

HOW TO MAKE FEMINISM MORE INCLUSIVE

**What we can learn from Muslim Dutch
feminists in uniting intersectional strategies
with the postsecular critique**

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ABSTRACT

Muslim female feminists in the Netherlands have a complicated position. Their experiences as Muslim women are affected by an intersection of sexism and islamophobia. Moreover, they are often excluded from feminist movements by secular feminists, who regard feminism and religion to be contradictory. In this thesis, I search for strategies to make feminism more inclusive by forming coalitions between Muslim and non-Muslim feminists. I argue that in order to achieve an inclusive feminism, it is essential to unite intersectional strategies for forming coalitions with the postsecular critique (as formulated by Mahmood, Bracke and Braidotti). This leads to two challenges. The first is to acknowledge pious agency in an intersectional discourse that is usually formulated in terms of resistance. The second concerns the question of identity politics. In line with Jakeet Singh I wonder: if intersectional strategies for forming coalitions often reject identity politics, is it still possible for Muslim women to formulate their religious motivations? Based on interviews with five Muslim Dutch feminists, I argue that the postsecular critique is indeed relevant in the Dutch context: feminists need to acknowledge pious agency. Furthermore, I find that in the process of forming coalitions, tactics of transversal politics as formulated by Nira Yuval-Davis are useful. Members of the coalitions share their stories and by listening to one another, formulate common goals and values. Identity politics are then not necessary. However, identity politics are still essential for actions of the coalition in the outside world. Only when they have the possibility to present themselves as 'Muslim women', Muslim female feminists can show their religious motivations and be truly recognised in society.

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	5
1.1 MUSLIM FEMINISM IN THE NETHERLANDS AND BELGIUM	5
1.2 WESTERN FEMINISM = SECULAR FEMINISM?	6
1.3 POSTSECULARISM AND INTERSECTIONALITY	8
1.4 OUTLINE	10
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	12
2.1 THE POSTSECULAR TURN IN FEMINISM	12
2.2 INTERSECTIONALITY	15
2.3 COALITIONS AND THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY	17
2.4 INTERSECTIONALITY, IDENTITY POLITICS AND RELIGION	22
2.5 RELIGION AND FEMINISM IN PRACTICE.....	23
3. METHODOLOGY	26
3.1 RESEARCH QUESTION.....	26
3.2 RESEARCH METHOD.....	27
3.3 RELATION TO VAN DER BRANDT	29
3.4 INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH.....	31
3.5 INTERVIEW METHODS.....	32
4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION	34
4.1 ‘MUSLIM FEMINISM’	34
4.2 THE FEMINIST LANDSCAPE IN THE NETHERLANDS	37
4.3 FEMINISM AND SECULARISM	38
4.4 AN INTERSECTIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON MUSLIM WOMEN	41
4.5 IDENTITY POLITICS.....	43
4.6 STRATEGIES: FORMING COALITIONS.....	45
4.6.1 <i>The art of listening</i>	46
4.6.2 <i>Vulnerability</i>	48
4.6.3 <i>Coalition is hard work</i>	49
4.6.4 <i>Shared values</i>	50
4.6.5 <i>Transversal politics and the question of identity politics</i>	51
4.7 STRATEGIES: EXTERNAL ACTIONS.....	53
5. CONCLUSION	56
5.1 REFLECTION.....	58
5.2 FUTURE RESEARCH	59
LIST OF REFERENCES	61
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (DUTCH)	66
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (TRANSLATION)	69

1. INTRODUCTION

Never has any of my working or studying projects led to so many surprised responses as this master's thesis. When I told people that my research regarded Muslim feminists, they more than once responded with laughter, genuine astonishment or 'jokes'. 'Now you're just making something up', 'I thought that didn't exist' and 'Muslim feminists?!' (combined with a huge frown) are a selection of the replies. Little did those people know that they ironically illustrated the whole reason why this thesis is needed.

Muslim feminism¹ does exist, and moreover (and not necessarily the same) there are many Muslims that identify as feminist. Muslim feminism comes in many forms and shapes, and is lived by a huge variety of people all over the world. The focus of this thesis is the rise of Muslim feminists in Western Europe, especially the Netherlands. More specifically: this thesis explores the challenges these Muslim feminists pose to secular feminism and how this shows that Western feminism needs to be adjusted in order to be inclusive in today's diverse society.

1.1 MUSLIM FEMINISM IN THE NETHERLANDS AND BELGIUM

More than a decade ago, in Antwerp, Belgium, a new feminist platform was created, called Baas Over Eigen Hoofd! (Boss Over Own Head), shortly BOEH!. The autonomous feminist group was created in response to a decision by the city council that employees in public functions were no longer allowed to wear a headscarf, because they had to appear 'neutral' (Van der Brandt, 2014). Ever since this moment, the group, consisting of both Muslim and non-Muslim women, fought for the right to wear a headscarf, niqab or burka, insisting that women should be free to wear whatever they want to (BOEH!, n.d.; Van der Brandt, 2015). The emergence of this group is a clear response to islamophobia in Belgium. After the decision by Antwerp's city administration, many similar policies followed. Women were fired for refusing to take off their hijabs in public functions, swimming pools were closed to women wearing burkini's, and a national ban was put in place on wearing a veil in the streets or the parks (Van der Brandt, 2014).

Over the last years, similar alarming developments have taken place in the Netherlands. In 2001 a woman was denied a job in court for wearing a hijab. She took the case to court and won (Bracke, 2007). However, women after her were less successful in similar situations. Recently, a Muslim police

¹ From the start of this research, I used 'Muslim feminism' as a concept. Later on, during the interviews for this thesis, I realised that the concept was contested and potentially harmful (see paragraph 4.1). Therefore, I changed my word choice halfway through this thesis, but I decided to leave the term in the first three chapters, as it represents my own learning process and hopefully, through that, can raise awareness among the readers as well.

woman in Rotterdam was prohibited from wearing a uniform – and therefore from doing anything else than office work – as long as she would wear a headscarf. The police force stuck to their decision, even after the advisory The Netherlands Institute for Human Rights (College voor de Rechten van de Mens) condemned this rule as discriminatory (De Voogt, 2017). In 2018, the Dutch legislature – after years of debate – passed a law that is commonly known as the ‘burka ban’, prohibiting people from wearing face-covering clothing in schools, government buildings, public transport and health institutions (Boersema, 2018). Moreover, next to formal policies that affect their position, Muslim women are regularly confronted with discrimination in public spaces² and on the labour market (Jung, 2016)³. Now, Muslim feminism seems to gain popularity in the Netherlands as well (Anne Dijk in Jansen, 2016). Muslim women speak up in media and public debates and engage in discussions on Muslim feminism (Belhaj, 2014; Bouchallikht, 2018; Meulenbelt, 2005; Pektas-Weber, 2005; Rode Hoed; Snijders, 2018; 2019; Trouw, 2005). And recently, a group of Muslim women have been planning on organising themselves, inspired by BOEH! in Belgium (A. Topolski, January 8 2018, personal communication).

1.2 WESTERN FEMINISM = SECULAR FEMINISM?

What strikes me as a white, non-religious Dutch feminist, is that these Muslim women⁴ in Belgium and now also in the Netherlands feel the need to organise themselves in separate movements. Not because I think it is problematic that they do so⁵, but because of what it might imply. Apparently, the numerous feminist movements that were already active in both countries, did not fight for the interests of Muslim women, or were organised in such a way that Muslim feminists did not feel included. Moreover, it seems like these women did not see their interests acknowledged or defended by their Muslim community. This would mean that they are excluded by both groups, compelling them to organise themselves in order to avoid being marginalised.

Furthermore, over the past years, Muslim feminists have seen themselves opposed not just by patriarchy or by extreme-right-wing politicians, but also by non-religious feminists who took a stance

² According to The Netherlands Institute for Social Research 51% of Dutch Muslim women experienced discrimination in public spaces in 2013 (Adriessen, et al., 2014).

³ For more information on islamophobia in the Netherlands, and discrimination against Muslim women, see Jung (2016) and Van der Valk and Törnberg (2017).

⁴ I am aware that there are many non-female feminists as well. During this thesis, I often refer to ‘women’ or ‘female feminists’. I do this because my research focuses on the position of Muslim women in the feminist movement, and (as I already explained) their position in Western society (and therefore in the feminist movement) is affected by different factors than the position of e.g. Muslim men.

⁵ Throughout history, women often sought support in groups of likeminded people. I can imagine this to be the same for Muslim women when organising themselves in groups or movements. On top of that, Muslim women often set up women groups to study Islamic texts from a female perspective, which is very logical to do with a group of just Muslim feminists.

against the headscarf or veiling or who pictured all religion as oppressive. As Nella van der Brandt concluded in her research on BOEH!: ‘In the experience of BOEH! members, the dismissal of the existence and activism of BOEH! (initially) came from both Muslim communities as well as from white women’s organisations and from white people belonging to own circles of friends, colleagues and family’ (Van der Brandt, 2014, p.128). In 2001, the editor in chief of the popular Dutch feminist magazine *Opzij* stated that she would not hire female journalists with headscarves (Midden, 2012, p.234). In 2015, the same magazine published a research stating that a woman wearing a headscarf is the best indicator for Muslim fundamentalism (Parool, 2015). In Dutch newspaper *de Volkskrant*, jurist Machteld Zee called for ‘a third feminist wave’ in which feminists focus ‘in the first place’ on ‘misogynist practices that are justified by making an appeal to cultural and religious toleration’ (Zee, 2014). The headscarf and women-only swimming pools were among her examples of women-unfriendly practices.

The above examples illustrate how Western feminist ideals sometimes exclude the experience of Muslim women. I argue that this exclusion is a serious societal problem. For me, inclusion by means of intersectionality is a crucial part of my feminism⁶. Intersectional feminism acknowledges that different inequality structures (like racism or sexism) cannot be seen as essentially separate from one another (Verloo et al., 2012, p.515). Instead, they ‘intersect and potentially mutually constitute (or shape) each other’ (ibid.). Gender equality can then never be accomplished without paying attention to intersectionality. The ways in which different women experience discrimination differs according to their race, religion, physical ability or sexuality (Dasvarma and Loh as paraphrased in Verloo et al., 2012, p.515). In the light of this thesis, intersectionality helps to understand that Muslim women are not just affected by sexism and islamophobia as women and as Muslims, but specifically as Muslim women on the intersection of gender and religion⁷.

Therefore, the feminist struggle should not be separated from the fight against islamophobia⁸. If feminism does not include Muslim women – or even worsens their position – these women are left on

⁶ In this thesis, I do not give a fixed definition of feminism. Feminism is a very broad and diverse movement, and different feminists define their feminism in different ways, as I will address in section 4.1. As a minimum definition, I describe feminism as a collection of ideals concerning the improvement of gender equality.

⁷ And of course by many different factors, like class, sexuality, physical ability, etc. All these factors will likely be important and of influence. However, due to restrictions in length and time, I focus on the intersection of gender and religion in this thesis, as this is an intersection that is still undertheorised (Bilge, 2010; Van der Brandt, 2014; Singh, 2015). As I also suggest in section 5.2, race is a particular important and interesting factor in the exploration of the gender-religion intersection. Not only are Muslim women often affected by racism based on their immigration background, ethnicity or skin colour, and can these forms of racism amplify the effects of islamophobia. Moreover, in European context Muslims are often racialised, as Anya Topolski explains in her work on the race-religion constellation (2018). Unfortunately, this thesis does not allow me to do justice to this important and complex intersection. Therefore, I will write about ‘islamophobia’ rather than ‘racism’.

⁸ Just as it cannot be separated from a fight for lgbtq+-rights, the class struggle, anti-racism activism, etc.

their own in a struggle against being marginalised in society. Moreover, if Western feminist movements will not make an effort to become more inclusive towards Muslim women, their blind spots for the problems faced by Muslim women will only get bigger. Since Europe becomes increasingly diverse both in terms of culture and religion (Jennissen et al., 2018; Koopmans et al., 2005; Perchoc, 2017), an exclusive feminism will marginalise a substantial group of women⁹ and can thus never really tackle inequalities.

1.3 POSTSECTULARISM AND INTERSECTIONALITY

The political problem that I described in the previous section, is reflected in a theoretical feminist debate of the last two decades. Feminist authors like Mahmood (2015) and Bracke (2008; and Fadil, 2008) criticise western feminist academics for reproducing a narrative that opposes emancipation with religion. According to their 'postsecular' critique, Western feminism centres a sense of agency that does not match the experience of pious women. In this thesis, I integrate intersectional strategies for forming coalitions with this postsecular critique in order to search for ways to make Western feminism more inclusive.

Two theoretical debates are relevant for this research. The first one is the postsecular feminist debate that I introduced above. The postsecular critique originates in Saba Mahmood's *Politics of Piety* (2005). In this book, she presents her study of Islamist women's groups in Egypt. These groups and women are often frowned upon by (Western) feminists, who believe these pious women are complicit in a system and religion that 'oppresses' them by liberal standards. Mahmood uses this case to show that Western feminism fails to acknowledge these women and their motivations. Liberal or secular feminism has a big focus on agency, and it defines an individual's agency as their resistance against oppressive norms. Individuals are then motivated by an inherent longing for autonomy or freedom. However, argues Mahmood, pious women like these Egyptian women sometimes have different motivations for their actions. She argues that they have a pious agency: sometimes they wilfully submit themselves to religion, because of their love for God. This form of agency is not recognised by Western liberal feminists. As a result, pious women are framed as ignorant and unaware of their own oppression.

Mahmood's critique has been reproduced and enhanced by different feminists in the field (among others: Bracke, 2008; Braidotti, 2008; Butler, 2008). This postsecular debate cannot be separated from the exclusion of Muslim women by European feminist movements that I described above. Research for example showed how the liberal feminist discourse on veiling in France led to misrecognition of

⁹ Statistics Netherlands (CBS) estimated that 5% of the people in the Netherlands is Muslim (Statistics Netherlands, 2016). Assuming that half of them is female, there are approximately 425.000 Muslim women in the Netherlands only.

veiled Muslim women. They were either portrayed as having no agency, or as wearing their veil out of protest against islamophobic systems (Bilge, 2010). However, neither frame recognises the reason why most women wear their veil: because it is their way of living their religion (ibid.).

A second theoretical debate that is relevant for my thesis, originates in intersectional feminist theory and concerns the question if feminists should make use of identity politics. An intersectional framework cannot solely help in understanding the position of Muslim feminists in society. It can also explain different power positions of women compared to each other. These inequalities between women can be a challenge for feminist movements. How can e.g. non-religious women support Muslim women in their fight against islamophobia? Over the past decades, feminists have developed different strategies on coalition forming (e.g. Reagon, 1983; Spivak, 1984; Mohanty, 2003; Yuval-Davis, 2006). One important question in the choice for a strategy is whether or not to apply tactics of identity politics. Identity politics means that a specific group, e.g. Muslim women, homosexual men, or transsexual Christians, unite on the basis of their shared identity. They fight for recognition and a better position, not regardless of their difference, but with demand for respect of themselves as different (Kruks, 2001, p.85). This can be a strong strategical choice, because it makes it easier to exert influence as a group (Spivak, 1984). At the same time, authors like Nira Yuval-Davis (2006) argue that identity politics is risky, because it leads to essentialism. A small group of Muslim women will be considered the voice of all Muslim women, leaving a big part of the group unheard in marginalised positions (ibid.). She therefore proposes a strategy of rooting and shifting, in which all activists share their personal experiences and stories, in order to formulate a goal. After this, they can all act as representative of the movement, regardless of their identity (ibid.).

Both these debates – the postsecular debate and the intersectionalist discussion on identity politics – are relevant in thinking about ways to make the feminist movement(s) in Western Europe more inclusive for Muslim women. However, combining them is challenging for two reasons. First of all, the discourse of intersectional feminism is aimed at fighting norms. Intersectional analysis mainly focuses on power positions, privilege and oppression. These concepts remind of the liberal notion of agency that Mahmood criticised. Secondly, the move away from identity politics as made by Yuval-Davis (2006), might leave less room for pious agency. As Singh (2015) remarks: it could deprive Muslim women of the ability to formulate their actions as something they are proud of simply because they are Muslim women. These two challenges lead to the central question of this thesis:

How can intersectional strategies for forming coalitions and the postsecular feminist critique be combined, in order to make Western feminism more inclusive for Muslim feminists?

This is a question with both societal and theoretical relevance. The postsecular debate has hardly ever been combined with intersectional theory. Furthermore, religion is often still ignored as a factor in intersectional theory (Bilge, 2010; Van der Brandt, 2014; Singh, 2015).

1.4 OUTLINE

From my position as an intersectional, white, non-religious feminist I searched for the answer to the research question by interviewing five Dutch Muslim women. I talked to them about their experience with non-Muslim feminists, their definition of Muslim feminism and what they think is necessary for a coalition between Muslim and non-Muslim feminists. I did not look for explanations on how these women can be feminist or if Muslim feminism can exist. Rather I wanted to know from my position as a white, non-religious feminist what I and others can do to make feminism more inclusive and form new coalitions.

As one of the first researches that attempts to combine postsecular critique with intersectional theory, this thesis is exploratory at first (Stebbins, 2008). Departing from the theoretical problem, I engaged in conversations with the interviewees. I explored their experiences, their definitions of concepts like 'feminism' and their visions on the Dutch feminist landscape and strategies for forming coalitions. In my analysis, I compared their visions to the theoretical work. Since this thesis only allowed for the time to talk to five women, it is impossible to give one comprehensive conclusion regarding the central question. However, through induction from the interview data, I did make an attempt at a normative contribution to the debate. I formulated standards for coalition forming between Muslim and non-Muslim women, regarding identity politics and postsecular notions of agency.

In the next chapter of this thesis, I expand on the theoretical framework. I explore the postsecular turn in feminism and how it challenges Western feminism. After that, I go into more detail about intersectional theory, employing Crenshaw's notions of structural and political intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991). The concept of political intersectionality helps me to explain the dilemma of identity politics in feminist coalition strategies. I concisely present some examples of theories on coalition forming. Then, I demonstrate the challenges that arise if I want to unite the postsecular critique with the intersectional discussion. Chapter three explains the methodology of this research. The chapter starts with the presentation of the research question, after which I explicate my important research decisions and reflect on my feminist and intersectional research methods. The fourth chapter is dedicated to the analysis and discussion. I present the statements made by my interviewees. The structure of this chapter is similar to the structure of the theoretical framework: I analyse their testimonies on feminism, the feminist landscape in the Netherlands, their experiences and how this relates to the intersectional perspective, identity politics and, finally, strategies for forming coalitions. In every section, I directly analyse the implication my findings have for the theories I presented in

chapter two. Since the interviews were extensive and in-depth, I was not able to present all the findings and selected them based on their relevance with regard to the central question and theories of this thesis. Finally, the conclusion gives a concise summary of this thesis, reflects on the impact of this research (and research choices), and makes suggestions for future research.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The developments in the Netherlands and Belgium and the debates and tensions among Dutch feminists, are reflected in ongoing debates in academic feminism. In this theoretical framework, I will explore two discussions in feminist theory that challenge the position of feminists in the Netherlands from the perspective of Muslim women. Hereby I complicate the question of how different feminists can support each other and collaborate. First, I will outline the postsecular turn in feminism. Thinkers in this tradition argue that notions of agency, autonomy and emancipation in Western (liberal) feminism exclude the experience of many religious women. I will show that this postsecular debate does not only expose a theoretical deficiency, but that the liberal feminist focus on agency is actually harmful to the position of Muslim women in Europe. Second, I will explain the intersectional challenges to formation of feminist coalitions. There are different feminist theories on how feminists should work together across their differences. The central concern in this debate is the tension between the potential benefits of identity politics and the risks of essentialism. Third, I bring the two discussions together, and show how the postsecular critique poses an additional challenge to the discussion on strategies and identity politics. I look at religion as a factor in intersectional feminist theory and show that intersections of gender and religion are still highly undertheorised. Here, I draw on the work of Nella van der Brandt, who extensively studied notions of religion and the secular among feminist groups in Belgium.

2.1 THE POSTSECULAR TURN IN FEMINISM

The first theoretical debate that will help understand the challenges posed by Muslim feminism, is the postsecular turn in feminism. At the start of the 21st century, feminists like Mahmood (2005), Bracke (2008), Braidotti (2008) and Butler (2008) took a critical stance against the intertwining of secularism and feminism. Their criticism is primarily aimed at the central and unquestioned position of agency in Western feminism. The prevailing notion of agency, postsecular feminism argues, excludes the experience of pious women by opposing religion and feminism and by only recognising agency when it is a form of resistance to relations of domination (Mahmood, 2001, p.203). This critique is part of an ongoing discussion¹⁰ that marks a 'shift of feminism to the "non-rational", the "non-secular" or the "religious"' (Vasilaki, 2015, p.103).

Since the 1990s, research on women and religious movements focused increasingly on women's agency with what Bracke called the 'turn to agency' (Bracke, 2008, p.62). Her argumentation is best understood as developing on the work of Talal Asad (1996). He describes how a focus on agency is

¹⁰ For counterarguments on Mahmood's perspective, see Kim Shively (2014) and Rosa Vasilaki (2015).

inseparable from modernity. In Western modern times, Asad argues, individual responsibility is regarded essential. We want to understand all human action as our own responsibility and therefore, we will interpret everything that people do as a decision made by a rational agent. Asad traces this focus on agency back to the Enlightenment, when the secular space was framed as the domain of 'purely natural' human action (ibid., p.267), separate from the religious domain. As a consequence, people came to believe that only the secular space is the space of human action. Only by acting in this space can we be acknowledged as humans.

This modern, secular conception of agency stands in stark contrast with the experience of pious people, who often describe their beliefs as something 'bigger than themselves'. In their experience, they are not religious because they made a rational, individual choice, but because of something that happened outside of their control. Asad observes the constant need in Western modernity to discount this claim and instead, to insist that the pious Other is indeed an agent (ibid., p.271), because 'a doctrine of action has become essential to our recognition of other people's humanity' (ibid., p.272). We continuously emphasise agency because this is how we 'integrate' people into our conception of modern (liberal secular) subjectivity, and our understanding of humanity (Bracke, 2008, p.62). However, we hereby discredit the experience of pious people, as their experience is no longer in line with our perception of humanity.

This line of critique is brought into the feminist realm by Mahmood in her *Politics of Piety* (2005), in which she scrutinises the conceptualisation of agency within feminist theory. Mahmood observes a tension in feminist writing on pious women in Islamist movements. On the one hand, many argue that these women are victim of the patriarchal system and are not aware of their own oppressed position. This is what Bracke (2004) describes as the false-consciousness discourse. Other feminists, Mahmood observes (2005, p.2), refuse to portray conservative Islamic women as powerless victims. Nevertheless, they continue to frame the issue as a contradiction: How can it be that women voluntarily join and support a movement that harms their own interests?

Thus, there is an incapacity of Western secular feminists to think of pious Muslim women other than in contradictions. Mahmood ascribed this to the persistent assumption that 'there is something intrinsic to women that should predispose them to oppose the practise, values and disjunctions that the Islamist movement embodies' (Mahmood, 2005, p.2). Mahmood challenges the liberal normative premise that all human beings have an innate desire for freedom. Especially within liberal feminism, she argues, there is a strong focus on women's wish to gain autonomy. Even more so: the self is defined as constructing itself in a struggle against hegemony. The central focus is always on agency, and agency

is generally defined in terms of challenging prevailing norms, and realising one's own interest against the oppression of social or religious norms and customs (Mahmood, 2005).

Mahmood's study of an urban women's mosque movement during the Islamic Revival in Cairo shows that these conceptions of autonomy, the self and agency do not match the beliefs, experiences and motives of pious Muslim women. For the women in this movement, subordination can be of great value. Submission to Islamic precepts (a higher authority) is of great importance to them. In other words: personal desire and social norms cannot always be separated, and often are not in Islamic culture (ibid., p.21). Mahmood therefore calls for an understanding of the self and the way the self is formed separate from a struggle with social norms. Agency for Mahmood is then not just the resistance, but also (more so) the way in which subjects inhabit and practice norms (ibid., p.15).

This has implications for conceptions of power as well. Mahmood states that 'the agency of resistance imposes a teleology of progressive politics on the analytics of power' (ibid., p.9). This teleology again excludes human beings that 'are not necessarily encapsulated by the narrative of subversion and reinscription of norms' (ibid.). Consequently, Mahmood challenges feminism to move away from the idea that subjectivity is produced in the binary of either subverting or confirming the norms (Vasilaki, 2013, p.112).

Braidotti, following after Bracke, proposes a similar line of arguments. In her 'In Spite of the Times: The Postsecular Turn in Feminism' (2008), she looks at the challenges that pious women and the postsecular turn brought to Western feminism. Braidotti formulates two important dilemmas that need to be solved, and that require a broadening of the feminist understanding of agency. The first challenge consists of linking subjectivity to religious agency. The postsecular critique shows that agency is not antithetical to religious piety. Moreover, political subjectivity 'can actually be conveyed through and supported by religious piety' (ibid., p.2).

This is well illustrated by Bracke's interview with a Dutch Muslim woman called Yasemin (Bracke, 2008, p.63). Yasemin explains that she does not want to marry and start a family. This can – from a liberal feminist point of view – be explained as a resistance to social norms. However, Yasemin main motivation is not to increase her autonomy or engage in resistance. She made her decision because marriage would distract her from the piety and spirituality she longed for (ibid., p.60). As Bracke explains: 'Yasemin's agency is driven not by a desire to resist social pressure, nor by a desire to comply with it. Instead, her subjectivity is marked by a desire to submit to God' (ibid., p.63). Her autonomous decision is an effect of her piety (ibid.).

The second challenge that Braidotti finds in the confrontation between Western feminism and postsecular critique, is the need to move away from 'oppositional consciousness and critique defined

as negativity' (Braidotti, 2008, p.2). She observes that critical theory, inspired by Hegelian-Marxist dialectics, is commonly based on negativity: people need to experience oppression before overturning it (ibid., p.15). In this understanding, political subjectivity will always be connected to negativity, to people fighting their oppression and forming oppositional consciousness. And this, again, does not always rhyme with the experience of pious people.

Finally, now I have explained the content of the postsecular critique, it is important to note that all of the above authors have written their postsecular critique in a specific context, in a time where a great deal of gender-politics is used as a vehicle for Islamophobia (Vasilaki, 2016, p.105). The discourse that is set out by secular feminism, both in the (highly intertwined) academic and political reality, is shown to be harmful to Muslim women (Bilge, 2010; Van Es, 2017; Jouili, 2015). Sirma Bilge (2010) for example studied the agency of veiled Muslim women in France. She found that in the French hijab debate, non-Muslim feminists subscribed to two possible discourses. In the first narrative, those feminists only recognise an action as free will when it matches their own liberal-secular values. Consequently, women who wear an hijab, are not recognised as autonomous subjects. In the second narrative women's decision to wear a veil is framed as a form of resistance against the hegemonic liberal majority. Therefore, Bilge argues, the veil is reduced to an instrumental function and the religious motivation of Muslim women is still not recognised. Margaretha A. van Es (2017) found a similar stereotype of Muslim women as oppressed and lacking agency during her research in the Netherlands. She shows that Muslim women, determined to show they are not oppressed, make a continuous effort to present themselves as emancipated and modern (according to liberal standards). Van Es calls this a form of self-essentialisation, as these women reduce themselves to one element of their identity – being a Muslim woman – that results in their full life being politicised (ibid., p.14).

These findings show that in the European multicultural context, (liberal) secular feminist beliefs are not just a limitation in academic research, but have an effect on the everyday lives of Muslim pious women. These women often have two options. They are either stuck in a frame of the oppressed victim without any agency. Or they are forced to adapt to an agency-centred frame and present themselves as emancipated, without any recognition for their religious agency. Therefore, as I will address later, the postsecular critique is also relevant for both Muslim and non-Muslim feminists in deciding on strategies to form coalitions.

2.2 INTERSECTIONALITY

In the previous section, I showed that the position of Muslim women in Europe is not just affected by being a woman in a patriarchal society, nor is it just affected by being Muslim in times of rising

islamophobia. More than that, they are affected by their position on the intersection of being female and being Muslim; they are affected by being Muslim women. In 2016, the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) published the report 'Forgotten Women: The Impact of Islamophobia on Muslim Women' (Šeta, 2016). The report investigates the effect of the gender-religion intersection and concludes that islamophobia had a disproportional effect on women (ibid.). Stereotypes in media and among European citizens present an image of the Muslim woman as either oppressed or dangerous (ibid.). Discrimination on the job market turned out to be especially problematic for Muslim women wearing a headscarf. And Islamophobic violence is mostly directed at veiled Muslim women.

The above findings show that it is relevant to analyse the mutually constituting effects of religion and gender while studying the experience of Muslim women. Therefore, I argue that an intersectional framework is essential for understanding the position of Muslim women in Europe. Intersectional theory is increasingly gaining popularity among academics in gender studies, social studies and economics (Verloo, 2006). An intersectional approach means that when looking at either someone's personal experience or social (in)equality in general, we pay attention not just to the factor of class or race or gender or sexuality. Instead, we focus on how these different factors all at once influence our world and how power is exerted through them. Moreover, we must be aware that the effects of these factors are intertwined and shape each other.

The origins of intersectionality lie in the work of black feminists in the United States at the end of the eighties. Black women were often excluded from the feminist movement. In response to this, they 'challenge[d] the notion that "gender" was the primary factor determining a woman's fate' (hooks, 2015, p.xiii). Feminists such as bell hooks argued that race, but also sexuality or class, could be of a bigger influence on a woman's life than simply her gender. The theory of intersectionality was formulated in 1989 by Kimberley Crenshaw. She then stated:

'If any real efforts are to be made to free Black people of the constraints and conditions that characterize racial subordination, then theories and strategies purporting to reflect the Black community's needs must include an analysis of sexism and patriarchy. Similarly, feminism must include an analysis of race if it hopes to express the aspirations of non-white women.'
(Crenshaw, 1989, p.166)

So the intersectional approach was introduced in order to open feminism up to non-white or non-liberal feminists and prevent feminism from having blind spots. It could also have this value to Muslim women nowadays in Europe. As I showed earlier, feminist discourse is often harmful to their position. And as long as liberal feminists frame Muslim women as oppressed, Muslim women do not have a proper voice in the feminist debate. On top of that, intersectionality is valuable because it offers an appropriate tool to understand the different factors at play here.

Over the past decade, a small number of theorists have formulated an intersectional approach towards Muslim women. In her analysis of the hijab debate in France, Bilge showed that a dominating focus on gender issues led to a focus on intragroup gender issues among Muslims, without paying attention to the effect of race and class. She proposes an intersectional framework as the solution (2010, p.18). Weber argues that understanding Muslim women groups in Europe (like the Aktionsbündnis muslimischer Frauen she studies), 'requires intersectional frameworks that recognize gendered raciali[s]ations of Islam' (2015, p.23). Saba Mahmood (2015, p.1) states that religion is often overlooked as factor in intersectional analysis. Iveta Josuvá (2015) interestingly shows how Braidotti's work fits the intersectional approach. Noteworthy, all of these scholars mention that the inclusion of religion or Islam in the intersectional framework is still a work in process and that a further development of the theory is needed. Jakeet Singh speaks of the 'relative silence on questions of religion in intersectional theory' (2015, p.257). Now I have established that intersectional theory is relevant for the analysis of Muslim women's position, I will look at the implications for possible feminist strategies from an intersectional perspective.

2.3 COALITIONS AND THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY

Since the roots of intersectional theory are in the struggle of African American women who wanted to make feminism inclusive, it has from the very start also been about the relation between women and between feminists. By looking at feminist movements from an intersectional point of view, we can see that cis white women of a higher class have a privileged position compared to e.g. trans black lower-class women. Similarly, secular (or Christian) women in Europe have a privileged position compared to Muslim women. This means that white secular feminists are more likely to be heard in public debate. Consequently, if white secular feminists do not make an effort to prevent this, they are likely to dominate the feminist movements¹¹. Moreover, as shown by the postsecular critics, they can reproduce the discourse and power structures that silence Muslim women.

Additionally, the experience of Muslim women is different from the experience of white non-Muslim women in our society. So they will be able to point out problems in society (and politics) that white secular women may not be aware of. I present this view from standpoint epistemology: the idea that knowledge is socially situated, and therefore socially marginalised groups will be aware of problems and are able to ask questions that others cannot ask in their place (Bowell, n.d.). This makes it especially problematic if Muslim women's voice is not heard. So how can feminists work together to

¹¹ Although the focus of thesis is not on material inequality, it is very important to note that a privileged access to public debate, will lead to the domination of resources, law, politics, and therefore lead to a great material inequality as well.

improve positions of all women, without white feminists overshadowing feminists of colour and secular or Christian feminists ignoring the problems faced by Muslim women?

Since the eighties, feminists developed many theories and strategies to cope with this challenge (Reagon, 1983; Spivak, 1984; Mohanty, 2003; Yuval-Davis, 2006). The discussions, surrounding those strategies, all lead back to the discussion on identity politics. Identity politics – a concept that is again very much empowered by African American feminist activists – centres around the idea that a marginalised group unites, based on their shared experience of injustice, to ‘assert or reclaim ways of understanding their distinctiveness that challenge dominant oppressive characterizations, with the goal of greater self-determination’ (Heyes, 2016). Sonia Kruks gives a clear explanation:

‘What makes identity politics a significant departure from earlier, pre-identarian forms of the politics of recognition is its demand for recognition on the basis of the very grounds on which recognition has previously been denied: it is qua women, qua blacks, qua lesbians that groups demand recognition. The demand is not for inclusion within the fold of “universal humankind” on the basis of shared human attributes; nor is it for respect “in spite of” one’s differences. Rather, what is demanded is respect for oneself as different.’ (Kruks, 2001, p.85)

Interestingly, Crenshaw formulated her theory on intersectionality in response to the domination of identity politics (Crenshaw, 1991). In her work, she makes a distinction between structural and political intersectionality¹² (ibid.; Verloo, 2006, p.213). Structural intersectionality concerns the ways in which inequalities and their intersections affect the position or experience of people. The previous section contains examples of structural intersectionality, like discrimination against veiled women in job applications. Political intersectionality indicates ‘how inequalities and their intersections are relevant to political strategies’ (Verloo, 2006, p.213). Crenshaw uses the concept of political intersectionality to highlight that women of colour are situated within two subordinated groups – ‘women’ and ‘people of colour’ – that sometimes oppose each other (1991, pp.1251-1252). As Verloo formulates it: ‘strategies on one axis of inequality are mostly not neutral towards other axes’ (2006, p.213). As a result, women of colour are forced to split their political energy. Moreover, because they do not have the dominant position within each group, their interests are not represented by either movement. Crenshaw blames this on failed identity politics (ibid., p.1242): by a dominant focus on the identities of ‘women’ and ‘people of colour’, people fail to recognise the differences and inequalities within a group. Furthermore, both groups present their issues as mutually exclusive terrains, depriving women of colour of the opportunity to address their issues. The same can be said for Muslim women in the European context: an assumed opposition between feminism and religion, makes it impossible for

¹² She also formulates a third type of intersectionality, namely representational intersectionality. For more information on this, see Crenshaw (1991, pp.1282-1283).

Muslim women to address their issues within the feminist movements. I will expand on this in the analysis of this thesis (chapter 4).

Although identity politics can be problematic, Crenshaw does not reject the use of identity politics. Rather, she calls for an intersectional approach to identity politics (Crenshaw, 1991, p.1299). This requires that 'we first recognize that the organi[s]ed identity groups in which we find ourselves in are in fact coalitions, or at least potential coalitions waiting to be formed' (ibid.). According to this logic, women can still unite in a fight for gender equality, however such a (feminist) movement will always be a coalition of different women with different positions, like white secular women and Muslim women of colour. But how can such a coalition be created? And how can more privileged feminists support other less-privileged groups of women? I now give an overview of the different feminist strategies that are developed in the last forty years, and the view on identity politics and intersectionality they imply.

One approach to the dilemma of identity politics can be found in tactics of transcendence (Mohanty, 1995, p.75). This strategy revolves around the idea that all women should unite, brought together by their shared experience of being oppressed under the patriarchal system. Robin Morgan's *Planetary Feminism* (1996, originally 1984) is a famous example of this. She talks about 'universal sisterhood' and 'the power of women as a world political force' (ibid., p.3). The idea that women differ because they have different experience of race, class or culture, are patriarchal views, meant to divide women across the world, because the 'simple truth' is that 'an indigenous feminism has been present in every culture in the world and in every period of history since the suppression of women' (ibid., p.5).

Morgan's view shows a disregard for Crenshaw's intersectional feminist critique. It is for this reason that she has been criticised by Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003), among others. Mohanty is concerned with decolonising feminism. In her *Feminism Without Borders* (2003), she contests the notion of feminist transcendence for being 'a model with dangerous implications for women who do not and cannot speak from a location of white, Western, middle-class privilege' (ibid., p.111). To think that all women suffer from the same oppression, Mohanty argues, shows a lack of inclusive historical knowledge (ibid., p.112).

An alternative approach is formulated by Bernice Johnson Reagon. In a famous speech (1983), she pleads for coalition politics. This is not based on a notion of shared oppression, but rather on cross-cultural commonality of struggles, identifying shared survival. She explains how identity politics will always create an inside and an outside group, which we can never control (ibid., pp.344-345). So we need to open the door to all who want to take part in the struggle. But this also means making coalition will never be easy. '[Y]ou shouldn't look for comfort' (ibid., p.346). The big difference with strategies

of transcendence is that Reagon *does* acknowledge differences between women, and also the importance of paying attention to those differences.

Reagon's argument is in agreement with Mohanty's view. Mohanty uses the word 'solidarity' to describe how feminists should work together (Mohanty, 2003). In this tactic, diversity and differences are central values, across which communities of people work to fight together. Mohanty is inspired by Jodi Dean's concept of 'reflective solidarity' (Dean, 1996). Dean's book *Solidarity of Strangers: Feminism After Identity Politics*, propounds the view that women should work together across their differences, and form diverse movements, with more than just women with similar experiences. Solidarity is formed through an interaction between at least three people, from the perspective of 'I ask you to stand by me over and against a third' (ibid., p.3). Dean, like Reagon, acknowledges the difficulty in forming solidarities. She has an in-process understanding of the 'we' in a solidarity movement (Mohanty, 2003, p.7). Solidarity therefore becomes a carefully strategised achievement.

Further, Mohanty is critical of a binary conception of oppression, where one is either oppressed or an oppressor, either colonised or a coloniser, either a capitalist or worker. Such limiting conceptions of oppression are, in her view, consequences of ahistorical notions of universalistic womanhood. Mohanty instead points to Dorothy Smith's 'relations of ruling' (Smith, 1987) which underscores the various relations between people and the history that shapes them. 'It is [...] by understanding these intersections [of these relations] that we can attempt to explore questions of consciousness and agency without naturalizing either individuals or structures' (Mahonty, 2003, p.55).

Consequently, Mohanty suggests the notion of a 'politics of engagement' over a politics of transcendence. She advocates for forming unlikely coalitions in which different groups need to learn about their mutual history, and be aware of the consequences of the past on their relations today. A solidarity coalition is then not just formed based on a shared experience of oppression (under e.g. capitalism) but also focuses on tensions within the coalition along the lines of race or class.

Nira Yuval-Davis (2006) is also critical of identity politics, but for a different reason. She argues that also after intersectionality, identity politics could lead to essentialist interpretations. '[S]ome of these intersectional approaches have become a kind of fragmented identity politics, in which the focus is no longer, for instance, women or Blacks, but Black women' (Yuval-Davis, 2015, p.93). New essentialist categories like 'Black women' or 'Muslim women' entail the risk of – again – marginalising those that have the least chance to raise their voice, because they do not fit the schoolbook definition of e.g. 'Muslim woman'. 'What takes place is actually fragmentation and multiplication of the wider categorical identities rather than more dynamic, shifting and multiplex constructions of intersectionality' (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p.195). The risk of identity politics then lies in a too simplified

vision of 'empowerment'. Activists sometimes aim for the improvement of the group's position, without paying attention to the consequences for the less powerful within the group, who, as a consequence, may be left behind (Yuval-Davis, 1994). Ironically, this is the same problem as Crenshaw formulated in the first place.

Nira Yuval-Davis finds an alternative approach in the practices of a feminist meeting between Palestinian and Israeli women. Inspired by their strategies, she formulates her theory of transversal politics (1994; 1999) which is based on three principles (1999). First, it acknowledges standpoint epistemology. Secondly, it respects the notion of 'difference by equality' (ibid., p.95). This means people should recognise that differences are important, but there should be no hierarchy among the differences. 'They assume a priori respect for others' positionings¹³ - which includes acknowledgement of their differential social, economic and political power' (ibid.). Thirdly, 'transversal politics is based on a conceptual - and political - differentiation between positioning, identity and values' (ibid.). Two people may have a same background, but hold different ideological views, while other may share the same values while having completely different identities.

These three principles lead to two implications for activists' strategies. Firstly, Yuval-Davis argues that activists should not regard themselves as representatives of their group (so not: 'I'm representative for Muslim women'), but instead they should see themselves as advocates for the cause. Secondly, this also means that those advocates do not always have to be members of the constituency they are fighting for. 'It is the message, not the messenger that counts' (ibid., p.96). This can be done through tactics of rooting and shifting. Rooting refers to the idea that each participant in the dialogue brings their own position and identity, with the accompanying insights. At the same time, activists should try to 'shift': to listen to the experiences of different people and imagine what their situation is like.

At last, there are also authors who defend identity politics for e.g. 'Muslim women' as a strategy. Post-colonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak famously spoke of the need to embrace a 'strategic essentialism' in an interview (Spivak, 1984, p.183)¹⁴. She hereby refers to the strategy where a group with a shared identity (like 'Muslim women') unites to present themselves in an essentialist way strategically. Although the essentialism may not be correct (there will always be diversity within the group), such a tactics can help gain more influence and attention for their common interests.

¹³ Positioning here means someone's situation within the intersectional structure. So this can be about someone's class, gender, race, religion, etc.

¹⁴ In 2008, Spivak retracted her claim, because it was too often used for nationalist purposes (Spivak, 2008, p.260).

2.4 INTERSECTIONALITY, IDENTITY POLITICS AND RELIGION

I have explored the postsecular critique, and the intersectional debate on identity politics and strategies for coalition forming. Both debates present challenges for the inclusion of Muslim women in European feminist movements. Now, I will show how the combination of these two debates, will further complicate the question of this thesis.

The postsecular critique pointed out a problem in Western feminist discourse. A negative notion of agency as resisting oppression, where the feminist self is shaped by fighting hegemony, and with a big focus on emancipation, can be harmful to religious women. Unfortunately, I argue, this critique is also valid for intersectional theory. The intersectional narrative often contains language of fighting an oppressive system and struggling against racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination. This raises the question of whether the intersectional framework can be applied when analysing Muslim feminism. Are concepts of intersectional strategies, as formulated by feminists of colour, applicable in the context of Muslim feminism? Or do we need new concepts and tactics?

Until now, intersectional analysis barely pays attention to religion as a factor (Bilge, 2010; Van der Brandt, 2014; Singh, 2015). I concur with Jakeet Singh (2015) when he states that there is an urge to unite intersectionality and postsecular critique. He is critical of some authors mentioned in the previous section. He argues that a move away from identity politics, like Yuval-Davis and Mohanty make, makes it even more difficult to fit the experience of pious women into the intersectional framework. In line with Braidotti and Bracke's postsecular critique, Singh observes negativity in intersectionality. He states that intersectional theorists only define differences when the groups defined by them (lower class, people of colour, women) are oppressed. This is problematic, because this negative focus on differences does not leave space for people to form an identity simply because they are proud of belonging to a certain group. When we reject identity politics, 'black people' or 'Muslim women' can no longer form an identity group because they are proud of their share culture or history. They can only present themselves as such, when talking about the oppression of their identity. And thus, intersectionality – especially without identity politics – does not seem able to accommodate positive or affirmative aspects of agency (ibid., p.664).

A possible critique against Singh is whether pious or religious women should not only be included in the intersectional framework when they experience a certain form of oppression, whether that is sexism or religious discrimination or an intersection of both. One could argue that if certain Muslim women are completely happy with their situation, there is no need for them to feel included in the intersectional discussion. Indeed, they do not desire to fight some form of oppression. And if they are *not* happy with their situation, for example because they experience discrimination, this means they

do want to fight a certain form of oppression. Therefore, they match the discourse of intersectionality, and can be included in the coalition, also without identity politics.

However, as Singh also argues (2015, p.670), even if Muslim women want to resist discrimination, they should still be able to identify with the discourse of intersectional theory in order to take part in a coalition. As Mahmood and Braidotti showed, current secular feminist discourse (as present in intersectional theories) is still opposed to religion and religious agency. Therefore, Muslim feminists looking for a way to fight discrimination, might still be excluded by an intersectional coalition.

2.5 RELIGION AND FEMINISM IN PRACTICE

The research on how feminists can work together across the religion divide, is still scarce, like the literature on intersectionality and religion. The only research on this topic in Europe comes from Nella van der Brandt. She dedicated her doctoral research to questions of religion and secularity among feminist movements in Flanders, Belgium (Van der Brandt, 2014). Although she did not focus primarily on an intersectional framework, nor solely on Muslim pious women, she does pay attention to the collaboration between Muslim and non-Muslim feminists in movements like BOEH!. Her research departs from the oppositional pairing of religion and feminism, both in Belgium and in feminist theory. From there Van der Brandt 'explores how the visions, priorities and strategies of various feminist organisations and groups create understandings about the relationship between religion and women's emancipation' (ibid., p.8). An analysis of five Flemish feminist movements, through interviews and written sources, brings her to the conclusion that the concepts of religion and women's emancipation cannot be separated in feminism. Instead, they will always be constructed together, in a specific local context. She states that '[w]hile many voices in the academic literature criticise and deconstruct one of the two concepts or both' (ibid., p.308) the real critical work and reinvention of the relationship between religion and emancipation takes place within feminist movements (ibid.).

Since she states that the deconstruction of religion and emancipation always takes place in a local context, Van der Brandt does not draw a final theoretical conclusion from the different strategies she observed in her study. She states that exactly because of the differences and contradictions within feminism, different situations will always urge feminist actors to choose different strategies (ibid., p.312). However, she does come up with one central insight that counts for all situations: '[T]hat feminism cannot productively work towards change without considering gender as always constructed in tandem with ethnicity, religion, class and sexuality' (ibid.). Although Van der Brandt does not explicitly use the phrase here, this can clearly be explained as a reference to intersectionality. She

seems to state that intersectionality should always be used as a framework, and that religion should always be considered a factor in this intersectional approach.

Other interesting – and for this thesis very relevant – results come from the case studies Van der Brandt presents in her thesis and in her later 2015 article ‘Feminist Practice and Solidarity in Secular Societies: Case Studies on Feminists Crossing Religious–Secular Divides in Politics and Practice in Antwerp, Belgium’. She shows for example that feminist group *ella* explicitly employs an intersectional framework to be aware of power differences among their members (Van der Brandt, 2014, p.224). This is also how they explicitly address not just sexism, but also racism as an important issue¹⁵.

Van der Brandt’s analysis of BOEH! shows a different strategy. Rather than emphasising differences between women within the group, they use a solidarity approach that Van der Brandt links to Yuval-Davis’ transversal politics (ibid., 139; Van der Brandt, 2015). BOEH! members, according to Van der Brandt, are critical of the tension between white and non-white feminism, and of the power implicated in the construction of the categories of ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ women (Van der Brandt, 2014, p.132). To end this power difference, BOEH! stepped away from identity politics and started to solely speak of ‘we’, whether talking about secular or Muslim women, veiled or un-veiled.

On top of that, they make another interesting strategic choice. In order to liberate Muslim feminists from the tension between being feminist and being Muslim, as created in Western Europe, BOEH! applies a language centred around women’s free choice and human rights (ibid., pp.123-127). In light of the postsecular critique I outlined above, this is remarkable at the very least. As Van der Brandt also states, ‘[i]t could be argued that a feminist argument based upon the notion of women’s free choice is in current West-European political and cultural contexts hardly radical’ (ibid., p.126). The BOEH!-women apply the language that authors like Mahmood and Braidotti are critical of. However, Van der Brandt argues, BOEH!’s discourse links freedom to issues of religion and the veil, in a context where feminism and liberalism is usually expressed as secular, as opposing religion, and especially as opposing Islam (ibid., pp.126-127). Therefore, through their discourse, BOEH! reconstructs the concepts of feminism and religion and the relation between the two (ibid.).

In a 2015 case study in Antwerp, Belgium, Van der Brandt observes the same tactics in the approach of feminist group *Motief* (Van der Brandt, 2015). Like BOEH!, these activists speak about the barriers caused by the dominant secular discourse and how they could cross the divide by focusing on emancipation, but disconnecting this emancipation from secularity. This is again a liberal narrative.

¹⁵ For more information on *ella*’s strategies, or on the other feminist movements Van der Brandt explored, I highly recommend reading her dissertation (Van der Brandt, 2014), as I unfortunately cannot do her work justice in this brief summary.

However, one of Van der Brandt's Muslim female interviewees explains that Motief formulates the problems and demands in a secular discourse for strategic reasons (ibid., 504). A 'strategic liberalism' so to say (ibid., p.504).

Van der Brandt's work gives a first insight in how religion and feminism can be united in the Western European context, as well as at how Muslim and secular feminists can form alliances. She states that the deconstruction of religion and women's emancipation takes place in feminist movements. And she shows that in practice, Muslim feminists indeed choose to use different strategies, of which transversal politics is one. And in this process, they sometimes apply secular or liberal discourse for strategic reasons. In the next chapter, I will come back to Van der Brandt's work, as I will show how my research is inspired by hers and how it builds upon her research and goes beyond it.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 RESEARCH QUESTION

As I have shown in the previous chapter, Muslim feminism poses two theoretical challenges to Western feminists in Europe. The combination of these challenges generates a theoretical puzzle that requires further theoretical development. First, the postsecular critique reveals that the dominant liberal discourse in feminism defines agency in terms of fighting oppression, and generally frames religion in opposition to emancipation. Therefore, religious women or feminists are unable to relate to the discourse. Second, I showed that Muslim women in Western-European societies are positioned at the intersection of gender and religion (as well as other factors). I explained how theoretically this poses extra obstacles in the formation of alliances or coalitions between Muslim and white, secular feminists who have different power positions (often unacknowledged). I discussed strategies for collaborations across differences, and showed how the discussion of different strategies is linked to the discussion on identity politics in feminism.

Finally, I analysed the discussion on identity politics and strategies from a postsecular perspective. Many of the strategies for coalition formation that were formulated during the last decades, originate in black feminism. However, black feminists (and intersectional feminists) often focus on emancipation in terms of resistance, which implies a liberal concept of agency. Therefore, I raise the question whether these strategies can be united with the postsecular call for a new or wider conception of agency. As Singh argued, the recent divergence from identity politics could make it especially difficult for Muslim women to define their agency without referring to some sort of coercion.

Acknowledging that the postsecular critique is crucial in order to make feminism inclusive to Muslim women, and knowing that an intersectional approach is important to understand the position of those same Muslim women, also within the feminist movement, this brings me to the central question of this thesis:

How can intersectional strategies for forming coalitions and the postsecular feminist critique be combined, in order to make Western feminism more inclusive for Muslim feminists?

This question is relevant for two reasons. First of all, there is an unmistakeable deficit in the theory on this topic. As authors before me stated (Bilge, 2010; Van der Brandt, 2014; Singh, 2015), religion is rarely integrated in intersectional analysis. The theoretical puzzle as formulated above shows that it is theoretically relevant to examine and theorise on the intersection of gender and religion, and the implications this intersection has for formulating an inclusive feminist theory.

Furthermore, a societal urgency exists to address this question. The reality of Muslim women in the (Western-)European context poses a strong challenge to feminist theory as it is. As I showed in the introduction, Muslim feminists are not just fighting the patriarchy, they are fighting islamophobia (and other forms of racism) as well. In this struggle, they are frequently opposed by white, non-Muslim feminists, rather than supported. As BOEH! in Belgium shows, Muslim feminists sometimes feel the need to organise themselves in new, separate movements. This indicates that European feminism does not always represent their perspectives, wishes and interests. Moreover, as I showed earlier, feminist discourse in Europe even contributes to the stereotypical image of the oppressed Muslim woman, thereby worsening their position. Since this discourse is related to the discourse of academic feminist literature, it is urgent that these problems are addressed on an academic level.

3.2 RESEARCH METHOD

In order to answer the research question, I interviewed five Dutch Muslim women, who all participate in some way in feminist debates. Two factors are relevant for explaining why it was important to conduct these interviews. First, as I explained above, both the position of Muslim feminists in Europe and religion as a factor in intersectional theory are highly undertheorised. Therefore, the answer to my research question does not yet lie in the literature. My thesis thus requires either to transform concepts from e.g. black feminism strategies to the context of Muslim feminism in Europe, or to develop new theory and concepts.

Secondly, I am a white, non-Muslim (non-religious) native Dutch feminist. I value standpoint epistemology not just in activist practices, but also in academic work. Consequently, I am aware that from my position, I will evidently have blind spots considering Muslim feminism. In order to either translate or develop concepts and strategies relating to the intersections of gender and religion, it is crucial to listen to those who have already been working on these issues far longer (and closer) than the average academic feminist. I therefore think Van der Brandt is right in saying that we should look at the practice of feminist movements (Van der Brandt, 2014, p.308).

Consequently, I interviewed a total of five Dutch Muslim women, all somehow engaged in the feminist debate in the Netherlands, in order to learn from their experiences and views. Originally, my intention was to also interview Muslim women who do not identify as feminist, but are engaged in e.g. women groups or with causes concerning women. I thought (and still think) these women could help me point out the exclusionary practices of feminism, since they apparently do not recognise themselves in feminism. Unfortunately, it was not easy to find these women with my current network¹⁶ in a limited

¹⁶ Which is also an important impulse for me to reflect on how inclusive my own network is.

time frame. During the course of this research, I realised that it can also be an advantage to focus on Muslim women who do identify as feminists or are involved in feminist debates. Since this thesis focusses not only on the exclusionary sides of current Western feminism, but also looks for strategies to make feminism more inclusive, it is valuable to talk to women who already have some experience with and knowledge of the current feminist field in the Netherlands, and possibly with collaborating with non-Muslim feminists.

I selected the respondents through purposive sampling (also known as judgement sampling) (Ritchie et al., 2014, pp.113-114; Marshall, p.523). Purposive sampling implies that I actively searched for the most productive sample with regard to my research question (Marhsall, 1996, p.523). Because I wanted to acquire detailed information on one phenomenon, namely Muslim feminism within the Dutch feminist landscape, I aimed to create a homogeneous sample (Ritchi et al., 2014, p.114). this means that all respondents share a couple of relevant characteristics. In this thesis, I selected my interviewees because I knew they were all Muslim Dutch women who were somehow involved in discussions on the position of women. (I did not know if they all identified as feminist before I started the interviews.) I found the women through my personal network, because of their contributions in the media or by attending lectures and public debates on Muslim or Islamic feminism.

Although my thesis focuses on the intersection of gender and religion, there are of course many other factors of influence on the experience and, accordingly, on the embodied knowledge of the women I interview. Therefore, I tried to make the group of women I interviewed as diverse as possible. I ended up interviewing five women who all had different cultural backgrounds. All of them grew up (for the biggest part of their youth) in the Netherlands, but their parents originate from Somali, Turkey, Pakistan, Suriname, Morocco and the Netherlands. Consequently, they have different skin colours and ethnicities. Four women were raised as Muslim, one was raised in a Christian family and converted to the Islamic religion later in her life. At the moment of interviewing, four women wore headscarves, one of them did not, none of them wore face-covering garments. The women grew up in different parts of the Netherlands, both in cities and villages. At the moment of our conversations, they all lived in cities and only one of them lived outside of the urbanised West of the Netherlands ('Randstad'). Four of them have attended university, and those four were still in some way engaged in doing research. All interviewed women participated in the feminist and public debate in the Netherlands, either through media performances, academia, panel discussions or (local) politics. Although they all identify as feminist, their views on feminism vary. While some of them clearly identify with human rights, others are more critical of the liberal framework (see section 4.1). However, for most interviewed women, I only learned about their exact standpoints during the interviews.

This group of respondents is clearly not a perfect representation of Muslim women or Muslim feminists in the Netherlands. In particular, the over-representation of women with an academic background might influence the results of this research. These women are often familiar with the postsecular theories I presented in the theoretical framework. This can be an advantage, since it simplifies the translation from the interviews back to the theoretical question. However, their knowledge of authors like Mahmood also influences their perception of the feminist reality in the Netherlands. Furthermore, it is important to also reproduce the knowledge of Muslim women that did not attend university, as they have valuable (whether different or similar) insights that should be taken into account.

Finally, it is very important to note that a master thesis only provides the possibility to interview a limited amount of people. Dutch Muslim women, and even Muslim feminists, include a huge variety of people with their own views and experiences. Therefore, the results from my interviews can give a first impression and direction for answers to my research question. This study offers an exploration of possible solutions to the challenge postsecularism poses to intersectionality, but it cannot give a final, comprehensive conclusion.

3.3 RELATION TO VAN DER BRANDT

This is not the first research that examines the practice of activist Muslim women in Europe in order to unite feminism with the experience of religious women. Both my research question and my approach resemble Nella van der Brandt's doctoral thesis (2014). However, three important differences exist between her study and this thesis, that will explain not just why my exploration is different, but also how my work builds on Van der Brandt's research and provides new insights.

First of all, one of Van der Brandt's main conclusions is that the deconstruction of concepts like religion, secularity and emancipation, as well as feminist strategies, can only be studied in a specific local context (ibid., p.308). Her research was situated in the Belgian political and societal landscape. A similar research in the Dutch context could lead to new insights, since Muslim feminists here are confronted with a different political system, different laws and jurisdiction regarding e.g. headscarves and veiling, and a different secular structure and context (Wintle, 2000). Cases of public bans on veiling have been going on for a longer time in Belgium than in the Netherlands¹⁷. This might partially explain why Muslim

¹⁷ BOEH! has its origins in the outrage when at the start of 2007, the Antwerp city council decided to put a ban on wearing a headscarf for all civil servants (Van der Brandt, 2014). In the Netherlands, a first legal discussion on the issue erupted when in 2001, a Muslim woman was told she could not work in the court while wearing a hijab. The difference, however, is that she went to court and won her case (Bracke, 2007). It was only more recently that women were legally prohibited from executing jobs or accessing public spaces because of their moderate clothing (Ezzeroli, 2017; Winterman, 2018).

feminists organised themselves sooner in Belgium¹⁸. BOEH! recently celebrated her 10-year-anniversary in 2018. In the Netherlands, Muslim feminists already raised their voice, but they are only now making plans to unite in their own movement (A. Topolski, January 8 2018, personal communication).

A second difference with Van der Brandt, is that I write this thesis in the field of Political Theory while she approached the topic from the perspective of Comparative Cultural Science. Consequently, although she analysed the way in which both religion and women's emancipation are constructed within the Belgian feminist movements, and while she considered their strategies, and gave a very solid introduction to the academic postsecular discussion, she did not reflect on the implications of her research for those theories or for feminist coalition strategies. My thesis focusses more on making theoretical interventions. I did not just use the theoretical strategies to identify the practices of the interviewees, but I also used my interviews to reflect on the theories and make a normative contribution to the debate. Furthermore, this thesis will focus to a bigger extent on the influence of power structures and power relations. Specifically, intersectionality is the starting point of my research problem, question and analysis. Van der Brandt's work and findings often relate to intersectional theory and power, and her attention for intersections of gender, race, sexuality and religion are clearly recognisable in her texts. However, intersectional theory is not the point of departure in her research¹⁹. As a political theorist, I come up with new insights by putting intersectionality central to my analysis and addressing how Muslim feminism could fit the intersectional framework, especially since the intersections of gender and religion are so undertheorised.

Finally, Van der Brandt's findings also led me to a new question. As I described in the previous chapter, her research shows that movements like BOEH! and Motief still apply a very liberal discourse, focused on free choice and human rights. This does not rhyme with the postsecular debate that is going on in feminism. In Van der Brandt's interviews, one Muslim Motief-member stated that this is mainly a strategical choice aimed at fighting islamophobia and sexism in a liberal, secular context (Van der Brandt, 2012, p.169). This makes me question whether such a strategy can be regarded as a way to make feminism more inclusive, or whether it is merely a strategy in which Muslim feminists

¹⁸ To be clear: I in no way imply that discrimination against Muslim women in the Netherlands is of a lesser degree, nor do I state that political discourse surrounding headscarves and veils is less harsh. But legal restrictions on wearing this religious dress, can threaten Muslim women's position more directly. It was also such an explicit ban (or plans for one) that sparked the start of BOEH!.

¹⁹ Van der Brandt only explicitly refers to intersectional theory in two occasions. At first in her methodology section (Van der Brandt, 2014, pp.19-21). Here she does emphasise her attention for the role of power and intersections of gender, religion, race, etc. while collecting and analysing her data. The second time she refers to intersectionality is in her analysis of ella, the feminist movement who call themselves intersectional.

compromise their own perspective in order to be heard. As I believe this question requires further research, it is one of the questions I addressed in my interviews.

3.4 INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH

This thesis does not only reflect on and develop intersectional theory, I also conducted my research and reflections from a political and intersectional perspective. As Lisa Bowleg formulates it:

'Simply put, intersectionality researchers are charged with the responsibility of making the intersections between ethnicity, sex/gender, sexual orientation (to name just a few) and the social inequality related to these identities, explicit.' (Bowleg, 2008, p.322)

This means that through the whole process of writing this thesis, I kept the importance of power positions in mind, and the role factors like gender, religion, class and race play in the power positions of the women I interview and the context in which they experience and share their perspectives. This requires me to not just look at differences between 'Muslim women' and 'white secular women' or 'Muslim women' and 'Muslim men', but to rather pay attention to the sociohistorical context in which these different groups were produced, and how power hierarchies between the groups were created (Crenshaw 1989; Bowleg, 2008). Unfortunately, this thesis does not permit me to make an extensive analysis of the historical context of feminism, secularism and islamophobia in the Netherlands. Instead, I shortly reflect on these topics in my analysis (see sections 4.1 until 4.4).

As Van der Brandt (2014, p.19) rightly points out, contextualisation is not just crucial for understanding the position of the interviewed women, but also for the concepts I apply in this thesis. 'Religion', 'secularism', 'women', 'Muslim', 'feminism' and 'emancipation' are all terms that have been constructed within a certain power dynamic. As demonstrated in section 2.1, the way these concepts are defined and applied produces power. It is important to acknowledge that these concepts do not just have a personal meaning and interpretation for the women I talk to. The dominant understanding of these concepts is shaped by the way in which privileged people use them, and therefore these meanings can harm the power position of the women who fall into their categories. A good example of this is the way in which 'Muslim women' in Western Europe are stereotyped as oppressed (Van Es, 2017).

Moreover, it is important to realise that this thesis also produces and reproduces knowledge. Hence, my definitions and applications can have consequences for the lived reality of Muslim women²⁰.

²⁰ For further reflection on the knowledge produced in this research, the consequences and my responsibility as a researcher, see section 5.1 of this thesis.

Precisely for this reason, I did not formulate fixed definitions of ‘feminism’, ‘Muslim feminism’ and ‘secularism’. These concepts are all contested, and if I would have determined the definition prior to the interviews, I would be the one controlling the frame of the interview, thereby influencing the power positions of the interviewees. Instead, I asked the interviewees how they themselves define ‘feminism’ and ‘Muslim feminism’, and whether they identify as either of them²¹.

3.5 INTERVIEW METHODS

I already discussed the importance of standpoint epistemology and intersectionality for this thesis. This is also relevant for my interview technique. I am aware of my own position as a white, non-religious researcher when I enter a conversation with (sometimes non-white) Muslim women. The interviews I conducted are ‘expert testimonies’ (Cole, 2008): both through their experience and, in some cases, their research, these women are highly informed on the topic of this thesis. Nevertheless, as a researcher, I will always have an advanced power position, since I am the one asking the questions and interpreting the answers in an analysis. Different feminist researchers have developed ideas on how to overcome the hierarchical relationship between researcher and informant by using participatory interviewing methods (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009, p.62; Van der Brandt, 2014, p.32). These methods implicate that as a researcher, I can be both an insider and an outsider (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). On the one hand, I can be the one asking the questions, while on the other hand, I can bring in my personal role by engaging in the conversation as myself and maybe answering questions the interviewees ask (ibid.).

Participatory interviewing methods are relevant for my thesis, as I started this research not just from academic interest, but also from a personal curiosity. That point of departure has implications for my positionality as a researcher. Since I identify as a white, non-religious, intersectional feminist, I belong to the study’s subject. The reason I chose this research topic, is partly because I, as a feminist, want to acquire knowledge on how to become more inclusive and relate in a better way to Muslim female feminists. I made the conscious decision to present my personal motivation in the introduction of this thesis. During the interviews, even though I did not plan on it, the narrative occasionally switched from saying ‘Muslim female feminists’ and ‘white, non-religious feminists’ to ‘you, as a Muslim woman’ and ‘me, as a white, non-religious feminist’ – both on my side and on the side of the interviewees. I think this is valuable. It is a way to make my positionality explicate in the interviews and thesis and, very

²¹ I do not consider ‘Feminism’ to be a concept that can be defined and applied to ‘test’ if a person is feminist. Rather, a person is only feminist if they define themselves in such terms.

important, to make myself vulnerable in the interviews and by that, shift the power balance between interviewer and interviewee.

In order to sufficiently address these considerations, I conducted in-depth interviews. John M. Johnson writes that in-depth interviews 'commonly involve one-on-one, face-to-face interactions between an interviewer and an informant, and seek to build the kind of intimacy that is common for mutual self-disclosure' (2001, p.103). I interviewed my respondents face-to-face in a location of their choice, to make sure they felt at ease. In-depth interviewing is a convenient method to access the voices of marginalised groups (Hesse-Biber, 2007). It allows me to access the interviewed women's ideas, thoughts and memories in their own language (Legard, Keegan and Kit Ward, 2003, pp.141-142; Reinharz, 1992, p.19). This is especially relevant for this thesis, seeing that it is important that the interviewees get the space to define their own concepts and identity in order to create a less hierarchical relationship between me as a researcher and them as the respondents, as I explained in the previous section.

Hence, I made use of an informal semi-structured interviewing method: I formulated the basic questions that I wanted to discuss during the interview²², but at the same time, I allowed myself to ask additional questions and to change the order of the interview based on the answers and the natural course of the conversation (Van der Brandt, 2014, p.33; Hesse-Biber, 2007). This enabled me to verify that I got the information I needed to answer the central question, while at the same time permitting the respondents to share their own thoughts and definitions of concepts. In doing so, I enabled them to (partly) take control over the course and content of the interview, and thus gave them a stronger power position in the conversation.

After conducting the interviews, I transliterated and anonymised them. I send the transcripts to the interviewees, for them to check and to comment if they changed their mind over some of their statements. Unfortunately, I could not append the transcripts of the interviews to this thesis, because the testimonies often involved personal details and anecdotes. Therefore, it would be too easy to trace the identity of the interviewees.

²² For the list of questions I used, see Appendix A (in Dutch) and Appendix B (the English translation).

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter will explore the outcomes of the interviews and relate them back to the theories and issues as discussed in the theoretical framework. As announced in the methodology chapter, I interviewed five Dutch Muslim women. Those five meetings added up to 6,5 hours of conversation. Not surprisingly, the five different women gave five different perspectives. However, as I show below, some experiences and views were clearly reflected in all or most of the interviews. Those views form some of the central points of my analysis. On other topics, the women's answers varied, sometimes because their views differed, but often because they were not sure about the answer and made contradictory statements. I will also reflect on these contradictions, since such moments of hesitance can be very informative of the difficulty of the issue, the different considerations these women have to make and the societal context that makes these issues so difficult for them.

In my analysis, I follow the issues as presented in the theoretical framework, which is in accordance with the sequence of the interview questions. First, I look at the women's definition of (Muslim) feminism and whether they identify as such. Especially that last part is telling for the context in which these women shaped and express their ideals. Secondly, I illustrate the Dutch feminist landscape as it currently is according to the interviewees, and the position of Muslim women within feminist movements. Subsequently, I reflect on the comments the respondents made on the relation between feminism and religion, relating their remarks back to the postsecular feminist critique I discussed in the second chapter. From here, I demonstrate how my findings relate to an intersectional framework: both in the way the interviewees experience their position in Dutch society, and in their position in the feminist and public debate in the Netherlands. Next, I present their views on the complex issue of identity politics. Finally, I discuss their commentary on strategies, both on the topic of forming coalitions and for the way a feminist coalition should communicate their message to the outside world. I will analyse how this relates to the different strategies I discussed in section 2.3, specifically Yuval-Davis' transversal politics. This analysis results in a normative strategical framework with implications for Yuval-Davis' work.

4.1 'MUSLIM FEMINISM'

Until now, I did not yet present a definition of 'Muslim feminism' in this thesis. I deliberately did not do this, because 'Muslim feminism' is a contested concept. Not just because different definitions are given and the concept therefore seems to be fluid (Tihidi, 2003, p.138). It is also contested because the category is often formulated and used by Western or Western-based feminists, putting the label upon others, and is therefore 'highly politici[s]ed' (Tihidi, 2003, p.141). Precisely for this reason, I find

it important to let the interviewed women define for themselves if they identify as such, and if so, what the definition of 'Muslim feminism' is.

While the concept of 'Muslim feminism' is being used more and more both in the media and in academics (this thesis included), part of the interviewees clearly pointed out why they have an issue with the phrase. 'Once more a new frame', two of them replied. One other agreed that the term could be problematic. These women have two objections. First of all, 'Muslim feminism' is another category, another label, that is put upon people who are both Muslim and feminist. They point out that women (including themselves) are often categorised as 'Muslim feminist' by others, without their consent, rather than identifying as a 'Muslim feminist' themselves. This resistance against being given another label reminds of Yuval-Davis' critique on intersectionality (2015, p. 93). Rather than investigating the intersection of being Muslim and woman or Muslim and feminist, this new concept 'Muslim feminism' could (or, according to these women, has) become a new essentialist category.

Secondly, they oppose the implication of the label. 'It implicates that there is a "normal" feminism and that you have some sort of "special" feminism', one of them explains. Another interviewee calls it a 'sensation label', which adds to the image that it is exceptional for a Muslim woman to have feminist views. From this perspective, the concept of 'Muslim feminism' excludes Muslim people from feminism, instead of making feminism more inclusive. The phrase 'Muslim feminism' is then part of the problematic discourse at which the postsecular critique is aimed²³.

However, two respondents did not have these objections to the concept, and recognised 'Muslim feminism' as a strand of feminism, only one of them identified as Muslim feminist. In their definition of the term, they make a distinction between 'Muslim feminism' and 'Islamic feminism'. They define these concepts using a formulation by Anne Dijk (2018). 'Muslim feminism' then refers to people who are fighting for the position or rights of Muslim women within society. 'Islamic feminism' is a feminism that is based on Islamic texts, and which deduces values like gender equality or women's rights from the Islamic religion²⁴.

Although their opinions on 'Muslim feminism' differ, all five interviewees do identify as both Muslim and feminist. And they all say their feminism is inspired by and interwoven with their religion, either through their religious upbringing that connected them to Islamic women groups, through Islamic

²³ The realisation that the concept of 'Muslim feminism' can be problematic or harmful to the position of Muslim women, did make me reconsider the use of the phrase. I decided to put the phrase between brackets from this chapter on. For further reflections on my contribution on the discourse per this thesis, see Chapter 5.

²⁴ One other interviewees made a distinction between these two strands of feminism as well. However, she gave different definitions. In this research, I will hold on to the two definitions as given above, as they are in line with the formulation of Anne Dijk, and because the woman who gave the deviant definitions already declared she was not sure if they were right.

values and texts on equality, or via female role models from the Quran. This seems to fit the definition of 'Islamic feminism' as given above, but only two women explicitly identified themselves as such during the interview²⁵.

The women's definitions of feminism vary, centring values like 'freedom of choice', 'self-determination', 'equal rights for men and women', 'emancipation' and 'questioning gender norms'. The variety of their feminist visions, is shown in the fact that one respondent mentions Mona Eltahawy and Seyran Ateş as two of her feminist examples, while two other interviewees mention exactly these women as feminists they cannot relate to because of their secular or liberal interpretations of feminism. As one of the women states: 'How complicated and undefinable the term ['feminism'] is, is already a definition.' The diversity in the respondent's answers shows that (although not surprisingly) Muslim female feminists²⁶ represent many different views and positions, which is an extra reason to be cautious with an essentialist notion of 'Muslim feminism'.

Remarkably, multiple interviewees mention that they do not always explicitly identify as 'feminist'. One of them states:

'When I'm talking to fellow Muslims, I often don't mention that I'm a feminist. Because they often associate feminism with something Western. [...] And at the same time, when I'm talking to non-Muslim people, I do call myself a feminist. Because I find it important to show them that feminism is not contrary to religion.'

Similar arguments are given by other interviewees. At the same time, one of them also purposefully uses the concept 'feminism' when she is in her Somali community, because it provides her with tools to talk about injustices that females experience. By linking feminism to religion, she creates space in her (Muslim) surrounding to address these issues.

These quotes show that while these women might define 'feminism' in a certain way, they are still affected by the visions and definitions others have of feminism. Being categorised or categorising themselves as 'feminist', affects the position of these women, both within their Muslim community and in the Dutch society. This is relevant for my thesis, because it shows that an intersectional approach is necessary even to understand the effects of 'being feminist' on women's experiences and position. If I, as a white non-religious feminist, decide to identify as 'feminist', this may lead to some angry response, but people generally do not question the possibility of me identifying as a feminist.

²⁵ It is important to note here, that not all women were explicitly asked if they identified as 'Islamic feminist'.

²⁶ I will use the phrase 'Muslim female feminist' to refer to a woman who identifies both as Muslim and as feminist, to prevent confusion with 'Muslim feminist' in the sense of a person who identifies with 'Muslim feminism'. During the interviews, which were in Dutch, I did this by switching from 'moslimfeminist' to 'moslima feminist', a nuance that is unfortunately not available in the English language.

However, if a Muslim woman identifies as ‘feminist’, she receives suspicion from some Muslims for being too ‘Western’ and from secular feminists for being religious. This difficulty shows the necessity to deconstruct ‘feminism’ and to understand that feminism does not have to be ‘Western’ or is not contradictory to religion (see section 4.3). Furthermore, the described struggle shows why it is important to be cautious with framing women as ‘feminist’ or ‘Muslim feminist’, since it affects their position. Or as I stated earlier: the definition and application of concepts produces power (see section 3.4).

4.2 THE FEMINIST LANDSCAPE IN THE NETHERLANDS

Talking from their own experiences and from what they observe in feminist debates, all five women seem to agree that feminism in the Netherlands is not yet inclusive. The image that arises is one of a fragmented feminist landscape, in which different groups²⁷ of feminists work on their own goals, but fail to collaborate, ‘stand up for each other’ or ‘really form alliances’. One interviewee says:

‘That all these different groups exist, is a good thing. I’m not saying that we need to become one melting pot. The fact that these groups exist is good and it causes a buzz. It ensures that we are having a conversation now about women at the top, women with hijab... [...] But what is our overarching goal? It lacks sometimes, we fail to articulate it.’

Even more important in the light of this thesis, is the place of Muslim female feminists within this landscape of fragmented movements. Although some women indicate that there is a rising interest for Muslim feminism in certain debating centres and e.g. in women’s history institute Atria, some of them also state that Muslim female feminists are mostly still separated from the broader feminist movement. Others point out that some feminist groups (mainly socialist feminists) are more inclusive than others. As a result, one of the woman states, ‘there is a lot of struggle going on, that is not seen now’ because white, non-Muslim feminists are not (enough) engaged in conversations with Muslim women or women of colour. And *when* a Muslim woman participates in the public debate, she is often one of ‘ten usual suspects, but I know there are more’, one woman claims.

²⁷ The Dutch word that is used by the women in the interview is ‘hokjes’, a typical Dutch word that refers to people stereotypical groups or categories of people. The interviewed women e.g. speak of ‘the Opzij-women’, ‘left-wing, white feminist’ or ‘socialist feminists’. ‘Muslim feminists’ would be another example of such a ‘hokje’.

4.3 FEMINISM AND SECULARISM

The key to understanding why these Muslim female feminists are often excluded from the bigger feminist movement in the Netherlands²⁸, lies in the postsecular critique as discussed in the second chapter of this thesis. Interestingly, none of the five women I interviewed, regards the present-day Netherlands to be a secular state. Two of them describe the Dutch relation to secularism as the ‘secular illusion’: the believe by most Dutch people that the Netherlands is a secular country, while in reality there are Christian national holidays and politicians that regularly refer to the ‘Judo-Christian’ culture. One of the consequences of this illusion, is that Muslim women are ‘othered’, as one of the woman formulates it. They are categorised as different, deviant from the norm, especially when they are veiled.

All five interviewed women are regularly confronted with the false assumption of non-religious Dutch people that their religion and their feminism collide, or, in the case of the women wearing a headscarf, that they are oppressed. These confrontations vary from people asking one woman how it can be that ‘such an intelligent woman is religious’ and explicitly doubting if women can really be feminist while wearing a hijab, to surprised responses when the women tell others that their feminism is inspired by the Islam. An assumed opposition between feminism and religion is apparently prevalent among white Dutch feminists. One interviewee links this adversary to a ‘trauma’ many older feminists have from the institution of the church:

‘White feminists in the Netherlands still adhere very much to the idea that religion is backward. That it should be taken out of the way, before we can work on emancipation. And that emancipation equals “the more sexual freedom, the better”. But that is not what Muslim women want.’

Consequently, these feminists are not capable of recognising or not willing to recognise Muslim females as feminist. When asked how she would describe the feminist movement in the Netherlands, one respondent answered:

‘I don’t dare to talk about the feminist movement, but I do see a slightly elitist, maybe even colonialist feminist movement. One that really presents white privilege, thinks it knows best, and wants to be the helping hand for other women. It is a movement with a lot of good intentions, but it doesn’t realise how colonial those good intentions are. It wants to change things, even though the other feels no need to change. By taking of the headscarf for example, or pleading that religion is harmful for you. And this movement is still really dominant.’

²⁸ This does not mean that no other factors are at play. E.g. that many white feminists may not know Muslim female feminists, or that other forms of racism cause the exclusion of Muslim women. However, all interviewed women recognised the postsecular critique to be a problem in the Netherlands.

Feminism in the Netherlands thus encompasses the false logic of feminism and religion as being incompatible, that was problematised by Mahmood (2005), Bracke (2008) and Braidotti (2008) in their postsecular critique. The urge to 'help' Muslim women indicates that these white feminists still have the assumption that those Muslim women are oppressed without being aware of it. This is what Bracke marked the 'false-consciousness discourse' (2004). Mahmood's analysis of Western secular feminists' inclination to think of pious women in terms of contradictions ('How can it be that they think of themselves as feminist?') therefore fits the Dutch context.

Although the interviewed women did not mention their 'agency', it is possible to draw conclusions regarding the feminist conception of agency, based on my interviews. I already showed that the discourse in which feminism is contrasted against religion, is problematic because it denies Muslim women's agency and therefore excludes these women from the movement. However, this is not the only harmful implication.

In section 2.1, I showed how Braidotti (2008), in line with Bracke (2008), formulated two challenges that the postsecular critique forms for the western (liberal) feminist perception of agency. The first one was to link subjectivity to religious agency. In a binary perception of subjectivity as produced through either subverting or confirming norms, feminism lacks the capacity to acknowledge the agency of women who perform actions out of a love for God, because of their spiritual devotion. This is clearly a problem that some of the interviewed women struggle with. One of them notices that at her job – working for an organisation that fights for gender equality – 'they continuously differentiate between my Muslim identity and my female identity'. Other women also notice that in the public feminist debate, there is often no space for them to share their religious motivations. Moreover, they notice that fellow Muslim women adjust their language to fit the liberal norm. One of the interviewees is involved in the establishment of a new collective of Dutch Muslim women. She recalls a discussion they had when she raised Islam as a source of inspiration.

'There was so much resistance. By Muslim women! Both with and without headscarf. They said: "No, human rights shape our language." Like human rights are unproblematic. And the fact that they want to define their struggle in such a way, is telling. Of course I understand it can be for strategic reasons, but it's also because society forces them to think exclusively in this way. Because it's the only way to get a bit of space.'

Later she adds:

'We talk about "free choice" all the time. And of course it's my free choice to wear my hijab. But if wearing a hijab is part of your conceptualisation of Islam and God, and of what God asks you to do as a religious person, it makes me wonder: How much freedom is that really? Is it not simply part of your religiosity? [...] So when hijab-wearing women formulate their action as 'this is my choice', I miss the religion in their statements.'

The second challenge as formulated by Braidotti, is the need to end oppositional consciousness. According to this critique, feminism needs to recognise that political subjectivity is not *always* formed through fighting norms or battling oppression. Interestingly, while the interviewed women did find it important to give space to pious agency, at the same time they all considered feminism to be about questioning norms or fighting injustice. Most of the consulted women talk about their feminism or activism as something that is 'necessary' because of the state of society. One of them told me: 'I really want feminism to be unnecessary. Feminism would not exist if everything was well and good. So feminism exists because it wants things to change, and that implies some kind of struggle.'

So this implies that in essence, all Muslim female feminists are already recognised as having agency through the Western liberal feminist discourse. Considering the fact that they identify as feminists, automatically indicates that they engage in some kind of struggle or fight, even if the battle they are fighting (e.g. for the right to wear a hijab) is connected to their religion. This observation can be explained by the theoretical work of Kim Shively (2014). She states that Mahmood's postsecular critique tends to focus on just one normative system while analysing individual ethical cultivation. However, Shively argues, individuals are usually exposed to several layers of authority, as they live under a multiple normative systems. Therefore, the submission to religious norms that Mahmood observed, often involves resistance to another set of norms (ibid.). I argue that this is also the case for the interviewees. While a religious action, like wearing a hijab, is a form of submission according to the Islamic set of norms these women deal with, it is at the same time an act of resistance in the liberal, Western set of norms of the society they live in. One hijab-wearing interviewee says: 'In order to simply be myself, I need to commit resistance. Frankly the fact that I'm myself and that I dress the way I dress, is already disruptive in certain circles.' So indeed, as Shively remarked 'resistance and submission, autonomy and conformity, are deeply entangled with one another' (ibid., p.476).

Does this mean that the postsecular call for a redefinition of agency, is irrelevant? I would argue it is certainly not. The above observation shows that all women who identify as feminist, are recognised as beings with agency through the liberal, negative perception of agency. This means that all women in a potential feminist movement could recognise themselves (partly) in a discourse centred around resistance and struggle. However, this narrative does not present the full story of many Muslim female feminists. Therefore, a feminist movement that does not acknowledge pious agency, potentially forces

religious feminists to adjust their discourse to fit the liberal framework. Take the interviewed woman who told me that her colleagues constantly differentiated between her Muslim identity and her female identity. She can function in this organisation, and she is enthusiastic about some of the work they do, but she also recalls thinking: 'Don't you people see me, or what?'. Another woman, who does not wear a headscarf, noticed how difficult this feeling was when she called for online solidarity after extreme-right politician Geert Wilders posted an Islamophobic video. The response was disappointing.

'I have 5000 Facebook friends. They all find me sweet and fun, but not right now. And then I thought to myself: How can this be? Apparently you only like a part of me. Up to here. But when I post something that is important to Muslims, to me and my children, I get the response: "Yes, but I'm actually anti-religion."'

Although she is not talking about pious agency per se (simply about fighting islamophobia), this quote does help to understand the problem at hand. The thought of Muslim women only being accepted 'partly', is valuable in realising the importance of the postsecular critique. It shows that even though Muslim female feminists may be able to fit into a feminist movement by e.g. saying that they wear their hijab out of 'free choice', it does not always present their main or full motivation. Therefore, they need to silence a part of themselves in order to be recognised as rational, and therefore human, as Asad (1996) and later Mahmood (2005) formulated it. I argue that this is problematic. If intersectional feminism focuses on how structures in society affect people's position, this should also mean that there is attention for people's ability to express their own identity and have their motivations and worldviews recognised. Further, the recognition of pious agency is also urgent for ending the stigma of Muslim women as oppressed, or lacking agency, which is important for pious Muslim women who do not identify as feminist as well. Accordingly, if feminists in the Netherlands really want to form an inclusive movement, in which Muslim women feel recognised, I argue that the recognition of pious agency is crucial.

4.4 AN INTERSECTIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON MUSLIM WOMEN

Muslim women in the Netherlands are not solely affected by being women, nor solely by being Muslim, but specifically by being *Muslim women*. This is illustrated for example by the variety of anecdotes the interviewees gave on them having to defend themselves against critical comments. Multiple women recall how since 9/11, they were suddenly questioned by fellow pupils, students or people on the streets about women's rights in Islam, or about why they were wearing a headscarf. One white woman tells that people often assume she is converted 'by a man'. Although Muslim men are also confronted with many prejudices, this specific questioning of their freedom and agency (see the last section) comes from the intersection of these women's gender and religion. The same is true for the

discrimination faced by women wearing a headscarf. Because of their clothing, these women are always visible as a Muslim and therefore vulnerable for islamophobia. This has consequences on the job market, and – as one woman remarks – ‘it seems to open the door for everyone to give his or her opinion on you’.

These examples illustrate how an intersectional framework can help understand the position of Muslim women in e.g. the Netherlands. The interviewees also mention different factors that affect their experience as woman in the Dutch society, like race, not being able-bodied, having a migrant background and class. And at the same time, one of them talks about her own privilege with reference to her female Muslim family members in Pakistan.

Besides providing a useful perspective on which factors affect the position of Muslim women in society, an intersectional approach can also help in understanding the struggle of Muslim female feminists. In section 4.1, I already analysed the different implications for these Muslim women when they call themselves ‘feminist’ in different contexts. This corresponds to the multiple battles Muslim female feminists have to fight, as most women explain. One of them speaks of a ‘triple struggle’.

‘As a feminist, you fight for women’s rights. Being a Muslim woman who is feminist, you fight multiple battles. Against the Dutch society, for being a feminist. But also within feminism, because you’re Muslim. And within the Muslim community, because you’re engaged with feminism altogether.’

Consequently, in the Netherlands, it can cost more effort and energy for Muslim women to fight a feminist fight than for secular, white feminists. According to the interviewees, this is a valid reason for many Muslims who fight for women’s causes, to not identify as feminist.

Furthermore, when a Muslim woman does identify as feminist or decides to participate in the feminist spectrum, it is more difficult for her to engage in the public debate. ‘As a Muslim woman, it is difficult to even *move* in the public debate, because there are so many fixed frames that you are easily put into.’ All women complain about the lack of representation of Muslim women in public discussions and in the media. Hence, an intersectional approach can help us understand the paradox surrounding Muslim women in the Netherlands. Considering structural intersectionality, their religion reinforces the effect of sexism on their lives, and visa versa their gender amplifies the effects of islamophobia. This should mean that feminism pays extra attention to and fights for Muslim women’s interests. However, a political intersectional approach shows that Muslim women do not get the chance to voice their interests as they are directly forced into frames that are harmful to their position. This means that an extra effort needs to be made by white, secular feminists in order to make feminism inclusive.

I will analyse what the interviewed women commented on strategies in order to achieve this, in the coming three paragraphs.

4.5 IDENTITY POLITICS

In the theoretical framework of this thesis, I showed that the question of whether or not to apply identity politics as a strategy, divides the feminist field. Earlier in this analysis, it became clear that Muslim female feminists are underrepresented in both the general feminist movement in the Netherlands and in the public debate and mainstream media. Identity politics could be an answer to this: by making an effort to get more Muslim women on the symbolic and literal stage, where they can speak up about the issues they face (or other issues).

During the interviews, the difficulty of identity politics became clear through the fact that none of the five women had a clear stance pro or contra the issue. Most women moved along different positions in different parts of the interview, and while realising this, stated they found it a complicated issue. The main argument against identity politics, is these women's aversion of carrying labels like 'Muslim woman' or 'Muslim feminist'. Two women literally state being 'tired of all those labels'. One of them asked rhetorically: 'Can I please just enter the conversation as myself, not as "the Muslim" or "the Black woman"?' She declares these categories are too fixed. 'If we really want to aim at equality, we need to dive into complexity, into messiness. It's impossible to catch that in ten or even twenty labels.' As an example, she mentions the difference between rich and poor black people. 'They may share their racial identity. Both black. But the experience of the rich black person is not the same as that of the poor black person. How can you catch that [in an identity]?' This intersectional critique is similar to the critique first Crenshaw (1989) and later Yuval-Davis (2006) had on identity politics: it can result in essentialist identity categories that leave no space for necessary attention for differences within the categories. It also reminds of Mohanty's critique on binary notions of oppression (Mohanty, 2003): while black people may be oppressed in a racist structure, one black person can still have a different position than another, or even be an oppressor themselves as part of the upper class.

Furthermore, one woman emphasises the power that can be exercised through these identity categories or frames. 'It is not always comfortable to be put in such frames. Because... who determines them? It's not me.' She links the formation of these frames to white privilege: certain (white) people have access to the system and can determine the frames, while it is very difficult to change the system for other people. An example she poses is how Statistics Netherlands (the national centre for statistical research: CBS) defines who is and who is not a 'person with a migrant background', and thereby who is and who is not determined 'the Other'.

On the other hand, these same women also emphasise the possible value of identity politics. The woman who criticised labels for being too fixed, states: 'I also want to be able to make use of those identities [i.e. being black, being Muslim] when I'm talking about my specific experiences.' She refers to using her identities to articulate and contextualise experiences and formulate differences, like distinctions between secular and Muslim women, or white feminists and feminists of colour. Identity politics then offers the possibility to analyse individual's secular or white privilege and engage in a conversation about the harm done by racist, sexist or capitalist structures. These are tools (offered by identity politics) that the interviewed women also apply during the interview. One woman talks about 'white privilege', while another talks about 'white saviour complex'²⁹ and several of them talk about the injustices they experience 'as a Muslim woman'.

The key to when these women are willing to apply identity politics seems to be whether it is 'functional'. One woman for example found it functional when she could speak from her own Muslim identity to address islamophobia towards her non-Muslim acquaintances. When discussing the lack of diversity and female Muslim representation in e.g. panel discussions or media, the interviewed women all agree that it is important to make sure more Muslim women are seen and heard. Identity politics could be an answer by making sure there is a black body, a Muslim woman, a trans Jewish person, etc. in a panel. The interviewed women do support this, because it is 'still necessary'. 'When talking about islamophobia, bring Muslims to the front. When talking about racism, do the same with people of colour.' However, some of them emphasise that diversity should be about more than just ticking the boxes. 'If you select a panel, it should also be diverse on the basis of content. It should not just be a checklist, like: this person represents all black people, that person all women. [...] A diverse panel in terms of colour or gender is step one, but after that we need to go deeper and look at the messages people are bringing.'

The idea of diversity in content, although it may sound obvious, gives more insight into when identity politics is exactly 'functional'. The reason why representation is important to these women is not just to 'shift norms', as one of them mentions. That can be achieved simply by putting bodies of colour or Muslim people on stage. Moreover, diversity is important because otherwise minorities will not be heard. Identity politics should be used to actually make sure people of colour, Muslim women or trans people get more influence and power.

²⁹ Saviour complex can be explained a sense of Western or white superiority, whereby Westerners believe that they are more advanced than other people, and therefore assume the other needs help in achieving freedom or justice. Jusuf Jailani (2016) explains how this applies to the situation of veiled women in the West.

Two of the women I interviewed are involved in the formation of a collective of Muslim women in the Netherlands, similar to BOEH!. When asked why such a collective is important, one of them answers:

'For visibility, for one, but also simply to gain influence. Imagine someone of the collective is attacked online. Or there is a lawsuit. We want to be able to exert pressure together. We do not want just one or two columnists to write about it, but we want to be able to mobilise a hundred people. You simply have more influence with bigger numbers.'

The image that rises is one of identity politics as a necessary evil. The respondents would rather not present themselves or be presented as 'Muslim women', but they are okay with doing this when it is 'necessary'. This can be explained as a form of Spivak's strategic essentialism (Spivak, 1984), that I mentioned in chapter 2. The collective of Muslim women that is taking shape now in the Netherlands, is a clear example of a diverse group of women (they told me about internal discussions on standpoints and strategies) that chooses to present themselves to the outside world as united under one identity, in order to defend their shared interests. From the interviews, I derive that identity politics as a strategy is acceptable, i.e. the end justifies the means, when A) it can genuinely enlarge the influence of the specific group, in this case Muslim women or Muslim female feminists, and when B) there is a focus on content, i.e. people really listen to what those women have to say.

I agree with this vision on identity politics. Although labels can indeed be damaging, and essentialism can marginalise the position of e.g. Muslim women with less material means, it seems necessary in the current Dutch public and feminist debate as pictured above. As long as Muslim women's interests are not heard and/or presented, it can be effective to unite their voices to amplify them and force the public to listen. Although Crenshaw formulated her theory of political intersectionality in a response to the potential damaging effects of identity politics, and her warnings should be taken into account, it might be a valuable strategy to give influence to women who find themselves at the intersection of religion and race.

At last, the interviewees seem to differentiate between identity politics as a strategy for forming feminist coalitions and identity politics as a strategy to engage in the broader, public debate. I will address this distinction in the coming two paragraphs on strategies.

4.6 STRATEGIES: FORMING COALITIONS

Finally, I asked the women I interviewed about strategies to make connections between feminists and build coalitions. How can white, secular feminists form an inclusive movement? How should coalitions be built? Which strategies do they apply? Their answers are a translation from the above findings regarding postsecularism, intersectionality and identity politics to the practical execution in the Dutch

feminist reality. The women all had their own views and doubts, but some overarching themes or strategies stood out. I discuss those in the coming two sections. In order to do so, I focus on two different stages of feminist coalition forming. The first is the actual formation of the coalition. In this section, I will address the questions of how different feminists can make connections and how feminism can become more inclusive. In the next paragraph, I look at strategies concerning the presentation of the coalition to the outside world: Who represents the coalition? Which language is used? What are the goals?

Earlier in this analysis, it already became clear that the feminist landscape in the Netherlands is fragmented, with different groups of feminists that fail to find one overarching goal or really support each other. On top of that, many of these groups are still exclusive to Muslim women and therefore Muslim female feminists do not yet have a fixed, strong position within Dutch feminism (although this might change soon as they are forming a collective). What should happen to make feminism in the Netherlands more inclusive? Based on the interviews, I formulated four preconditions that multiple women named for forming a good alliance. At the end of the paragraph, I will compare the four preconditions to Yuval-Davis' assumptions for transversal politics.

4.6.1 The art of listening

First of all, white, secular feminists need to start listening to Muslim women. Although this seems very obvious, the current fragmentation of the feminist movement shows that it is not yet happening. One of the women I interviewed, kept mentioning 'connecting' as the key word. She is perplexed by the left-wing activist circles in her city, Nijmegen, where activists have inclusive goals, but are still a predominantly white group of people. 'Make an effort', she says.

Learning from the interviews, 'listening' seems to be about more than just engaging in conversation with the other. Even more than simply keeping quiet and giving the other person space to talk. As intersectional analysis in the first part of this chapter showed, not all feminists are equal in the current society and structures. As a result, when e.g. white, secular feminists and Muslim feminists of colour engage in a coalition, they have different power positions, also vis-à-vis each other. As a result, without an active effort to correct for this inequality, white, secular feminists will be dominant in the conversation. Furthermore, the analysis of secularism and feminism in the Netherlands showed that white, secular feminists are likely to have presumptions about Muslim female feminists and might set out a narrative that makes it impossible for Muslim women to engage in the dialogue as themselves. Therefore, it is important to comprehend what 'listening' means for the interviewed women.

One woman is very clear in her wording. 'Let Muslim women determine the agenda', she says when talking about the possibility of forming a BOEH!-like collective in the Netherlands. 'Give priority and preference to the voice of Muslim women within the movement, especially in the start. Non-Muslims can be connected as allies, and together we can determine which actions to take.' This implies that non-Muslim feminists, aware of their privileged position, should consciously let Muslim female feminists take the lead and formulate the goals. This is a radical transformation of the power balance, and therefore probably very effective. I argue that this is a valid demand in a movement that is meant to promote the interest of Muslim women. After all, their experiences give them better insight in the inequalities that they face. Moreover, in a broader feminist movement Muslim women could be taking the lead as well. This does not mean that white, secular feminists cannot have opinions or wishes of their own anymore. However, since I already showed (using Crenshaw's political intersectionality) that without such a proactive strategy, white secular feminists will dominate the coalition, Muslim women's interests should be given priority.

However, even if Muslim female feminists take the lead, this still requires good listening from white, non-Muslim or upper-class feminists, in order to engage with the agenda. In the end, all members of the coalition will have to understand and agree with the goals of the movement in order to be a good ally. So what needs to happen in order to achieve this?

One important requirement for being a good listener is to put your own assumptions aside. A term that is mentioned by multiple women is 'opening up'. One of the women defines inclusion as 'radically opening up to everyone'³⁰. This, she explains, requires an attitude of total equivalence: the assumption that everyone's beliefs and worldviews are equally valuable. A similar point is made by another respondent, who calls for self-reflection and warns against saviour complexes: white feminists should realise that they are not better and do not know more than other feminists. She states:

'If Muslim women state: "This is what is happening to me, this is my experience, this is my view on what I observe in the media", then you need to take them serious. Even if what they say is different from your own experience.'

Important in the process of listening is sharing and learning from others' stories. One of the respondents mentions storytelling as a way through which Muslim women could learn more about secular feminists' relation to the church and religion. At the same time, Muslim female feminists can share their experiences with religion and with racism, sexism or islamophobia.

³⁰ However, she does make an exception for people who are exclusive themselves. In other words: She cannot be inclusive to people who do not recognise the right to exist of herself or others.

These strategies for listening show that being open to others and sharing stories, are meant to include the experiences of Muslim female feminists in the coalition. I believe that moreover, they are essential for making white non-religious feminists aware of the exclusionary mechanisms they (re)produce. Awareness is important for breaking with discriminatory structures. This is the self-reflection one of the interviewees referred to. Therefore, white, non-religious feminists should not only open up to Muslim-women in order to really listen to them, they also need to listen to their stories in order to learn how they can open up. The opening up is then not something anyone can simply start with, but it a learning process (see section 4.6.3). However, if people need the stories in order to become aware and the awareness in order to be good listeners, how can we start? I therefore add that in order to be good listeners, white non-religious feminists need a willingness to learn about their own errors and privileges. With this, the above strategies can help to imply an political intersectional perspective by ending the exclusion of Muslim women from feminism³¹.

4.6.2 Vulnerability

A second precondition for an inclusive feminist coalition, is that the people in the coalition allow themselves to be vulnerable. This is closely related to the requirement of listening and opening up, and can even be understood as a precondition for having a good conversation. Two interviewed women mention ‘vulnerability’ as necessary in order to make a connection. Vulnerability to them means to truly expose yourself. One woman elaborates:

‘It means admitting that sometimes, you simply don’t know things. Be honest. Listen to one another without pretending like we already have all these constituted ideas. It’s the willingness to test yourself and your ideas, to be willing to change your mind. [...] We don’t need to have the same opinion. But I do want you to question yourself, to struggle, to think. That you can admit: “I used to think of it in this way, but now I’m actually not sure how that relates to society or to the conversation we are having.” And then you say: “Actually, I don’t know it all.”’

So while ‘opening up’ already required people to regard all others’ views as equal, ‘vulnerability’ now requires people to actively doubt their own ideas and also show that doubt. Vulnerability in this definition becomes a tool to even out the power balance. The woman I quoted above, calls it ‘the first step’ in feminist coalitions. ‘It creates an equilibrium. You share something that is hard for you, that puts you in an vulnerable position. I do the same, and then we are equal. Regardless of the labels that are put upon us.’

³¹ Remarkably, four women mention Anja Meulenbelt as *the* example of inclusive feminism in the Netherlands and praise her for noticing Muslim female feminists and really listening to them. Therefore, it might be interesting for future research to take a look at her strategies.

I argue this interviewee is right: the concept of 'vulnerability' can be helpful in the question of this thesis. As I already explained using intersectional theory, feminists need to make an active effort to create equality within a coalition. Without this effort, they move and talk within a space that has the same structures as society: where liberal, secular views on feminism are likely to be the norm and white, non-Muslim persons are likely to dominate. This means that without interventions, Muslim female feminists are in a vulnerable position due to a skewed power balance. By making an active effort to put themselves in a vulnerable position, together with the other people in the conversation, white, non-Muslim, or higher-class feminists can at least improve the balance. And when the conditions for the conversation are improved, there is space to work on mutual relations.

4.6.3 Coalition is hard work

The third precondition for building coalitions is that coalition members should focus on the process and the struggle it entails. Something that all women emphasise in the interviews is that the conversations, the listening and the opening up, are difficult. However, they also add that this is alright. The woman who elaborated on the concept of 'vulnerability' adds a quote from rapper J. Cole (2014): 'There is beauty in the struggle.' Often we focus too much on the results of collaborations, she argues, while what we should focus on is the struggle it takes us to get there.

The same tendency is displayed in the other interviews. The struggle, the unease or the difficulty these women mention, often refers to the task of self-reflection. If I, as a white feminist, engage in a conversation about racism, it can be uncomfortable because the conversation will also be about how I benefit from a racist system or about my role in this structure. One of the women gives an example:

'Non-white people already know very well what it's like to reflect on your own position. We are constantly told: "you are not neutral because you are brown and wearing a headscarf." Why would a white person be neutral? The conversation about this topic should be held more often. I understand that it's a sensitive subject, but it's all the more important to talk about.'

Here she implies that exactly *because* a conversation is difficult to have, it is important to have it. This is an important remark. I derive from this, that a focus on the process is important because it is a key to self-reflection. Feminists can never form a coalition if they are not critical of their own positions in society, of their own privilege and their own role within the coalition. A focus on the unease in the conversation and on making this unease explicit, is crucial for learning how to overcome obstacles for forming a coalition. therefore, an evaluation of this unease is essential for being able to even have a coalition.

Reflecting on the strategies as discussed in chapter 2, this implies that Reagon (1983) was correct: making coalitions will never be easy. Dean's understanding of reflective solidarity, as used by Mohanty (2003), is in line with the precondition I formulated above. As she argued, solidarity will always be an achievement that requires effort and hard work. The strengths of these theories is that they focus on the process, acknowledging the difficulty of collaboration. Thereby, they also create space to learn from this process. This is important because the 'opening up', the 'listening' and 'being vulnerable' that I mentioned in the previous sections, will not be successful, nor will they be effective, at once. As I argued at the end of section 4.6.1, all these actions require people in the coalition to learn and improve themselves and only then can the movement become inclusive.

4.6.4 Shared values

The fourth precondition is that feminists need to search for similarities. In order to form a coalition across their differences, feminists will need to find a common goal or value at which their actions will be aimed. Reflecting back on the first paragraph of this chapter, the women I interviewed mentioned central values of their feminism like 'emancipation', 'free choice', or 'equal rights'. Although most of them motivate these central values from an religious perspective, the interviewees also underline that they often have these values in common with non-religious feminists. Therefore, if all these different feminists engage in conversations and white, secular feminists actually listen to Muslim women, they will find shared standpoints. One of the interviewees says: 'And then you can establish: we think the same, but everyone has different approaching paths. That is a proper basis for a movement.' All women agree that they can collaborate well with feminists who have a non-religious motivation for the same values as they have. Another woman explains:

'I link justice to a divine order. I believe I'm on earth to fight for justice. But others might say: "I simply think justice is a good thing." They might motivate their struggle from that foundation. But we can find each other in the common value, in this case justice. So I think it's very easy: your personal motivation is different, but the values you fight fore are shared.'

Interestingly, the shared values that the interviewed women name, can all be related back to a form of oppositional consciousness. So again, it shows that these feminists are united by a shared struggle or fight against norms or oppression. One of the women even states: 'If we would have a good conversation, I think we can find a lot of similarities: reasons why we were forced to think about feminism.' While the women have motivations that can be explained as religious agency, the common value under which they are likely to unite with other (secular) feminists, fit the liberal framework of agency as resistance and negativity. My interviews were a good example of this. I, as a non-religious feminist, engaged with these women in conversations about their experiences as women and their

views on feminism. These women shared both their religious motivations and arguments that fit into my own oppositional narrative. Consequently, I could relate to their goals and make a first attempt at understanding their true motivation³².

4.6.5 Transversal politics and the question of identity politics

The listed strategies for forming a coalition across differences, resemble Yuval-Davis' strategy of transversal politics as discussed in chapter 2. Reflecting on the three assumptions Yuval-Davis formulated for activists (1999), I will compare her view on forming alliances to that of the women I interviewed. First of all, there is an acknowledgement for standpoint epistemology. The narrative the interviewed women use, clearly reflects the idea that every person speaks from her own experiences. Hence the importance of the listening and storytelling. Secondly, the strategies also mirror Yuval-Davis' requirement of 'difference by equality' (ibid., p.95). The interviewee's emphasis on self-reflection and awareness of people's own privilege, implies that they find it necessary that members of a possible coalition acknowledge the implications of different propositions. And their statements on being open to alternative views, implies that they oppose any form of hierarchy because of those different propositions. Based on my interviews and reflection, I have an important remark here. That activists oppose hierarchy, does not mean that they can prevent it from entering the coalition. Coalitions are not created in a vacuum, separated from society and its structures. As I explained earlier, power structures and therefore sexism, racism, classism, etc. will be influential. The strategies of listening, vulnerability and focussing on the process, that I formulated earlier, are therefore valuable additions to Yuval-Davis' transversal politics.

Thirdly, Yuval-Davis stressed the independence of positioning, identity and values. This translates into the belief that two women may both be Muslim, but can still have very different views and ways of presenting themselves. This is where Yuval-Davis diverts from identity politics. Although the women did not make explicit statements about it, the reality of their self-identification does prove their diversity. As I analysed in the paragraph on 'Muslim feminism', different interviewees had different views on the definition of feminism and important role models. However, having different identities and values in reality, does not imply that the women oppose identity politics altogether. As I discussed in the last paragraph, they can still apply forms of strategical essentialism. Nevertheless, I argue that this would not be necessary in the stage of coalition forming. One of the women explicitly stated: 'If we're in a conversation or when we're collaborating, I want to be able to relate myself to you without

³² Although, it is also important to note that the interviewed women still adjusted their explanations so I could relate and understand. So this shows again that forming an inclusive coalition, requires work.

all those labels.’ This is possible, I argue, because while it is important to have a big share of Muslim women in the coalition, those women can then talk from their own personal perspective during discussions and conversations. As follows from the acknowledgement of standpoint epistemology and the ‘difference by equality’ principle, transversal politics strategies leave space for the Muslim women to share all their experiences and, if they want to, relate them to their position as Muslim women. However, it is not necessary for them to speak on behalf of ‘Muslim women’ as a group, since every member of the coalition (whether Muslim or non-Muslim) can share their story and therefore, in a coalition with multiple Muslim women, their different experiences and interests will be heard.

At the same time, another interviewee made the statement that she wants Muslim women to determine the agenda. Do these two ideas collide? Is this last statement a call for identity politics, and an end to transversal politics? I argue this is not necessarily the case. Although this statement does of course require the identification of ‘Muslim women’ within the movement, it does not mean that every one of those women is expected to speak on behalf of all Muslim women or that all Muslim women are treated as one group. Furthermore, does giving Muslim women priority in determining the agenda, collide with Yuval-Davis’ principle of differences by equality? I do not think so either. Although Yuval-Davis is very concise in her explanation of this concept (1999, p.95), the denial of hierarchy based on gender, race, religion or class, is very likely meant to avoid racism, sexism or other forms of discrimination within a movement. On top of that, the idea to give priority to Muslim women’s voices within a coalition, does not imply that Muslim women are higher in hierarchy. Rather, it is a recognition of the Muslim women’s disadvantaged in Dutch society (as Yuval-Davis requires), and therefore a strategy to correct for this disadvantaged power position.

In conclusion, Yuval-Davis’ transversal politics is a suitable guideline for forming inclusive feminist coalitions between Muslim and non-Muslim feminists. The emphasis on storytelling and people sharing their own experiences, complies with the theory’s ‘rooting’. ‘Shifting’, i.e. listening to other’s experiences and trying to understand their position, can be achieved through listening, opening up and being vulnerable. At last, the idea of a movement of people who have different positionings and motivations, but a shared goal or values, matches Yuval-Davis’ concept of formulating ‘common transversal epistemology’ as she explains in her 2015 article ‘Situated Intersectionality and Social Inequality’ (2015, p. 98).

This also implies that in the stage of coalition formation, identity politics is not necessary. Jakeet Sing’s worry that without identity politics, feminism leaves no space for pious agency, is not grounded for the process of forming a coalition and interaction between the coalition members. The storytelling

that is part of the 'rooting' enables religious women to share their pious motivations if they want to. A move away from identity politics, does not mean that they need to hide their religious identity.

4.7 STRATEGIES: EXTERNAL ACTIONS

Now I have formulated strategies for forming a coalition, the next question is: which strategies should the coalition apply in the outside world? Who can represent the movement? Should identity politics not play a role when members engage in the public debate? What should the message be? According to Yuval-Davis' strategy of transversal politics, it should make no difference who converts the central message of the movement. Because of the rooting and shifting, all people within the coalition understand and can articulate the problems and goals.

However, as I showed earlier in this analysis, the interviewed women still have an issue with the lack of diversity and representation of Muslim women in the media and in public discussions. Therefore, they do formulate some strategies to enforce the presence of Muslim women or women of colour. Since white, secular feminist currently have easier access to media or public discussions, some women suggest they use this privilege to create space for fellow feminists as well, e.g. by sharing the stage when they are invited to speak³³. At the same time, white, non-Muslim feminists may have access to an audience that Muslim women cannot reach. They should then use this influence to advocate for Muslim women's interests and share their stories (while giving credits).

What lasts, is the question of which discourse should be used to formulate the goals of the coalition to the outside world. I established in the last paragraph, that common values or goals should have been formulated in what Yuval-Davis calls common transversal epistemology. However, the reasons for supporting these goals, differ for different feminists in the coalition. While a Muslim female feminist might infer the values from Islamic texts, another woman might support the values with liberal arguments. One very essential lesson from the interviews, is that it is important that the religious motivation of the Muslim female feminists should be vocalised both within the feminist movement and within the public debate. In the first place because this is necessary to counter the secular believe that feminism and religion are oppositional. And secondly, because only then the religious agency of Muslim women is recognised, i.e. Muslim female feminists are only then fully recognised as self-determining human beings, as I explained in the section on identity politics.

³³ There is a lot more to say on this topic, and the interviewees did give interesting suggestions. However, this thesis does not permit me to elaborate on this.

This implies that not just the coalition's shared goal or value should be communicated to the outside world, but also the different argumentations. One of the women formulates her view as:

'Show all those differences. There is one central message. This is like a coatstand, with ten hooks. Everyone embodies, or is aware of, the central message. And every individual is one hook. I think that it's beautiful if you can form a movement that gives scope to those different perspectives and, even though they are contradictory, puts them next to each other.'

Another woman talks about stories that 'do not need a filter. People can be confronted with a completely different perspective that is not adjusted to their own sensitive world.' And finally, one woman states: 'When you are digestible for the white crowd, it's a problem. And then you need to think: What am I doing to be accepted?' This refers, again, to how Muslim women are often resisting norms simply by being themselves. In order to be accepted, they are inclined to adjust their discourse. This is the 'filter' that prevents confrontation. However, these women should be able to express themselves the way they are and, as I established in the previous section, the confrontation with diverging norms is valuable.

Therefore, it is important for some of these Muslim female feminists to show their motivations, including their religious arguments, in the public debate. The question that is important considering this thesis then is: Can this be done through rooting and shifting? Or does it require identity politics? In other words: Can I, as a white, non-religious feminist listen to their stories about pious motivations, Islamic texts and submission to God, and then repeat these motivations in a discussion, interview or opinion piece? Or will they lose meaning, as I will always translate them in my own non-religious vocabularies?

In order to complexify these questions, I want to go back to BOEH!, the Belgian organisation that fights for the right to wear a headscarf, and that uses strategies of transversal politics according to Van der Brandt (2014). Another remarkable part of their strategy is 'strategic liberalism' (Van der Brandt, 2015, p.504). The women I interviewed that were familiar with BOEH! were all very positive about the existence of such a coalition. However, one woman was explicitly critical of the language BOEH! uses to formulate their stances. 'When talking about Islam and why women wear a headscarf, it's formulated too much in liberal terms. And I find that difficult. Where is the religion?'

It is of course impossible for me to know if BOEH!'s choice for 'strategic liberalism' is a direct result from the tactics of rooting and shifting. However, when secular and Islamic feminist need to search for common values in their fight for e.g. the right to wear a headscarf, these shared formulations will always be in terms of 'freedom of choice' and never in terms of 'love for Allah'. When dealing with issues of e.g. poverty or racism, I as a middle class, white woman, can listen to the experiences of other

women and reproduce them in conversation with other people. However, this seems more difficult when I as a non-religious feminist need to reproduce a story in the narrative of divine love and spiritual experience. I therefore argue that Yuval-Davis' rejection of identity politics does not work when feminists need to work together across religious-secular differences. The rooting and shifting can be a good strategy to create understanding and search for common goals among the people within the coalition. But identity politics is still necessary to properly translate these goals to the general public and media, as otherwise the pious agency of the Muslim female feminists will be lost.

Without identity politics, member of the movement can still fight for the shared goals and values and they can be successful in doing so. This means they might be able to improve Muslim women's positions from the perspective of structural intersectionality. They can e.g. fight against Islamophobic laws and protest when a woman loses her job over wearing a headscarf. However, it is also in the interest of Muslim women to be fully recognised in society, including their pious agency and motivations. From a political intersectional approach, I therefore argue that an inclusive feminist movement should fight for this interest as well. In order to do so, the feminist coalition needs to express pious motivations in the public debate, and thus – as I explained above – needs to apply identity politics.

5. CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I explored the possibilities to combine the postsecular critique in feminism with discussions on strategies and identity politics in intersectional theory. On top of that, I examined the intersection of religion and gender in intersectional theory for the position of Muslim women both in Dutch society and in Dutch feminism. I started my research from a personal perspective, motivated by the observation that Muslim female feminist in Belgium and the Netherlands were not only badly represented in the current feminist landscape, but were even opposed by Islamophobic discourse among some secular feminists. As a white, non-religious intersectional feminist, I wondered how feminism could become less exclusive and how non-Muslim and Muslim women could form coalitions in order to fight for the interests of Muslim women.

I formulated two challenges for combining postsecular critique with an intersectional framework. The first one is the fact that intersectional feminism has an inherent focus on inequalities or forms of oppression that should be opposed. This entails a focus on oppositional or negative agency, which is exactly the definition of agency that Mahmood, Bracke, Braidotti and other postsecular feminists critique. However, my research showed that Muslim female feminists can identify with oppositional agency. My question focuses on forming coalitions and the reason for starting such a coalition would always be to unite in the fight against injustice or oppression. This desire for change counts for Muslim female feminists just as much as for other feminists. In fact, the struggle against injustice should be the shared goal that unites Muslim and non-Muslim feminists and enables them to collaborate across their differences.

However, this does not mean that the postsecular critique is not relevant. Contrary, the interviews showed that the problems formulated through the postsecular critique, are indeed relevant in the Dutch context. Muslim female feminists are regularly confronted with stereotypes on religion and fellow feminists sometimes fail (or refuse) to recognise them as feminists. The feminist landscape in the Netherlands is fragmented, and currently predominantly exclusive towards Muslim women. So regarding the postsecular critique, an effort needs to be made to achieve two things. Firstly, the harmful image of the opposition between religion and feminism needs to be tackled, both in the public discourse and among feminists, in order for Muslim women to even be given a chance to engage in feminist movements. Secondly, when they are part of this feminist movement, Muslim women should be able to formulate their feminism in their own words, including their religious arguments. If they cannot do this, they cannot present their full self, and therefore are still not truly recognised.

Thus, while the initial focus on oppositional or negative agency in intersectional feminism is not a problem, the feminist discourse does need to be altered to acknowledge other forms of agency as well.

The postsecular critique is correct in this. Feminists should listen to Mahmood's call for feminists to understand the self not just as formed through struggle with social norms, and recognise that agency can also mean that subjects inhabit norms. Not because Muslim female feminists can otherwise not identify with intersectional coalitions at all (they are feminists because they oppose injustice in society), but because otherwise the intersectional coalition does not recognise them. Furthermore, without the acknowledgement of pious agency, Muslim women who choose to submit to Islamic norms and who are not part of the feminist struggle, will not be recognised as conscious women with agency. And that should not be the way a feminist movement frames women, as it would harm the position of these pious women rather than support them.

This brings me to the second challenge in uniting the postsecular critique and intersectional strategies for forming coalitions: the question of whether identity politics should be part of this strategy, and whether pious agency can ever be recognised if feminism departs from identity politics. My research showed that identity politics should not be centred during the formation of coalitions. Yuval-Davis' theory of transversal politics and the according rooting and shifting are valuable guidelines for feminist activists to listen to each other's experiences and thereby finding a common goal.

However, in actions of the formed coalition to the outside world, in the public debate, it is important to not just show the common values and goals. It is important to show the variety of views and motivations different feminists have. Especially because the norm in Dutch or Western society is still to solely recognise negative agency, it is important to express pious motivations and show that they are relevant in a feminist movement as well. Therefore, I argue that identity politics are necessary in the presentation of the coalition to the outside world. It will be valuable if Muslim women talk in public as 'Muslim women' and show both their fight against injustice *and* their religious motivations.

So, how can intersectional strategies for forming coalitions and the postsecular feminist critique be combined, in order to make Western feminism more inclusive for Muslim feminists? In this thesis I argued that, first of all, religion needs to be included as an important factor in intersectional analysis. Therefore, it is important to recognise pious agency, along with negative agency. In the process of forming coalitions, it is important to recognise that members of the coalition will always have unequal power positions. In order to make sure that also marginalised members are heard, feminists will need to make an effort to listen to each other and others' experiences, regardless of the labels they carry. They need to make themselves vulnerable by acknowledging their own mistakes and insecurities. They need to realise that this will be a struggle and, rather than just focus on changing the outside world, feminists should also focus on the difficulty of these conversations and put energy in self-reflection and –improvement. In the end, mutual goals and values can then be formulated. Yuval-Davis'

transversal politics is therefore relevant in the formation of a coalition (taking the aforementioned additional guidelines into account). However, identity politics is still important while engaging in the public debate. If (and only if) Muslim women are comfortable with doing this, it is valuable when they enter interviews, protests or discussions as 'Muslim women' to express pious agency and challenge the opposition of religion and feminism. I therefore argue that Jakeet Singh (2015) was right in stating that, in order to integrate religion as a factor into intersectional theory, we cannot (yet) let go of identity politics in the strategies feminists apply.

5.1 REFLECTION

This thesis did not just produce insights in light of the research topics, it also motivated me to critically reflect on my position as a white, non-religious, female, feminist researcher. To engage in critical or feminist theory, should always mean you are also critical of you own position, the knowledge you (re)produce and the consequences this has for people and structures in- and outside of the academic field. I forced myself to engage in a permanent critical reflection on my role in this research, on the language I used and my relation to the women I interviewed. A very important part of this was that I ended every interview with a question on what these women thought of me doing this research. They delivered some very beautiful, sometimes confronting, but always helpful critique. I will share two important insights I gained in the process of writing this thesis.

First of all, as I already acknowledged in section 3.4, by conducting this research I also produce and reproduce knowledge on Muslim women and Muslim female feminists. As one of the interviewed women rightly pointed out: 'Even if you have the best intentions, you are part of a society in which the population category you are researching, is problematised. Indirectly, you are contributing to this.' She refers to the rising interest in Muslim women and Muslim female feminists in academia. Even when this is coming from a critical perspective, aimed at fighting islamophobia, researchers are at the same time studying 'Muslims' as a group of its own and therefore we are constantly making them into the Other. For example, while I critique non-religious feminists for the secular language they use and their presumptions on religion and feminism, at the same time I run the risk of contributing to these harmful discourses. One way in which I did this, is by focusing on 'Muslim feminism' at the start of this thesis. In the interviews, I learned that some (although not all) women regarded this as another way in which Muslim female feminists were 'othered' and as a narrative through which it was emphasised that the combination of Islam and feminism is exceptional. One woman told me that, by using the term 'Muslim feminism' in my interview request, she felt like I put a label on her, before the conversation was started. I heard the critique and during the course of the interviews, I changed from asking about the position of 'Muslim feminists' to 'Muslim female feminists', which led to opener conversations. I also

changed the concept in this thesis from chapter 4. In this way, I hope to not only limit the harm, but also make the reader aware of the importance of being careful in using this concept. It can be fine to use it when a woman identifies as 'Muslim feminist', but we should be hesitant in making 'Muslim feminism' into a research object, and we surely should not put the label on women without being sure they identify as such.

Secondly, I am still struggling with my role as a white, non-religious researcher vis-à-vis this research topic. My own positioning will always result in the white, non-religious researcher questioning or studying the Muslim woman as research object. Although there are interview techniques and methods – which I hope to have applied at the best – to shift the power balance between researcher and researched, I will in the end always be the one making the analysis and writing the conclusion³⁴. At the same time, I also think research on racism should not be executed solely by people of colour, and research on sexism should not just be done by women. Just like the feminist struggle should not just be fought by women and protests against islamophobia should not just come from Muslim people. What is important for me, is that the focus of this research was not the actions of the Muslim female feminists, but the actions of non-religious feminists, like me, and how they could become more inclusive. The role of the women I interviewed was then not to be studied, but to provide me with information from their expert perspective.

In the end, many of the conclusions I have drawn in my analysis regarding strategies for forming coalitions, are also applicable to this research. As a feminist researcher, it is just as important to avoid a focus on secular agency or exclusionary discourses, to try to alter the power relations in an interview as much as possible and open up to the views of the people I interview. Or, as one of the interviewed women formulated it: 'Like I said, Muslim women should be listened to more. You can take that role.'

5.2 FUTURE RESEARCH

While I made a first step in trying to combine intersectional theory with the postsecular critique (together with authors like Bilge, 2010; Van der Brandt, 2014; and Singh, 2015), this is hopefully only the start of a necessary debate. I will now make four suggestions for future research, on topics and questions that I was not able to address in this thesis.

³⁴ An interesting technique that could be applied if I or other researchers had more time, would be to write the analysis, and then send it to the interviewed women for them to comment on. Although I did let the women check the transcript, and asked them to let me know if they changed their mind on some statements, I did not ask them for their opinion about my interpretation of all the interviews altogether.

First of all, it is still very valuable to explore the role of race. It would be valuable to know how race, religion and gender intersect. This can be understood in two ways. Firstly, the influence of race on the experiences of Muslim women. Do the experiences of black, brown and white Muslim women differ? How should this be taken into account in the formation of coalitions? On top of this, there is the question of racialisation of Muslim women. Anya Topolski (2018) already wrote about the 'co-constitution of the categories of race and "religion"' (ibid., p.59), which she labels the religion-race constellation. Islamophobia, she argues, is an important example of how a religious group is racialised. Alia Al-Saji (2010) writes how such racialisation works on veiled Muslim women in Western Europe. This field should be further theorised, and it would be interesting to see how this translates to feminist strategies.

A second question that is not properly addressed by this research, is how feminists (whether Muslim or non-Muslim) should relate to Muslim women who do not identify as feminists, but might still have opinions or struggle for the position of Muslim women. As I addressed in the analytic chapter of this thesis, it would be wrong and harmful to force them under a feminist label. This does, however, not mean that it is not important for intersectional feminists to also relate to these women, learn about their point of view or possibly form coalitions with them to support them. Should this be done? Should we then get rid of the 'feminism' label? Or are these women not interested in collaborating and would this only be done out of 'saviour complex'?

Thirdly, the interviews in this research were now all aimed at Muslim women, due to the lack in time or space to include even more people and because I felt that I needed to speak to at least five Muslim women to get a grasp of their views. However, it would be valuable if future research also looked at the views and discourses of A) Non-Muslim feminists: How do they relate to the postsecular critique? What is their view of Muslim women? So: In what ways are they still exclusive? And B) Muslim men: How do they relate to Muslim female feminists? Are they supportive of Muslim women's struggle? How can they be included?

Finally, there is still an important group that I did not explicitly address in this thesis. Those are Muslim lesbians, homosexuals, bisexuals, transsexuals, queers and other-identifying (lgbtq+). Since the public discourse on the opposition of feminism and Islam is possibly even stronger on the opposition of Islam and lgbtq+-rights, it would be valuable to look at their position and how they are (or are not yet) included in the lgbtq+-movements in the West. And if they are still excluded, what should be done to change this?

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (DUTCH)

INTRODUCTIE

- *Is het oké als ik dit interview opneem?*
- *Stel jezelf eerst even voor. Wie ben je? Waar houd je je mee bezig?*

(MOSLIM)FEMINISME

- *Wat is uw beeld bij moslimfeminisme? Hoe zou u het definiëren?*
- *Identificeert u zich als moslimfeminist? Waarom wel/niet? [Indien 'ja'; welke waarden zijn van belang in jouw feminisme]*

HIERNA TWEE MOGELIJKE VRAGENLIJSTEN: EEN VOOR VROUWEN DIE ZICH WEL IDENTIFICEREN ALS MOSLIMFEMINIST, EEN VOOR VROUWEN DIE DAT NIET DOEN (ZOZ).

INDIEN JA

- *Waarom is moslimfeminisme van belang? Voelt u die urgentie specifiek in de Nederlandse context? Wat is het doel van moslimfeminisme? Wat wilt u bereiken? [Onderliggende drijfveren.]*
- *[Eventueel] Hoe verhoudt dit zich tot uw ervaring van religie? Draait (moslim)feminisme dan altijd om verzet? Sommigen zeggen dat juist die nadruk op verzet niet aansluit bij de beleving van moslimvrouwen, hoe zie jij dit?*

POSITIE MOSLIMVROUWEN IN NL

- *Wat is volgens u de positie van moslimvrouwen in Nederland?*
- *Welke factoren dragen daaraan bij? Is Nederland een seculier land? Welke invloed heeft dit op moslimvrouwen?*

FEMINISME IN NEDERLAND (postsecularisme)

- *Wat is jouw beeld van de bredere feministische beweging in Nederland?*
- *[Teruggrijpen op eerder genoemde drijfveren. Kunnen ze die kwijt in de huidige feministische discussie in NL?]*
- *Welke plek neemt moslimfeminisme in binnen de grotere feministische beweging in Nederland?*
- *Ervaren moslimfeministen extra drempels op de weg in hun strijd, vergeleken met witte, niet-Moslim feministen? Welke drempels zijn dat?*

VERHOUDING TOT NIET-MOSLIM FEMINISTEN (intersectionaliteit, identiteitspolitiek)

- *Hoe verhoudt u zich tot niet-Moslim feministen? Botst u soms met hen? Hoe komt dat dan? Welke gevolgen heeft dit voor uw strijd?*
- *Hoe kunnen moslim en seculiere feministen samenwerken? Welke rol spelen machtsverhoudingen tussen moslim en (witte) niet-moslimfeministen hier dan? Moeten niet-moslim feministen in deze tijd een stapje terug doen? Kunnen zij ook strijden voor de doelen van het moslimfeminisme? Hoe dan? Moeten zij moslimvrouwen het podium 'geven'? Kunt u een voorbeeld geven van een waardevolle samenwerking?*
- *Moet er binnen de feministische beweging een onderscheid worden gemaakt tussen moslim en niet-moslim vrouwen?*
- *Kun je feministische strijd voeren met feministen die spreken in termen van emancipatie en verzet?*

INDIEN NEE

- *Wat is jouw beeld van feminisme in het algemeen? Identificeer je je wel als feminist? Waarom wel/niet? Drijfveren? Hoe definieer je jou feminisme? Welke rol speelt religie hierbij? Wat vind je van moslima's die zich wel als moslimfeminist identificeren?*

POSITIE MOSLIMVROUWEN IN NL

- *Wat is volgens u de positie van moslimvrouwen in Nederland?*
- *Welke factoren dragen daaraan bij? Heeft het invloed op moslimvrouwen dat Nederland een 'seculier' land is?*

FEMINISME IN NEDERLAND (postsecularisme)

- *Wat is jouw beeld van de bredere feministische beweging in Nederland?*
- *Welke plek neemt moslimfeminisme, volgens jou, in binnen de grotere feministische beweging in Nederland?*
- *Zijn er extra drempels in de feministische strijd voor vrouwen die moslim zijn?*

VERHOUDING TOT NIET-MOSLIM FEMINISTEN (intersectionalisme, identiteitspolitiek)

- *Hoe verhoudt u zich tot (niet-Moslim) feministen? Botst u soms met hen? Hoe komt dat dan? (Welke gevolgen heeft dit voor uw strijd?)*
- *Is het binnen de feministische beweging relevant of iemand moslima is?*
- *Hoe vindt u het als seculiere vrouwen zich uitspreken over bijvoorbeeld islamofobie? Is het relevant of iemand zelf moslim is in dit debat?*
- *[Hoe kunnen moslim en seculiere feministen samenwerken? Welke rol spelen machtsverhoudingen tussen moslim en (witte) niet-moslimfeministen hier dan? Moeten niet-moslim feministen in deze tijd een stapje terug doen? Kunnen zij ook strijden voor de doelen van het moslimfeminisme? Hoe dan? Podium geven? Kunt u een voorbeeld geven van een waardevolle samenwerking?]*
- *Moet er binnen de feministische beweging een onderscheid worden gemaakt tussen moslim en niet-moslim vrouwen?*

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (TRANSLATION)

INTRODUCTION

- *Is it okay if I record this interview?*
- *Please introduce yourself. Who are you? What are you busy with?*

(MUSLIM)FEMINISM

- *What is your image of Muslim feminism? How would you define it?*
- *Do you identify as Muslim feminist? Why? [If 'yes'; which values are important for your feminism?]*

AFTER THIS: TWO POSSIBLE QUESTION LISTS: ONE FOR WOMEN THAT DO IDENTIFY AS MUSLIM FEMINIST, ONE FOR WOMEN THAT DO NOT (SEE NEXT PAGE).

IF 'YES'

- *Why is Muslim feminism important? Do you feel the urgency for Muslim feminism specifically in the Dutch context? What is the goal of Muslim feminism? What do you want to achieve? [Search for motivation.]*
- *[Possibly] How does this relate to your experience of religion? Is (Muslim) feminism then always about resistance? Some people say that exactly the focus on resistance does not rhyme with the experience of Muslim women. What is your opinion on this?*

POSITION MUSLIM WOMEN IN THE NETHERLANDS

- *What is the position of Muslim women in the Netherlands?*
- *Which factors are of influence on this position? Is the Netherlands a secular country? How does this affect Muslim women?*

FEMINISM IN THE NETHERLANDS (postsecularism)

- *What is your image of the broader feminist movement in the Netherlands?*
- *[Relate back to earlier mentioned motivations. Can they express those in the current feminist debate in the Netherlands?]*
- *Which position does Muslim feminism have in the broader feminist movement in the Netherlands?*
- *Do Muslim feminist experience a higher threshold in their struggle, compared to white, non-Muslim feminists? Why?*

RELATION TO NON-MUSLIM FEMINISTS (intersectionality, identity politics)

- *How do you relate to non-Muslim feminists? Do you sometimes collide? Why? What are the consequences for your struggle?*
- *How can Muslim and secular feminists collaborate? What is the influence of power relations between Muslim and (white) non-Muslim feminists? Should non-Muslim feminists take a step back? Can they fight for the goals of Muslim feminism as well? How? Should they 'give' they stage to Muslim women? Can you give an example of a valuable collaboration?*
- *Should there be a distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim women in the feminist movement?*
- *Can you enter the feminist struggle together with feminists that speak in terms of emancipation and resistance?*

IF 'NO'

- *What is your image of feminism in general? Do you identify as feminist? Why? Motivations? How do you define your feminism? Which role does religion play in your feminism? How do you feel about Muslim women that do identify as Muslim feminist?*
- *What is the position of Muslim women in the Netherlands?*
- *Which factors are of influence on this position? Is the Netherlands a secular country? How does this affect Muslim women?*

FEMINISM IN THE NETHERLANDS (postsecularism)

- *What is your image of the broader feminist movement in the Netherlands?*
- *Which position does Muslim feminism have in the broader feminist movement in the Netherlands?*
- *Do Muslim women experience a higher threshold in their struggle, compared to white, non-Muslim feminists? Why?*

RELATION TO NON-MUSLIM FEMINISTS (intersectionality, identity politics)

- *How do you relate to non-Muslim feminists? Do you sometimes collide? Why? What are the consequences for your struggle?*
- *Within the feminist movement, is it relevant if someone is Muslim or not?*
- *What do you think of secular women that voice their opinion on e.g. islamophobia? is it relevant if someone is Muslim themselves in this debate?*
- *[How can Muslim and secular feminists collaborate? What is the influence of power relations between Muslim and (white) non-Muslim feminists? Should non-Muslim feminists take a step back? Can they fight for the goals of Muslim feminism as well? How? Should they 'give' they stage to Muslim women? Can you give an example of a valuable collaboration?]*
- *Should there be a distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim women in the feminist movement?*