for exercising active citizenship. The analysis of the findings of our study revealed that participants' faith, within both Christian and Muslim faith traditions, structures and guides their way of life within the home and within their communities. A uniting characteristic among our interviewees is their focus on *religion as a way of life.* In this view, religious belief and rituals are not viewed as discrete spheres of thought and action, but as deeply intertwined with all areas of life, and as providing guiding principles and inspiration for how to live a good life. One difference we detected, however, is that Muslim women tend to focus on both specific religious prescriptions for behaviour and on general 'Islamic values', while Christian women tend to focus less on specific prescriptions for behaviour and more on general 'Christian values' or attitudes. Some of the common values of both faith traditions, including respect for others and principles of good ethical behaviour, have been recognised by the UK government as contributory factors to social and community cohesion.[51] These findings therefore serve as a basis for us stating that by actively practicing a faith within organised religious contexts, women are also practising active citizenship.

In our study we found that Muslim women's participation in the religious arena tends to be more restricted and/or limited than Christian women's participation. One important issue was the allocation of space for women in Mosques to enable them to attend collective worship. In the case of absence of such space, Muslim women are in practice denied the opportunity to pray within organised or formal religious structures. It can therefore be argued that in situations where a designated space for women in the mosque is lacking, women's communal practice and participation within the context of organised religion is effectively restricted.

We also observed that Christian women were active in church activities involving either the entire (gender-mixed) congregation or in activities involving women and

[51] http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/actionplan.pdf [accessed April 8, 2010].

children, whilst Muslim women were active in women-only activities. In comparison with the Christian women, the Muslim women had more limited roles of participation within their faith. Although Christian women have yet to obtain the right to hold all formal positions in the church (e.g., the role of bishops is still limited to men within the Anglican Church), or to obtain full parity with men (e.g., there are more ordained male clergy than female clergy in both Anglican and Pentecostal churches), there are more opportunities for women to lead gender-mixed worship and to teach in Christian congregations. As religion provides women with an important platform for participation, a relevant question is if Muslim women's participation will continue to be restricted to women-only activities, or if Muslim women over time will be allowed to participate in gender-mixed activities within the mosque. Albeit outside the context of our case-study, an important development in this regard is the high-profile leading of gender-mixed Friday worship by American female Professor Amina Wadud in New York in 2005 and in Oxford, UK, in 2008. Moreover, Muslim women in various European contexts are increasingly taking on various leadership roles within mosques (see Nyhagen Predelli, 2008).

In this project we asked whether and how women experience constraints and opportunities for active citizenship through their participation in religious organisations. The multicultural citizenship regime practiced in the UK has resulted in the broad acceptance of a diversity of faiths and religious practices. Only one of the twenty participants in our study narrated an explicit story of discrimination, and this was related to the work place. She associated her experience of discrimination with her Muslim faith, as religious prescriptions prevent her from attending social functions at work without the company of her husband. The interviewee suggested that her career had been negatively affected by this fact, as the employer may have interpreted her lack of attendance at social functions as a negative attribute of her as an individual, rather than as a feature of her religious practice. On the other hand, some interviewees suggested that the 'minority label, applied to either their ethnic status or their religious belief, could be a resource both in their own personal lives and for the communities in which they are active. For example, some of the participants in our study claimed to have been positively affected by the government's policy of reaching faith communities. This policy appeared to have mainly benefited minority faith communities, which is not that surprising as the

government has explicitly targeted Muslim communities for outreach programmes. Christian participants in our study did not talk about having been affected by similar government policies to reach faith communities.

The notion 'religious citizenship' was new to our respondents; they had not thought about religion before in relation to citizenship. However, many of them found that it would make sense to talk about religion in relation to citizenship as *practice and belonging*, as their faith-based community participation and activism would be an example of. To be a good citizen and a 'good Christian' and a 'good Muslim' was basically the same for our interviewees: they include showing love and care, respect and tolerance, and engaging oneself within the community. We found that the interviewees' understanding of the notion of religious citizenship also included a specifically religious notion of an other-worldly context. They talked about citizenship both within this-worldly communities, and within other-worldly contexts such as heaven. Both Christian and Muslim women emphasized that all human beings are equal before God. However, when related to other-worldly contexts, citizenship in 'heaven' or in 'God's kingdom' entails a non-inclusive dimension in that non-believers are excluded.

In a similar vein to how citizenship was talked about in more general terms, religious citizenship was also understood in terms of status, participation and belonging. In terms of status, the interviewees revealed a tension between the ideal notion that all religions should be treated on equal terms, and the fear that any talk about 'religious citizenship' could imply in practice that religions were treated differently, with some religions being discriminated against. Yet another dimension of religious citizenship concerns the treatment and participation of women within various faith traditions, and the interviewed women in our study emphasized how their religions allowed them rights as women, and opportunities to participate. Some interviewees seemed to think about l*egal* status in connection with the term 'religious citizenship', while others were more concerned with how people of different religions perceive each other in terms of participation and belonging. Hence, religious citizenship was not perceived first and foremost as a means to ensure equality between faiths within the community, but rather as an abstract construct which could potentially create more divisions between religions. It therefore seems that any conceptualisation of

religious citizenship should emphasise the equal status and opportunities of all religions and of all believers within various faith traditions, together with issues of participation and belonging.

Our interviews with Muslim women also resulted in discussions about the headscarf or 'veil'. In this regard, the interviewees raised issues that dwelt on political and religious 'correctness' related to that of being a Muslim woman and being British. Focusing on religious practice, some participants argued that the wearing of the headscarf is prescribed in the Quran's instructions about Muslim women's clothing, and rejected the idea that it could be read as an indication of Islam being a religion that 'oppresses' women. Further, the narratives by the Muslim women were also linked to the political debate on the headscarf and other items of women's clothing such as the niqab and the burka. Debates about such clothing items increased after the former Foreign Affairs Minister, Jack Straw, in 2006 claimed that the niqab, or 'covering people's faces', implies separateness and the development of 'parallel communities'.[52] Both Muslim and non-Muslim groups and individuals reacted to Straw's views as intolerant, and some Muslim groups accused Straw of religious discrimination and a lack of understanding of Muslims.[53] This debate reveals one of the tensions of the notion of multiculturalism in the UK. In relation to Muslim communities, the identity of 'the veiled Muslim woman', her alleged 'oppression', and alleged 'negative impact' on community relations, is at the centre of debate. If Muslim women are discriminated against due to their following of religiously prescribed rules regarding clothing, it could be argued that they experience constraints on their citizenship rights.

7.4 Gender equality, feminism, and the women's movement

In our study we also asked about the notion of gender equality in terms of how the women themselves understood the term. References to explanations based on biological differences, and ideals of complementary gender roles and equal value, are main findings in the interviews with women from all the different religious communities. However, in addition to asserting such differences between women

[52] ''Remove full veils' urges Straw', at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/5411954.stm [accessed April 9, 2010].
[53] See ibid.

and men, most of the interviewees also emphasised that men and women should have the same opportunities in society, and that women's rights and empowerment should be supported.

Participants' responses on the relevance of gender equality within their respective faiths focused on the alleged 'nature' of men and women, and the functionally distinct roles that were deemed appropriate for women and men to have (Lehman, 1994). For the interviewed women, gender equality was thus presented within the context of complementary gender roles, where women and men have equal value, regardless of the role they are set to play. The Muslim women in our study referred to the Quran in order to legitimate the ideal of complementary gender roles, and emphasised the woman's main role as care-taker and the man's role as family provider. Muslim women thus highlighted complementary gender roles as religiously prescribed. Christian women, on the other hand, did not similarly refer to the Bible or Christianity when they talked about gender roles. Moreover, some of the Christian women in our study were concerned that feminism could 'go too far', or be 'too extreme', and they were keen to avoid the disempowerment of men alongside the empowerment of women. Thus, the issue of gender equality has different relevance to religious women depending on their context.

We asked our interviewees to reflect on whether or not they had experienced any constraints on their citizenship practice. If any constraints were identified, they were mainly attributed to the legal status of the individual within the UK. However, this aspect only affected ethnic minority participants, irrespective of their religious affiliation. As researchers, we identified a further constraint to citizenship practice embedded in rules regarding women's roles and participation in churches and mosques. Any limitations on women's roles in religious contexts can be interpreted as constraints on their right to practice gender equal citizenship. The religiously prescribed roles and behaviour affect the extent of women's active participation, but more so for Muslim than for Christian women. Christian women have more opportunities to hold leadership roles for adult gender-mixed groups within their churches, although in some contexts they still do not have access to certain leadership roles, such as that of bishops in the Church of England. Muslim women can also hold certain leadership roles, but these are strictly limited to either women-

only groups or to gender-mixed groups of children. Moreover, Muslim women are not allowed to lead gender-mixed prayer. In relation to activities outside the churches or mosques, however, we found no indication in the data material that there were differences between opportunities enjoyed by Christian and by Muslim women. Some ethnic minority women identified their ethnicity as a constraint for citizenship practice, because they do not feel accepted or understood by the majority ethnic group. Yet the religious organisations in which they are active provided a space where they felt a sense of belonging and could participate at different levels in issues of their interest which often extends to the larger community.

We have also explored whether religious women who attend churches and mosques have been influenced by women's movements, and whether feminism is relevant to their lives. As mentioned above, the interviewed women acknowledged a positive impact from the women's movement on women's rights and opportunities, especially in relation to equal pay, gender equality, women's rights, and women's empowerment. However, despite the positive view of these aspects of the women's movement, few interviewees identified with feminism, and many viewed feminists as having 'gone too far' or being 'too extreme'. This is related to the impression many of the interviewed women have of the feminist movement as wanting women to 'become like men' or to 'take over from men', or of it allegedly supporting a notion of female supremacy and superiority. However, the religious women in our study sympathise with demands for justice and gender equality, and some of them have a more positive view of feminism.

Christian women in our study viewed the women's movement as having contributed to changes within churches related to the fact that women now play more prominent and recognised roles in churches. For example, in the Anglican Church, women were welcomed to the priesthood in 1992, and a debate is currently taking place whether to allow the ordination of women bishops (in comparison, the Pentecostal church Assemblies of God ordained its first woman clergy at the time of its founding in 1914). Moreover, both Christian and Muslim women in our study viewed the women's movement as having impacted on socio-cultural practices and values regarding gender relations in the family and in society at large. Most of our participants viewed the movement as having positively contributed to women's roles

in politics and in the labour market. Although some interviewees highlighted the positive contributions resulting from women taking on leadership roles, some also expressed concern that women should 'take over' *all* leadership roles from men. In relation to the family, our interviewees expressed both positive and negative views on the impact of the women's movement. For example, some viewed the women's movement's emphasis on women's independence as having gone too far, in that it could result in divorce and family break-up. On the other hand, the movement's emphasis on men taking on household work and caring roles was highlighted as positive by some interviewees. Muslim interviewees talked about how gender relations are changing within Muslim married couples, as women are increasingly taking on paid employment. This development was seen as positive despite being viewed as contrary to Quranic prescriptions about gender roles which emphasise women's caring role in the family and men's role as family 'breadwinners'. Moreover, the Muslim women in our study, like the Christian interviewees, underline the important role of the women's movement in advancing women's right to vote. But in contrast to the Christian interviewees, they put more emphasis on the basic rights accorded to women within Islam. Some point to the fact that women were given rights in Islam much before the onset of the nineteenth century women's movement.

Yet feminism as a concept was generally not embraced by our interviewees, and many preferred to distance themselves from it although its relevance was not entirely dismissed. This finding seems to imply that the agenda currently pursued by feminists and the women's movement is not striking a cord with many religious women. However, despite distancing themselves from the *label* of feminism, our interviewees expressed support for a number of issues on the women's movement agenda, including equal pay, equal opportunities, and women's empowerment. Despite their dislike of the concept of 'feminism', they had a clear interest in some of the core political claims forwarded by the women's movement. The women's movement thus has a task in communicating its policy agenda to religious women in order to create more dialogue and mutual understanding.

There are several important lessons to be drawn from our preliminary findings; among them the fact that many religious women support major items on the

women's movement agenda, such as equal rights and opportunities for women and men. However, many religious women do not identify with the concept of 'feminism', and many view the women's movement as too radical. Feminist women's movement organisations therefore seem to have a challenging task ahead in communicating their agenda to religious women who do not feel that their concerns regarding women's rights and equality are served well by feminist organisations. Our findings suggest that there is currently an untapped potential to create alliances between religious and secular women in the advocacy of equal rights and opportunities. This is in line with Nussbaum (1999) who argues that religion can 'contribute to the struggle for justice', including the struggle for gender equality, and that religious feminists are thus potential allies of secular feminists (ibid.: 107).

7.5 Good practice and policy recommendations

For faith groups and women's movement organisations, our good practice recommendations are:

- For faith groups to develop equal opportunities for women to take on roles that are currently preserved for men.
- For women's movement organisations to engage in dialogue with religious women in order to increase understanding and create policy alliances on gender equality issues between women of faith and secular women.

For governmental institutions at various levels, our policy recommendations are:

- Local Authorities should ensure that all public buildings, or any plots of land/buildings for which planning permission is sought, for the purpose of a Mosque, are inspected to secure that they include a designated space where women can participate in collective worship.
- All governmental institutions should insist on equal representation of women and men when faith groups are invited to hearings, committees, religious dialogue, etc.
- Public funding should require compliance with gender equality legislation.
- Equal access to public funding for majority and minority faith groups.

- Motivate and fund dialogue and cooperation between women’s groups across religious beliefs and secular beliefs.
- No public ban on the use of headscarf (hijab) in public spaces.
- Governments to address the contradiction between freedom of religion and women’s rights in national and international contexts.
- Promote religious tolerance and thus support community cohesion.
- Address challenges arising from the ideal of complementary gender roles. To what extent does such an ideal collide with the notion that women’s economic independence is ‘the bottom line’ of gender equality?

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Introductory Letter

Femcit › Gendered Citizenship in Multicultural Europe: The Impact of Contemporary Women's Movements

The Department of Social Sciences and the Centre for Research in Social Policy (CRSP) at Loughborough University are conducting an international research which aims to understand how religious identities and practices provide resources and barriers to citizenship in the United Kingdom, Spain and Norway. We are especially interested in how religious women in Europe define, construct and practice citizenship in their everyday life. In our research, we are keen to achieve an understanding of women's views in relation to their citizenships in both majority and minority religions.

This project is part of the international project **Gendered Citizenship in Multicultural Europe: The Impact of Contemporary Women's Movements**, which is funded by the European Union, 2007 – 2011. Please see www.femcit.org.

In order to understand how religious identities and practices provide resources and barriers to citizenship we are interviewing women who are active in religious activities. You have been identified as such an individual, we are therefore inviting you to participate in our research. Your participation will consist of one interview, lasting for about one hour, in a location convenient to you.

We would like to stress that participation in our research is entirely voluntary and you will be able to withdraw at any time. We would also like to assure you that the study is conducted in the strictest confidence, and no individual participant will be named. Your anonymity is assured, as we never pass on personal details to third parties.

If you need any further information or would like to contact us, please contact me by phone 01509 223373 or be e-mail: E.Manful@lboro.ac.uk. Alternatively, you can contact our project administrator, Sharon Walker, by phone, 01509 223618, or by e-mail: S.Walker@lboro.ac.uk

We hope you will consider taking part in this piece of research. Thank you.

Yours sincerely

Dr. Esmeranda Manful

Research Associate

Appendix 2: Topic Guides

WP4 Strand 2: 'Gender, religion and citizenship' Topic guide (Christian participants)

1. Preparation

Introduce yourself and the project;
share information letter, FEMCIT leaflet,
and go through consent form and permission to record.

2. Citizenship in the religious arena – Religious identity

I'd like to start by asking some general questions about your religious activities:

What motivated you to start attending Church of England (a particular issue or experience?),

Do you have any specific roles in your congregation?

Can you tell me about the types of activities you are involved in/participate in within your religious community? (attention: are any of these activities for women only, or are they gender-mixed)

Do you attend any women's meeting?

What does women's fellowship/meetings within and outside your congregation mean to you in your everyday life – how important is it to you?

How would you describe who you are – what is your identity?

How important is religion to your identity? And in your everyday life?

Are there any women in your religious tradition that you admire? (historical or contemporary figures) Why do you admire them?

Are there any men in your religious tradition that you admire (historical or contemporary figures? Why do you admire them?

Are there any discussions within your religious community about the roles and positions that women and men can take on - both within the religious community itself and outside it (in public life)?

At this point in time, do you feel that gender relations within your religious community are under pressure or changing, or are they more or less stable?

3. Gendered citizenship – Gender and religion

You belong to a women's group within your church. Are there any special issues that are important to you as a woman within the context of your own faith or religion?

In your view, is there an ideal role for a woman within Christianity today?
In your view, is there an ideal role for a man within Christianity today?

How do you view the relationship between the ideal role for women prescribed by your own religious tradition, and the roles that women have in today's society? Is there any conflict between the two, or not?

'Gender equality' can mean different things to different people. Some people may say that gender equality means that women and men have the same status and rights and can do exactly the same things, while others may say that women and men have equal value but should concentrate on doing different things and complement each other.

How does the term gender equality relate to your own understanding of the relationship between women and men?

The women's movement has for a long time supported the development of women's rights in different spheres of society.

What is your understanding of the importance of the women's movement in general?

Has the women's movement had any effects on your religious tradition, as you see it?

What about your own personal life and beliefs – have you been influenced by the women's movement?

What does the word 'feminism' mean to you? Is feminism in your understanding of the word something that you identify yourself with at all, if so, how?

4. Towards full citizenship - Perception of citizenship

When I say the word 'citizenship', what do you think about?

What does citizenship mean to you?

How would you describe your own nationality? (British? English?) Do you feel British? Do you feel accepted and included as a citizen in Britain?

What do you think makes a good citizen? (and, conversely, a bad citizen? Alternatively, use the notions of 'active' and 'passive' citizen to solicit answer)

Have you or anyone close to you experienced any *barriers or limitations* in terms of participation in society due to your religious faith?

Have you experienced any *advantages* in terms of participation due to your religious faith? (Further explanation: In this country, your own religious tradition can be considered *the majority religion/a minority religion*. In other words, you are a member of a *majority* religion in this country. Have you, in these respects, experienced any barriers/limitations or advantages?)

To what extent do you feel included or excluded in society, considering your own religious faith and belief?

Or, as a member of a particular faith in this country, to what extent do you think you can exercise full citizenship in this country?

Are there other aspects of your identity that affect the way you feel about inclusion or exclusion? (e.g., ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexuality, age….)

What does multiculturalism mean to you, or the fact that people from different cultural backgrounds are living together in society?

Is multiculturalism important to you in your religiously based work?

In our research project, FEMCIT, we are trying to develop a multi-dimensional understanding of citizenship. We are thinking that a notion of full citizenship would imply that both women and men can participate in many different arenas – be it on the political arena, the social and economic arenas, on private arenas such as the family, and in the religious arena.

Do you think it makes sense to talk about citizenship in the religious arena? Why/why not?

5. Additional aspects of citizenship related to civil society and work–Civil Activities

Do you do any voluntary work outside the church? (how often, how long, what is your motivation?)

Do you participate in any other community groups? Campaigns, protests, petitions? (how often, how long, what is your motivation?)

Do you actively use trans-national or international contacts? To what extent are such ties important to your identity?

Did you vote in the last political election? Do you intend to vote in the next election?

You participate in all the activities you have described to me during the interview. Would you say it matters to you whether or not these activities can contribute to bringing about change in society?

Do you have a job in addition to your participation in the religious activities? What kind of job, and is it part-time or full-time? How do you like your job situation? If not working, how do you like your situation?

Do you care for children? How do you organise childcare?

6. Ending

If not already discussed, obtain details related to age, marital status, children, education, occupational status, ethnicity and nationality, how long in this country (if not from birth).

Thank you for your time. Reiterate anonymity. Obtain contact information for future correspondence (thank you letter/note and project findings).

Ask if they would recommend anyone they know to be interviewed by you. Ask if they are willing to give you contact details of such persons.

WP4 Strand 2: 'Gender, religion and citizenship' Topic guide
(Muslim participants)

1. Preparation

Introduce yourself and the project;
share information letter, FEMCIT leaflet,
and go through consent form and permission to record.

2. Citizenship in the religious arena

How would you describe who you are – what is your identity?

How important is religion to your identity? And in your everyday life?

What mosque do you attend?

What motivated you to start going to this particular mosque? (a particular issue or experience?),

and when did you become involved?

What motivated you to become involved in religious activity?

Do you have any specific roles in your mosque?

Can you tell me about the types of activities you are involved in/participate in within your religious community? (attention: are any of these activities for women only, or are they gender-mixed)

Do you attend any women's meeting?

What does women's meetings within and outside your mosque mean to you in your everyday life – how important is it to you?

Are there any women in your religious tradition that you admire? (historical or contemporary figures) Why do you admire them?

Are there any men in your religious tradition that you admire (historical or contemporary figures? Why do you admire them?

Are there any discussions within your religious community about the roles and positions that women and men can take on - both within the religious community itself and outside it (in public life)?

At this point in time, do you feel that gender relations within your religious community are under pressure or changing, or are they more or less stable?

3. Gendered citizenship

You belong to a women's group within your mosque. Are there any special issues that are important to you as a woman within the context of your own faith?

In your view, is there an ideal role for a woman within your faith today, or, does your faith influence your view of women's roles?

In your view, is there an ideal role for a man within your religious tradition today, or, does your religion influence your view of men's roles?

How do you view the relationship between the ideal role for women prescribed by your own religious tradition, and the roles that women have in today's society? Is there any conflict between the two, or not?

'Gender equality' can mean different things to different people. Some people may say that gender equality means that women and men have the same status and rights and can do exactly the same things, while others may say that women and men have equal value but should concentrate on doing different things and complement each other.

How does the term gender equality relate to your own understanding of the relationship between women and men?

The women's movement has for a long time supported the development of women's rights in different spheres of society.

What is your understanding of the importance of the women's movement in general?

Has the women's movement had any effects on your faith, as you see it?

What about your own personal life and beliefs – have you been influenced by the women's movement?

What does the word 'feminism' mean to you? Is feminism in your understanding of the word something that you identify yourself with at all, if so, how?

4. Towards full citizenship

When I say the word 'citizenship', what do you think about?

What does citizenship mean to you?

How would you describe your own nationality? (British? English?) Do you feel British? Do you feel accepted and included as a citizen in Britain?

What do you think makes a good citizen? (and, conversely, a bad citizen? Alternatively, use the notions of 'active' and 'passive' citizen to solicit answer)

Have you or anyone close to you experienced any *barriers or limitations* in terms of participation in society due to your religious faith?

Have you experienced any *advantages* in terms of participation due to your religious faith? (Further explanation: In this country, your own religious tradition can be considered *the majority religion/a minority religion*. In other words, you are a member of a *minority* religion in this country. Have you, in these respects, experienced any barriers/limitations or advantages?)

To what extent do you feel included or excluded in society, considering your own religious faith and belief?

Or, as a member of a particular faith in this country, to what extent do you think you can exercise full citizenship in this country?

Are there other of your identity that affect the way you feel about inclusion or exclusion? (e.g., ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexuality, age….)

What does the fact that people from different cultural backgrounds are living together in society mean to you? Or multiculturalism

Is multiculturalism important to you in your religiously based work?

In our research project, FEMCIT, we are trying to develop a multi-dimensional understanding of citizenship. We are thinking that a notion of full citizenship would imply that both women and men can participate in many different arenas – be it on the political arena, the social and economic arenas, on private arenas such as the family, and in the religious arena.

Do you think it makes sense to talk about citizenship in the religious arena? Why/why not?

5. Additional aspects of citizenship related to civil society and work

Do you do any voluntary work outside the church? (how often, how long, what is your motivation?)

Do you participate in any other community groups? Campaigns, protests, petitions? (how often, how long, what is your motivation?)

Do you actively use trans-national or international contacts? To what extent are such ties important to your identity?

Did you vote in the last political election? Do you intend to vote in the next election?

You participate in all the activities you have described to me during the interview. Would you say it matters to you whether or not these activities can contribute to bringing about change in society?

Do you have a job in addition to your participation in the religious activities? What kind of job, and is it part-time or full-time? How do you like your job situation? If not working, how do you like your situation?

Do you care for children? How do you organise childcare?

6. Ending

If not already discussed, obtain details related to age, marital status, children, education, occupational status, ethnicity and nationality, how long in this country (if not from birth).

Thank you for your time. Reiterate anonymity. Obtain contact information for future correspondence (thank you letter/note and project findings).

Ask if they would recommend anyone they know to be interviewed by you.

Ask if they are willing to give you contact details of such persons.

Appendix 3: Consent form

Femcit › Gendered Citizenship in Multicultural Europe: The Impact of Contemporary Women's Movements

GENDERED CITIZENSHIP IN MULTICULTURAL EUROPE: THE IMPACT OF CONTEMPORARY WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

The purpose and details of this study have been explained to me. I understand that this study is designed to further knowledge and that all procedures have been approved by the Loughborough University Ethical Advisory Committee.

☐ I have been told about and understand about the research, and this consent form.

☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions about my participation.

☐ I understand that I am under no obligation to take part in the study.

☐ I understand that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any stage for any reason, and that I will not be required to explain my reasons for withdrawing.

☐ I understand that all the information I provide will be treated in strict confidence.

IF YOU ARE ABLE TO GIVE **WRITTEN** CONSENT, PLEASE COMPLETE THIS SECTION

I agree to participate in this study.

Print name: _____

Your signature: _____

Signature of investigator: _____

Date: _____

IF RESPONDENT IS ABLE TO GIVE **VERBAL** CONSENT, RESEARCHER COMPLETES THIS SECTION

Name of respondent: _____

Willing to participate: yes/no (delete as appropriate) Date: _____

Comments: _____