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Femen and Muslima Pride: Locating Muslim Women in a German Landscape

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FEMEN AND MUSLIMA PRIDE:
LOCATING MUSLIM WOMEN IN A GERMAN LANDSCAPE

by

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B.A., Mount Holyoke College, 2011

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FEMEN and Muslima Pride: Locating Muslim Women in a German Landscape

Thesis directed by Associate Professor Beverly M. Weber

Historically, Muslim women in Germany have been externalized from participating in European identity, despite possessing European citizenship. FEMEN's Topless Jihad Day protest places Muslim women inside of a German landscape, though through deeply problematic means. FEMEN demands the liberation of Muslim women from Islam through nudity. Previous research on Topless Jihad Day focuses on the Islamophobic and imperialist tactics of FEMEN, rather than their location of Muslim women within German society. My theoretical framework is based primarily in Judith Butler's theory of performativity, as well as Carrie Smith Prei and Maria Stehle's articulation of "awkward feminism". As a result, Topless Jihad Day distanced itself from other Islamophobic protests that represented Muslim women as outside of German society. The acknowledgment of Muslim women as German opens up the possibility for Muslim activist to gain access to more stable avenues of activism within European public discourses.

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On April 4th 2012, FEMEN staged a topless protest outside of Ahmadiyya-Moschee in Berlin. With words of defiance painted around their exposed breasts, six European FEMEN activists screamed for emancipation on behalf of Muslim women. For less than ten minutes, the six activists shouted out “Fuck your morals” “Free Amina” and “Freedom for women” to passersby. Through visual references to their breasts, FEMEN¹ demanded Muslim women take off their headscarves and shirts for liberation from the patriarchal institute of Islam. Similarly, the FEMEN activists held signs that read “Arab women against Islam” and “Freedom for all women.” In an interview after the protest with Ruptly TV, a local Berlin news network, FEMEN activist Anna Shevchenko said women cannot be free until they renounce their religious affiliation and reclaim their bodies as their own. She continued to say that women can fight against the patriarchy and that breasts were the strongest of weapons (“Germany: Femen Freeze and Scream in Berlin”). The protest in Berlin was a part of a series of international demonstrations called Topless Jihad Day. The title of the demonstrations is indicative of FEMEN’s co-optive nature.

The demonstration was meant to be a protest in solidarity with FEMEN member Amina Tyler in Tunisia, who was taken into custody after an image of her topless protest denouncing Shar’ia law in Tunisia went viral. Consequently, Muslima Pride, a German Muslima activist organization, staged their own counter protest to Topless Jihad Day. Members of the organization stood outside of the same mosque, fully clothed in winter jackets and veils. The activists held signs protesting the Islamophobic rhetoric and co-optation of Muslim women’s voice by FEMEN.

¹ I use the spelling FEMEN because it is how the organization capitalizes its name. It should be noted that there are some published sources that use the lower case spelling.

Muslima Pride held signs in both English and German reading: “Ich bin schon frei” [I am already free], “There is more than one way to be free”, “Islam is my choice” and “Gegen Unterdrückung” [Against Discrimination]. As a result of this counter protest, Muslima Pride’s public activism took a digital platform on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. With fervor, Muslim women across Europe posted pictures of themselves posing with demonstration signs under the hashtag Muslimapride. This is a noteworthy protest for Muslim women in Germany, as no other counter protest in Germany against FEMEN by Muslim women has taken place in public physical space as well as digital space. Moreover, Muslim women are not necessarily visible in public discourse in Germany, even when the discourse is in need of perspective. German feminists often still bind Muslim women to a Western colonial definition of being docile and voiceless. They do not see Muslim women as being capable of entering into public discourses on their own. (El-Tayeb; Ong; Sezgin; Weber). As a result of Topless Jihad Day and normative societal assumptions, Muslima Pride and FEMEN appear to be situated in an opposing, binary relationship.

I argue that Muslima Pride and FEMEN do not exist in a binary relationship. Instead, they exist within a circular relationship, mutually produced by larger feminist developments in response to the privileging of the individual, rather than collective feminist action.² A circular relationship has a processual nature that opens up the possibilities for activism to respond to insufficiencies of other forms of activism. As new feminist activisms emerge, this processual nature becomes awkward, as many organizations have unclear messages, yet they actively insert their opinions and grievances. Activism grows processually via the unfolding, turning back, and

² I rely on Smith-Prei and Stehle’s essay “WIG-Trouble: Awkwardness and Feminist Politics” and Baer’s essay “Redoing Feminism within and outside the Neoliberal Academy” for a discussion of the impact of neoliberalism on feminism. I focus on the neoliberal emphasis of the individual, as it is in opposition in to discourses surrounding the importance of feminist collective activism.

circulating of intended and unintended actions of protests, which is highlighted in the actions between FEMEN and Muslima Pride. Awkwardness relies on the self-conscious relationship between the activists and the public. However, feminist activists use this self-conscious awkwardness to “trouble” or subvert normative societal assumptions, which is seen in Muslima Pride’s protest. They subvert societal assumptions of Muslim women in Germany by public protest. Circularity is a starting point for politically productive discourse, as this also begins the clarification of activist’s messages, even through unintended actions of protest. Through unintended actions, FEMEN is able to locate Muslim women within an inclusive European understanding of identity, rather than through an externalized identity, though in deeply problematic ways. FEMEN, in a European context, should not be viewed positively, as their intentions are racists and Islamophobic as a whole. This location of Muslim women as European shows the reach of a processual relationship. Throughout my analysis, I will juxtapose the images of Topless Jihad Day and the counter protest of Muslima Pride with the use of social media networks, such as Facebook.

My theoretical framework is based primarily in Judith Butler’s theory of performativity, as well as in theories of redoing feminism. Focus has shifted from a collective discourse on feminist politics to the discourse of individuals, creating an idea that feminism is unnecessary. Topless Jihad Day is an example of why feminism remains viable in society. Feminism is even more necessary as new intersections of marginalization emerge. Emerging activism allows for the re-doing of feminism via the subversion of normative gender assumptions and encouraging the participation of collective activism. Furthermore, this emergence allows for emerging feminist politics to intersect and exist in tandem with the “troubling” of gender, granting an expansion of activism to fit within necessary political and cultural conditions. (Butler; Baer; De

Clerq; Smith-Prei; Stehle). Using this framework, I will focus mostly on FEMEN's naked protest in Topless Jihad Day, as this demonstration is a productive place to begin a discussion of the significance of the processual nature of activism.

Previous research surrounding Topless Jihad Day focuses on the explicit forms of Islamophobia as well as the problematic representations of the female body that FEMEN reproduces in their performances. I make use of this previous research, while at the same time I go beyond this scope and analyze the significance of the inexplicit location of Muslim women within a European identity. Historically, Muslim women in Germany have been externalized from a modern European identity, even if they are European citizens. Muslim women have been thought of as having origins elsewhere. FEMEN acknowledges Muslim women inclusively as Germans. This acknowledgement can potentially open up new avenues of activism.

Circularity, Troubling and Awkwardness

Circularity, troubling, and awkwardness help us see a way to circumnavigate a binary relationship between success and failure in emerging feminist discourses. A circular approach keeps dialogues open in a processual nature, rather than assuming an end point at success or failure. Awkwardness draws attention to normative representations, while at the same time putting on display the collapse of standard discursive or theoretical frameworks that might easily describe these representations (Smith-Prei and Stehle 214). Topless Jihad Day draws attention to normative representations of the female body, but also displays the collapse of traditional feminist frameworks. This is indicative to a change of discourse.

FEMEN and Muslima Pride seek to subvert existing regulatory laws surrounding societal expectations of doing gender. “ The examples of FEMEN and Muslima Pride are clearly

Butleresque in that they performatively play with gender, social norms, and expectations; their activism works with repetition and emphasizes the *act*” (Smith-Prei and Stehle 213). According to Judith Butler’s theory of performativity established societal assumptions of gender potentially can be dismantled over time through the “troubling” of these assumptions. Troubling of gender takes place through repeated performance or acts, which displace the normative assumptions placed on gender and gender roles. Butler cautions that performances must repeat and “radically proliferate gender”³ or run the risk of further iterating heteronormative ideology. Therefore, gender activists must be self-aware of their troubling in each of their performances. The goal of the performances is to constantly undermine the “category of normativity” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 146; De Clerq 37; Smith-Prei and Stehle 212).

The of act of subverting gender assumptions must repeat, though in evolving ways, in order to provide a challenge to rather than a confirmation of normative assumptions. Performances in circularity create situations for protests to evolve via the opening up of the possibility of “troubling” by doing or undoing societal assumptions of gender. The processual nature of emerging activism grows via the unfolding, turning back, and circulation of actions within activism.

If performances intend on subverting assumptions, activists have to be conscious in their representations of gender, in order to avoid reifying existing frameworks. For example, FEMEN displays their bodies in a way that is not subversive. Instead the activists play into already existing frameworks on body image and sexuality, even though their intention is to subvert these assumptions.

³ Radical proliferation of gender is a term from Judith Butler. It is the possibility of having many forms of gender that are rapidly reproduced and disseminated through performativity.

These possibilities sustain subversive repetition according to specific political and societal conditions. Because “troubling” asks activists to be self-conscious of their performances, circularity often messy, meaning activism cannot necessarily conform to traditional feminist frameworks. Awkwardness draws attention to normative portrayals of race, gender, and sexuality (via self-conscious activism), as it collapses theoretical frameworks used to easily describe away these portrayals. Representations of normativity have grown awkward in themselves by misappropriating context, time, place, and theory, as seen in Topless Jihad Day. A more complex analysis is required as emerging feminist activism begin to take form. This processual nature allows activism to form without reducing their subversive acts to the privatization of an individual, which is often seen as a consequence of neo-liberal discourses (Baer, “Redoing Feminism” 199; Smith-Prei and Stehle 214). Protests that exist in circularity should not be defined in terms of effectivity or productivity because activists, as a collective, can evolve their methodology according to context. Accordingly, every performance is considered productive because it is a continuation of discourse. Labeling a performance as a failure or as a success ends the discussion surrounding the subversion of normativity. “Failure, like success, merely replicates those binary patterns that claim there may be a way out of the trouble” (Smith-Prei and Stehle 214). In neo-liberalism, where feminist politics have created unlikely ties, “troubling” normative assumptions of gender cannot be reduced to the individual experience. One such tie is the relationship between feminist activists and social media. The media notoriously consumes images of women, yet activist must rely on media for viability and distribution of information. Troubling assumptions must work circularly to redo gender. Feminist activists must continually question as a collective rather than as individuals. “[FEMEN and Pussy Riot] have begun to

reestablish the grounds for a collective feminist politics beyond the realm of the self-styled individual” (Baer, “Redoing Feminism” 201).

What is happening in a neo-liberal landscape is an awkward, but necessary transition of feminist activism to incorporate emerging intersections of marginalization as a collective. In Germany, for example, second wave feminists, such as Alice Schwarzer, have become obsolete in the changing political landscape of Germany due to immigration and the corresponding question of identity. “Rejecting a feminism of filial inheritance, popfeminist writers and activists create a new feminism on their own terms, as a deliberate political act” (Baer, “German Feminism” 364). The message of activists like FEMEN is not yet precise, however the propagation of activist names, demonstration locations, and memberships is becoming more important than the clarity of the context. “In this sense such opaque activism has indeed been politically productive, though in a very different way” (Smith-Prei and Stehle 211). The unclear messages are politically productive in that they show the reach of circularity. FEMEN draws attention to the normative representations of gender, race, and religion in Topless Jihad Day. However, their delivery of a subversive act is unclear and co-optive. FEMEN, in a European context, should not be viewed as positive, as their intended actions of protest are racist and Islamophobic.

The reach of circularity appears as an evolved counter protest by Muslima Pride, who has a clearer message and undermines assumptions of Muslim gender roles by appearing in a public discourse against FEMEN. Muslima Pride makes a case for the compatibility of Islam and feminism as a collective in this context. Despite the problematic monolithic representations found in both protests, they subvert neo-liberal normativity through collective circularity, rather than through individualism (Baer, “Redoing Feminism” 201; Smith-Prei and Stehle 213).

Juxtaposing the images of FEMEN's protest and the counter protest of Muslima Pride accentuates why exactly feminist collective activism is still necessary. Questions of body politics, gender, race, and religion remain unanswered. These unanswered questions are where circularity, troubling, and awkwardness intersect in hashing out new realities for feminist activisms and the proliferation of gender.

Topless: A Contextualization of Naked Protest

In the context of feminist activism, the methodology of naked protest is a highly contextual action that seeks to trouble the assumptions of gender through subversions, often creating awkwardness in performances. As an example, naked protest, in the context of Topless Jihad Day, is awkward; linking the performance of FEMEN and Muslima Pride in a circular relationship.

Furthermore, it is politically effective in gaining attention to the activists, and ideally to the cause it is intended to highlight. While there are a number of environmental organizations that do have male activists, women, in particular, have historically used naked protest "as an effective yet perilous strategy" (Cockburn 158). Naked protest should be assessed in context, rather than in a universalized theoretical framework. Naked protest raises the question as to whether this method of protest is in actuality doing the work of the patriarchy. Depending on the context of the performance, naked protest could potentially reiterate embedded practices of social norms, scripting women as sexual objects, without agency. Women activists taking to naked protest is a conscious decision in "doing" gender, attempting to disrupt societal laws surrounding women's bodies. "If the viability of these protests is to be gauged in terms of other than mere theatrical performance, shows of angry desperation, or even heroic sacrifice of

modesty, then they just be examined in terms of the meaning and stakes of nakedness in each specific context” (Misri 604). The emergence of a different feminist perspective opens up the possibilities for other interpretations of nude protests. Feminist scholars have begun to trace the use of naked protest in a neoliberal western framework to the need to redo feminism to encompass changing intersections (Alaimo; Baer; Misri; Smith-Prei; Stehle).

There are several examples of naked protest from around the world, varying in context, which subvert normalized assumptions and are therefore viable within their contexts. The rationale for the use of naked bodies varies depending on the history and institutions surrounding the activist organization and the context of the protest.

Long before FEMEN co-opted naked protest, women in Africa used it as a threatening last resort, while making their bodies and personal histories vulnerable as a collective. Igbo and Ibibio women in southeastern Nigeria during the Women’s War of 1929 relied on the social scripts surrounding shame in order to re-establish their voting rights. Tens of thousands of women from the surrounding area used their naked bodies to shame their men as a militarized collective. Men were subject to the curse of nakedness if they were to see a mother or elderly woman naked. The woman carried the shame on their bodies and it was their responsibility to keep the curse at bay. Taking their clothes off meant disobeying the traditional scripts of shame. The mass collective performance sufficiently resignified the scripts of shame through indigenous feminism. The Igbo and Ibibio women aggressively danced, chanted, sang, and otherwise occupied public space. This protest led to a victory for women in the Women’s War of 1929. Frequently, nonwestern feminism or women’s collective action is reduced to a “lesser derivative” of Eurocentric feminism or even considered too different, diverging from the realm of feminism all together (“Parallel Histories”).

The documentary *Naked Option: The Last Resort* chronicles how 600 women in Nigeria were able to shut down a Chevron refinery for ten days, halting production of roughly five million barrels of oil in July 2002. The Chevron refinery produced one hundred percent of the country's income, but the area surrounding the refinery lost its food supply and income base due to the pollution of their water. The threat of naked women created such fear in the men working at the refinery that they refused to go to work until an agreement could be met.

Similarly, naked protest is of particular impact when used against perpetrators of domestic and gendered violence. Indian women have used naked protest as a subversion of shame placed on rape victims' bodies. In Meshweta Devi's story, the main character, Draupadi, is brutally beaten and raped by officers of the Indian Army. In an act of defiance, she refuses to clothe herself and remains naked in front of the military institution. Her nakedness disobeys the scripts of shame that are inscribed to her as a woman in front of men. Draupadi essentially emasculates the men by refusing shame of her body. "Her naked protest tauntingly punctures the triumphalism structure of rape as power. It recodes rape as an unmanly act of cowardice" (Misri 621). The naked protests of India and Nigeria are all specific to a cultural context, which gives these protests the ability to perform in a threatening, rather than sexual, manner. They are used to challenge the masculinity of the state powers. State power is contingent on the docility and obedience of its subjects. If the subject disobeys those scripts of docility, the state has essentially lost its power, even if it's for a short period of time. "The moment at which the raped subject refuses the obedient, shame ridden femininity that is scripted for her is the moment when administrative masculinity falls apart" (Misri 607). Naked protests are used to capture attention toward bodies, and ideally, to the cause of the activism. These are two examples of feminist activism, which have sought to rewrite regulations around the naked body. This subversion

allowed protests to be comprehensible as a feminist protest, rather than a protest working for the patriarchy.

The relationship western feminist organizations have with naked protest is entangled in consumption and commoditization that, instead, often overshadows the cause and creates a sexualized spectacle. The consumption of the western media focuses on sexualizing women, often undermining the potential of naked protest in these contexts. Nevertheless, the subversion of western media focus in regards to naked protest relies on the troubling of assumptions in a circular relationship. This allows for the proliferation of gender beyond a media spectacle.

Imperial Feminism and FEMEN Activism

In many ways, FEMEN is using strategies that align with tactics considered imperialist to co-opt, or even obscure, the voice of Muslim women. Nevertheless, Muslima Pride and FEMEN both sought to subvert the normalization of gender assumptions via a collective protest, rather than on the basis of individual histories. Though the activism of FEMEN remains opaque and problematic, it situated itself to open up the possibilities of proliferation of gender and subversion of normativity. The awkwardness of FEMEN activism lies in its Islamophobic and white imperialist ideologies, while at the same time still being a productive component in redoing gender. Accordingly, every performance is productive as it opens up the possibility of redoing gender. However, this does not mean every performance is positive in every context. FEMEN's performance in Topless Jihad Day is not positive as it uses Islamophobic rhetoric and imperialist tactics. It is, however, productive because it lends itself as a platform for Muslima Pride to protest against.

FEMEN reduces women to one monolithic intersection based upon a European identity. European society is often defined against Islamic society as being an arbiter of human rights and gender equality, therefore held as a standard in the west. “Within this unequal dichotomy, Europe invariably stands for the universal, while Muslims represent the particular and thus inferior” (El-Tayeb 81). FEMEN imagines that it participates in a global sisterhood, and therefore can protest on behalf of Muslim women (Ong, “Sisterly Solidarity” 32; Abu-Lughod 789). What emerges from this attitude is a string of Islamophobic protests, including Blackface veiling at Slut Walk Berlin in 2012⁴ and cultural appropriation of beards and turbans during Topless Jihad Day in Paris. Additionally, Inna Shevchenko wrote an open letter to the group Muslim Women Against FEMEN saying that even though Muslima Pride writes on their posters that they are already liberated, she sees in their eyes a call for help (Nelson, “Inna Shevchenko Responds to Muslim Women” 2013). As FEMEN’s leader, Shevchenko’s response is indicative of the organization’s belief in their own western cultural superiority, believing Muslim women are inferior, needing a savior (Ong, “Colonialism and Modernity”). The organizations tactics align with colonial feminism, a term coined by Leila Ahmed, which only shows selective concern for Muslim women and does not take seriously questions relating to Muslim women’s political and societal conditions (Abu-Lughod 784).

The German scholar Hester Baer in a lecture on Digital Feminism, describes FEMEN’s tactics as hegemonic (Baer, “Digital Feminism”). The organization twists religious symbols in ways to suit their political agenda, regardless of the implications. The Islamophobic rhetoric only reifies the normalization of the monolithic Muslim woman as a victim. This undermines the

⁴ FEMEN painted their naked torsos and faces black, leaving only a stripe across their eyes unpainted. In effect, the five white German women painted on a veil and held signs, two of which read: “Unveil women’s right to unveil” and “Freedom to all women.” Thus, participating in a racist performances, targeting both Muslim women and women of color. This performance only added to the problematic whitewashing of Slutwalk Berlin (Baer, “Digital Feminism”).

activism of Muslim feminist organizations, which seeks to open up spaces in public discourses to address their specific concerns. FEMEN conflates wearing the veil with gender violence, not with a woman's right to choose. As an example, FEMEN has created a public service announcement against Islamism. A white woman with blonde hair wearing a burkah sits on the floor with a bloody and swollen face. The tag line underneath the image is " Stop Islamism." (FEMEN International. "Stop Islamism").

In another example of FEMEN's hegemony, the organization demands Muslim women to remove their veils in an act of liberation from patriarchal Islamic doctrine. FEMEN perceives the veil as synonymous with oppression, further reducing all Muslim women to an article of clothing. "The *hijab* in particular serves as the key symbol of Muslim difference, representing silenced, oppressed women living in parallel societies that are shaped by ancient and primitive rather than modern Western structures"(El-Tayeb 83). By asking Muslim women to unveil, FEMEN is reducing millions of Muslim women to an article of clothing as a monolithic representation. "Muslim women let's get naked!" as a slogan does not subvert normative assumptions of gender or gender roles. FEMEN reifies the existing victimhood narratives. Not only is this a reduction, but a marker of ignorance of cultural and political conditions in order to maintain a sense of superiority over a marginalized group. Muslima Pride is able to challenge FEMEN's Islamophobia via the circulation of the subversion of normativity.

An Analysis of Topless Jihad Day

FEMEN

FEMEN's approach and execution of naked protest is problematic. Their display of nudity is not significant enough in a German context to be considered a subversive act. Nudity is a method

used to quickly gain media attention and become a public spectacle. In the documentary, *Nackter Protest*, FEMEN defines success in terms of how quickly the media acts to cover their naked protests. FEMEN places their activism in a binary between success and failure, rather than within a circular procession to allow further acts of subversion and proliferation of gender.

Additionally, FEMEN plays into neo-liberal consumption of the female body regarding media attention. Members refer to FEMEN as a feminist organization, but in a way that denotes sex positive activism, meaning they do not bend patriarchal frameworks, rather use them in the name of feminism. “There is a bitter irony to the fact that ‘but I’m a feminist’ has become one of those phrases by which male dominance can be positively reinforced” (Glosswitch, “‘Sex Positive’ Feminism”). An example of this is that members of FEMEN have trademarked their breasts as their weapon of choice, drawing attention to them either visually or through language. “Boobs, not bombs”, “Titslamism” and “They want to lapidate us? Let’s breast them!” are just some of the phrases, which appear on their Facebook account (FEMEN International, “Lets Breast Them [sic]”). The organization searches to reinvent the breast as a feared object in Western society through repeated performances. Yet, the way in which FEMEN performs does not sufficiently subvert the breast as a weapon; it only draws more attention to breasts reinforcing a male gaze. For example, FEMEN’s online campaigns feature runway model women in provocative topless stances. One woman sits on a couch with her legs spread and middle fingers up with freedom for women written on her torso in French. Another example, is an advertisement for FEMEN merchandise. Two thin, white, blonde women are hugging each other topless with snowflake pasties. The slogan underneath them reads “Hey thoughtful girl!” (“FEMEN Official Store”). These images are not subversive, rather playing into established frameworks. The organization uses their breasts as a trademark to distinguish themselves against previous notions of feminism,

thought to be too uptight and exclusionary. FEMEN's consumption of feminism is indicative to choice feminism, meaning so long as a woman chooses her actions and affiliations it is feminism (Ferguson 12).

The organization's naked protests are hypersexualized, giving their western audience more of what they want, all the while functioning under the auspices of feminism. FEMEN is infamous for their often sexual and grotesque acts of protest. In a Western European context, it is hard to disassociate FEMEN from choice feminism as runway chic activists garner attention with their breasts via protests and their own FEMEN gift shop. Choice feminism fits within a neoliberal framework by valuing individual choices, regardless of the impact on a collective (Ferguson 13). It is also uncritical of consumerism, allowing FEMEN to commodify their protests and sell their type of feminism as a product online. For example, it is possible to buy breast prints from recent protests in FEMEN's gift shop.

In order to understand FEMEN's topless protest tactics, it is important to analyze the organization as a product of their origins in a post socialist landscape. Emily Channell quotes Judith Butler, "Women are socialized into being gendered subjects who use their bodies to perform femininities that are situated to perform in specific cultural and political conditions" (Channell 612). With this in mind, FEMEN's hypersexualized actions can be better understood in the context of a post-socialist gendered framework. The political and social structures after the Cold War and the Orange Revolution in the early 2000s have molded FEMEN's political activism. FEMEN is the product of the influx of neo-liberalism influences into an unstable post-socialist society. In countries like Ukraine, there has been a recent emergence of "sex kitten glam femininity" in politics (Kaneva and Ibroscheva 6). This phrase implies that women are expected to hyperbolize femininity in their political campaigns. Women politicians have also turned to

social media outlets to gain accessibility to their audiences and increase face time in a culture obsessed with celebrity.

In that role, women are often portrayed as gaining independence and social power through the use of their 'physical assets'. We would argue that these trends represent reactions to the collapse of communism and the influx of global (i.e. Western and neoliberal) influences in the chaotic period of 'transition' that followed (Kaneva and Ibroscheva 6).

These influences include an increased circularity and cultural presence of the hypersexualized female body, ideals about which are essentialized through television, magazines, and in the beauty industry. Women in political positions or in political activism, who are highly visible, often hold central positions within this process, as they are constantly being consumed and subjugated by the media. Women in politics must play into normative roles of femininity, as it is political suicide for women to reject hypersexuality that they are now expected to perform, thereby creating a porn-chic, post feminist aesthetic. Women who fail to play this role are deemed weak and often attract only negative attention from the media and obtaining labels such as frumpy or unattractive (Channell; Kaneva and Ibroscheva; Zychowicz). Kaneva and Ibroscheva believe this hypersexuality is a product of neoliberal influence pushing in from the West in combination with a reaction to the restrictive nature of Cold War communism. "...[Female Politicians] represent the ascendance of commercial and mediatized models of femininity as the new norm" (Kaneva and Ibroscheva 11). In the Ukrainian context, FEMEN is subverting normativity. Instead of being docile "sex kittens", they are creating an opposition by aggressively militarizing bodies. FEMEN's rejection of post socialist scripts of femininity and power is expressed through the invention of sextremism and radical atheism.

Sextremism is FEMEN's response to this new norm of hypersexual femininity. The organization bends the patriarchal frameworks by being aggressive. The motto that drives

FEMEN's activists at training camps is too frighten men, not attract them with their bodies ("Femen: Sextremism in Paris"). Inna Shevchenko tells the *BBC Why Factor* that FEMEN's nudity is a reclamation of women's bodies back to women. Men can no longer control what women do with their naked bodies. Taking this ideology farther West to a place where the political and cultural conditions contrast to those found in Ukraine, turns sextremism into choice feminist act, rather than a sufficient subversion of normativity. "The surprise of seeing breasts – and of women proclaiming that their breasts are weapons that make *only* themselves powerful – makes it challenging to get *past* the breasts and into the question of what Femen's goals as feminists really are" (Channell 614). FEMEN names the hypersexualized nature of sextremism as their choice in dismantling the patriarchy. This method does not challenge or bend pre-existing frameworks, rather it works in tandem with them.

The organization has not been significantly influential in rewriting policy or subverting sexist political institutions. However, FEMEN's insufficiencies open up the possibility for other organization to spring forth and subvert normativity through other tactics. Through the relationship of circularity, awkwardness, and troubling, FEMEN is an important actor in terms of re-doing feminism in a neoliberal age, often creating a messy dialogue among feminist activists in the process.

As an example of this relationship, grassroots women's organizations in Ukraine are working intersectionally in ways that FEMEN never did in order to broadcast Ukrainian women's issues in a more transnational approach. Grassroots organizations in Kiev, such as Insight and Ofenzywa use social media to approach women's activism through different sectors. In this way, they hope to reach more locally defined needs of women, including LGBTQ rights (Zychowicz 215).

In a German context, FEMEN's post-socialist background resonates within their naked protest on Topless Jihad Day. Though, in a German context, the act of nudity does not hold the same cultural significance that the FEMEN protest of 2012 in Tunisia had or previous protests in Ukraine. Nudity has played an important role in German society, beginning in the late nineteenth century. "At worst German society and politicians were indifferent to nudism; more often than not they openly supported local nudists" (Ross 13). During the 1960's, the GDR used nudism as a way to promote socialism and family values. The regime disseminated nude photographs of families, made nude beach brochures and advertised people doing outdoor activities in the nude to promote a type of free expression in East Germany. In West Germany, nudity was used as a protest against bourgeois values. Today, Germany is known for the FKK (Free Body Culture) movement, which advocates for the freedom to engage in naked culture in Germany's parks and beaches. FEMEN uses nudity as a point of liberation for all women, even when it is contextually and socially inappropriate, even dangerous, for women to disrobe. Topless Jihad Day in Berlin posed no great risk to morality vis-à-vis naked bodies. The mosque was closed on the day of the protest, which only lasted roughly ten minutes before the activists were escorted away by the police. What is significant in a German context is FEMEN's inclusiveness of Muslim women as European, rather than defined as an outside body.

Locating Muslim Women in European Identity

In a German context, the protest in front of an Ahmadiyya Mosque in Berlin was FEMEN's most radical performance. However, it was not radical in the way FEMEN comprehends radicalism. FEMEN defines its feminism through what it calls a sextremist approach, which warrants being aggressive, topless women in a public space. Sextremism does

not subvert normative gender assumptions, rather merely bends an already existing framework. Instead, FEMEN's subversion of normative assumptions is the inclusion of Muslim women within a German and European landscape, as opposed to "othering" them as a separate entity to German identity. Although FEMEN used visibly Islamophobic references during Topless Jihad Day, the organization did not use exclusionary rhetoric against Muslim women. FEMEN's inexplicit inclusion acknowledges German Muslim women as Germans. The Topless Jihad Day protest in Berlin is noteworthy in a German context because, unlike other Islamophobic protests, FEMEN is not demanding that Muslim women integrate into German society. FEMEN's demands rely on the forgoing of religion by all women. In effect, Topless Jihad Day is a springboard for other protests to evolve and morph in a circular relationship with FEMEN. In the case of Muslima Pride, the possibilities of opening up space for subversion are created.

In emphasizing the distinction of FEMEN's inclusionary performance, there are several examples of the anti-Islamic sentiment prevalent in Germany in the past decades. Former finance minister Thilo Sarazin became synonymous with anti-immigration and anti-Islamic sentiment after publishing *Deutschland schafft sich ab* in 2010. Additionally, in 2007, Kanak TV created *Weißes Ghetto*, a short documentary eliciting candid reactions to integration. Kanak TV interviewed Germans in Cologne Lindenthal asking them why there was a lack of immigrants in the community. Many of the interviewees used terms like "bio-Deutscher" [biologically German] and "echter-Deutscher" [real German] to define themselves against Germans with immigrant heritage, which has become synonymous with Islam (see, for example: El-Tayeb; Erel; Sezgin; Weber). Recently, protest movements in Germany, such as PEGIDA, are also thematic in their exclusionary anti-Islamic rhetoric.⁵ Immigrants are excluded from the German landscape

⁵ FEMEN is vehemently opposed to Pegidazation, as well to the Islamization of Western Europe. "Femen denounces the right winged movements of both Islamization and Pegidazation, with its often racist, nationalist,

because they are not considered “echter Deutscher”. One such demonstration in December 2014 attracted more than 10,000 supporters. However, counter protests are beginning to far outnumber the original PEGIDA demonstrations.

Germany’s political and social conditions work in tandem with a policy of “colorblindness”. This prohibits a discussion on race and religion (El-Tayeb xvii). In contrast, FEMEN takes a more simplistic Islamophobic approach focusing on the eradication of religion to liberate women. Similarly, both FEMEN and Islamophobia in Germany frame their discourses in terms of gender violence in religion (Montoya 241; Weber 12).

With these circumstances in mind, the environment fosters a circular relationship between FEMEN and Muslima Pride, allowing FEMEN to place Muslim women within a German landscape. First, FEMEN uses a secular approach to Islamophobic rhetoric. The organization demands Muslim women join Topless Jihad Day and renounce their religious affiliations, not integrate into European society. Second, Topless Jihad Day uses inclusivity to identify Muslim women as European. “For feminists, embracing the cause of ‘women’ requires defining oneself in relation to ‘Europe’ and its announced project of social inclusion” (Rottmann and Ferree 482). FEMEN seeks to embrace the cause of woman while using inclusivity of a European identity, though perhaps not in the same vein as Rottmann and Ferree intended. This is in sharp contrast to German feminism that uses exclusionary tactics. Lastly, this circular relationship revolves around the use of Islamophobic rhetoric to deny Muslim women the access to feminist discourses.

White German feminists define themselves as secular European and, in so doing, against Muslim women as secular European. Accordingly, being Muslim implies the visibility of

homophobic, anti-feminist supporters” (FEMEN International). FEMEN is not just demanding Muslim women to forgo religion, they are asking every woman to do so in order to eradicate the patriarchy.

religion, while secularism embraces the invisibility of religion. Secularism is closely tied to Christianity and more often than not conflated as such. “In this account, modern secularism emerged in the seventeenth century as a political solution intended to end the European Wars of Religion by establishing a lowest common denominator among the doctrines of conflicting Christian sects...” (Mahmood, *Secularism* 324). The assumption of secularism is that it implies an invisibility of religion from the public sphere as it is theoretically synonymous with neutrality. Ideally, neutrality allows for a separation of church and state, which is significant in that political decisions are made impartial to religious doctrine and individuals have the freedom of religion (Mahmood *Secularism* 324). In reality, secularism in Europe has been used within a religious binary to define itself against the influx of Islam. Islam cannot be comprehended as modern within the European secular framework, which is problematic for Muslim feminist organizations trying to gain leverage within European discourses on gender. “The Othering and marginalization of Muslim minorities is increasingly justified with the supposed threat that intolerant, misogynist, and homophobic Muslims pose to the secular, liberal Europe they want to be part of” (El-Tayeb 90). Fatima El-Tayeb continues saying that the discourse on secularism purposefully hides the proclivity toward Christianity in order to appear as a religiously neutral state. Though religious neutrality in Europe is intended for Judeo-Christian institutions only. Following Gayatri Spivak, Weber argues that “secular democracy, secularism has been rendered specifically Judeo-Christian even as it is presented as universal” (Weber, “Gender, Race, Religion, Faith?” 9). Islam challenges the notions of identity for Europeans, as well as disrupts colonial perceptions of privilege and universalization. Muslims in Germany, if they were not born in Europe, most likely emigrated from Turkey. Turkey is a strictly secular state, which bans religious symbols in civic institutions.

What makes FEMEN's protest in Berlin atypical to other Islamophobic protests, is that the organization is not positioning Muslim women within the binary of secular Christianity versus religious Islam. FEMEN does not use this binary definition of secularism in their protest rhetoric, instead the organization uses their own definition of secularism. As stated in their online manifesto, religion is a destructive institution to all women. The organization specifically targets Catholicism and Islam, saying one of their goals is “ [t]o universally and completely separate the church from the state and to prohibit any intervention of the religious institutions in the civic, sex and reproductive lives of modern women.” (“FEMEN's Requirements”). FEMEN defines secularism at face value, which is that secularism is based on the neutrality of religion and the forgoing of Christian undertones, and members intend on eradicating religion in all forms, including Judeo-Christian institutions. In fact, FEMEN leader, Inna Shevchenko, was a keynote speaker at the 2014 Secular Conference in London with her presentation entitled “Girls against God”. She spoke about the dangers of the close connections between the state and religious institutions.

As a result of FEMEN's secular movement, they became a political enemy in Ukraine after sawing down a crucifix while nude. The government perceived these actions as a threat to the autonomy of the regime. Additionally, in December of 2014, FEMEN was caught stealing the Baby Jesus from the Nativity scene at the Vatican (femen.org). Ultimately, FEMEN does not have the imagination that religion can work in tandem with feminist ideology, even if, as a result, those discourses become awkward and messy. FEMEN is deeply entrenched in their own anti-patriarchal ideology. As long as they consider religion a patriarchal institution, FEMEN will lack an imagination for feminists and religion working in tandem. FEMEN's secular ideology creates a messy discourse, which opens up the possibility for Muslim feminist organizations to trouble

the essentialized assumptions about gender and religion. That is to say that by denying women the right to chose religion in the name of liberation, room is left for Muslima Pride to interject. Furthermore, it is undeniable that FEMEN is problematic in their essentialist notions of Muslim women. “...they seem to be ignorant of both their essentializing of all Arab women and of the ways their tactics alienate feminists...” (Channell 613). However, FEMEN is using inclusivity in European identity as a part of their brand of secularism, rather than exclusionary rhetoric used traditionally used by German feminists.

By way of contrast to German feminists, FEMEN includes Muslim women within a German landscape, rather than fixating on their exclusions. German feminists have not conceptualized Muslim women in Germany as having a European identity. Instead, Muslim women are comprehended as having “origins elsewhere” and externalized from society (Weber, “Gender, Race, Religion, Faith?” 29). As previously stated, gender normativity is constructed on the political and social conditions of society. This resonates with Topless Jihad Day’s inclusion of Muslim women within European society. Germany has a differing political and social relationship with Muslim women, which emphasizes exclusion.

German feminists were late in their engagement with issues of immigration. Feminists were drawn toward gender as a marker of difference rather than toward race and ethnicity. “A fixation on gender as the ‘primary’ difference delayed discussions of ethnicity and race by feminist researchers in Germany until early 1990’s” (Weber, *Violence and Gender* 12). Consequently, the fixation on gender and ignorance of other intersections led to the exclusionary social structures. The structures essentialized otherness, defining western German women against immigrant and German women of immigrant heritage. Additionally, religion and race are synonymous intersections in Germany, which further contribute to the construction of Otherness.

“Both ethnic and class barriers have significant impacts on Muslim women and work against their full inclusion in the German nation state” (Rottmann and Ferree 488). Muslim women, even if they are ethnically German, are racially “othered”, therefore not included within a German society. This also means Muslim women, who do not adhere to essentialized narratives, have difficulty in entering public discourse.

The normalization of the monolithic Muslim woman, as an example, is easily seen in popular media. Muslim women are comprehended within the victim narrative, as seen through Turkish and Muslima narratives. Women who have renounced their religion because of their personal narratives are regarded as the norm, rather than the exception (Weber, *Violence and Gender* 12). Those women who cannot be comprehended within these narratives are written off and excluded from public discussions. As contrary as it may seem on the surface, FEMEN disobeys these normalized scripts of exclusion, but rather acknowledging Muslim women as nationals of Germany. FEMEN does not protest under the assumption that Muslim women have origins elsewhere. FEMEN’s assumption is that Muslim women are enslaved by religious patriarchy, like every other woman in Europe. “No Master, No Slave”, “Don’t Fear Freedom” are both slogans written on the protest placards and across the activists’ bodies.

The organization locates Muslim women inside of a European framework, rather than demanding they integrate. The assumption is that Muslim women are already European. However, FEMEN’s performances remain racist and Islamophobic. FEMEN is not demanding integration, rather the whitewashing and aestheticization of all European women. The supposed incompatibility of the West and Islam and Shar’ia law is the bases of FEMEN’s imperialist rhetoric. FEMEN states that the “[i]mmediate political deposition of all dictatorial regimes creating unbearable living conditions for women, first of all, theocratic Islamic states practicing

Shari'ah and other forms of sadism regarding women should be henceforth eradicated and replaced by women's mob rule" ("FEMEN's Requirements"). FEMEN targets Muslim women because of the westernized notions of Islam as being incompatible with democratic values and modern morality. "Mantras from the North like 'women's rights are human rights' propose global human standards without regard to other moral systems and visions of ethical living" (Ong, "Sisterly Solidarity" 31). FEMEN's goal for women's liberation is to use Eurocentric universalization through non-religious secularism in order to make space for a standard form of liberation through female nudity. In FEMEN's sextremism, women can only liberate themselves through the reclamation of their body from the male gaze via public nudity. Kübra Gümüşay, a prominent Muslim feminist in Germany, points out in her blog *ein fremdwörterbuch* [a foreign dictionary] that the Topless Jihad Day only illustrated FEMEN's ignorance toward veiling and Islam. It did not help FEMEN's case that the mosque they chose was closed. Gümüşay continues by asking "Vor der Moschee einer religiösen Minderheit also, die in vielen islamischen Ländern verfolgt wird. Was war die Idee? Das sind alles Muslime, wird schon irgendwie passen?" [In front of a mosque that is followed by a religious minority in many Islamic countries. What was the idea behind that? That all Muslims would somehow pass by?]. Other Muslima bloggers shared the same sentiment surrounding about the actions of FEMEN, including Muslima Pride.

FEMEN is locating Muslim women within a German context, but as long as Muslim women continue to be Muslim, FEMEN will continue to co-opt their activism. "Projects saving other women depend on and reinforce a sense of superiority by Westerners, a form of arrogance that deserves to be challenged" (Abu-Lughod 789). It is within circularity and the awkwardness of feminist activism that FEMEN's Islamophobic tactics are challenged. It is also within this dynamic that FEMEN locates Muslim women as German.

Returning to the theoretical and cultural significance of Topless Jihad Day, the protest illustrates the awkwardness in which feminist activism in a neoliberal framework finds itself. While FEMEN locates Muslim women inside of a European landscape, at the same time they situate themselves firmly within an essentializing framework using Islamophobic rhetoric, thereby, creating a messy discourse. Though contradictory on a surface level, FEMEN's Islamophobia is necessary to the development and evolution of feminist activism in a circular relationship. It creates dialogue through visual representations of racism. Additionally, in the context of Topless Jihad Day, FEMEN is the springboard, which opens up the possibilities for further evolving performances in the re-doing of feminism. FEMEN itself is unable to sufficiently subvert normative assumptions of gender. FEMEN privileges white feminists' activism over Islamic feminism. This type of universalization, in tandem with Islamophobic rhetoric, triggered a motion within the circularity of feminist frameworks. On one hand, Muslima Pride emerged to define itself against FEMEN and challenge the accessibility of discourse. On the other hand, Muslima Pride and FEMEN are in agreement on the identities of Muslim women as German citizens.

In summary, as Smith Prei and Stehle point out, feminist activism within neoliberal institutions makes for complicated and problematic political connections. Muslima Pride used the highly publicized event in order to merge and springboard their own activism against the cooptation of their voice by white feminist through imperialist means. Their act was not just a form of subversive activism against FEMEN, it was a statement to the public that they were German nationals. FEMEN's protest in front of the mosque has expired and contains no more validity or usefulness to Muslima Pride. At first Muslima Pride only carved out the space to define themselves against FEMEN. As circularity shows, over time Muslima Pride has begun to

expand and define themselves in forms of online activism that have moved beyond the limitations of FEMEN. The emergence of this protest is an example of why feminism has become complicated. Additionally, Topless Jihad Day shows the re-doing of feminism does not have a clear message. Consequently, opaque activism can lend itself to being politically productive by opening the possibilities of other acts of subversion. "...messy issues that arise in [Topless Jihad Day] point to exactly why feminist protest matter today: they draw attention to the questions that remain unanswered, politically pertinent, and explosive" (Smith-Prei and Stehle 212).

Muslima Pride: Women as German

Perceptions of Muslim women in Germany have been fixed within a victimhood narrative. This popular conception is based on reductionist views of immigrant women as subservient to their cultural and political practices, which are patriarchal in nature. These assumptions marginalize the existence of immigrant women or German women of immigrant heritage to the outskirts of a German landscape. In addition, these views assemble Muslim women as monolithic in religion and nationality, creating a roadblock to their integration within German society. In recent research of Turkish German women, who are often associated with Islam, a wide variety of religious preferences, as well as views on the headscarf were established beyond societal assumptions. "[Karakaşoğlu-Aydin's] findings alert us that the practice and orientation of religion are far more differentiated than the public representation suggests" (Erel 157). These public representations of the Muslim woman in Germany are encompassed through the veil, which supposedly reproduces gender inequality. The veil is a visible marker of

difference in European society as it is bound to Islamic doctrine. Furthermore, Islam is considered both different and inferior to European society; it is perceived as preventing Muslims from participating in democracy and comprehending human rights and gender equality (El-Tayeb, xviii; Weber, “Gender, Race, Religion, Faith?” 8). Consequently, this perception causes the externalization of immigrants and Germans with immigrant heritage outside of a European landscape. This externalization is a product of the European internalist identity, which emphasizes a homogenous entity, not penetrated by outside influences (ibid. xviii). As an example of this externalization, many German women who identify as Muslim find it extremely difficult to be comprehended as German. They are viewed as having origins elsewhere.

Wenn ich beim Schulamt der Stadt Köln anrufe und sage: >>Guten Tag, mein Name ist Katajun Amirpur, könnten Sie mir sagen, wann in diesen Jahr ein Einschuldungstermine sind?<<, dann kommt spätestens nach dem dritten Satz: >> Sie sprechen aber gut Deutsch.<< Liegt das nun daran, dass viele Menschen mit einem ähnlich orientalisches klingenden Name wie meinem nicht gut Deutsch sprechen? (Amirpur 200)
[When I call the Cologne school board and say: “ Hello, my name is Katajun Amirpur, could you tell me when enrollment dates are for this year?” after the third sentence, at latest, comes this: “ You speak German well.” Is it really that a lot of people with similar oriental sounding names, like mine, can not speak German well?”]

It does not seem to matter if a woman is German or not. If her name or appearance is not perceived to be German, she is externalized as the “Other”. Again in another example, externalization is seen through a newspaper poll. In 2006, the Allensbacher Institut [Allensbacher Institute] published a poll in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung [Frankfurt General Newspaper] asking, when you hear “Islam” what do you think of first? 93% of respondents associated Islam with repression of women. “Es scheint, dass die befragten Deutschen den Islam eher als eine feindselige und antidemokratische Religion bewerten, welche besonders die Rechte der Frauen beschneidet” (Grumper 46). [It seems that the Germans polled

assessed Islam as a hostile and antidemocratic religion, especially surrounding the rights of women.]

Muslim women and Turkish women are scripted in society as being victims of their culture. They are homogenized through religion and gender. On the whole, most Muslim women do not fit into this victimhood narrative and are therefore comprehended as being ‘atypical’. Being both German and Muslim is viewed as being mutually exclusive, making it difficult for Muslim women to be comprehended as activists in German political and social circumstances (Erel 2003). In previous years, the only way Muslim women were comprehended as activists is if they utilized the victimhood scripts within their own person narratives. This usage, however, is again problematic in representing millions of Muslim women’s identities.

Given these points, Topless Jihad Day in Berlin is a notable occurrence for the Muslim women’s organization Muslima Pride. It should be emphasized that, again, Muslima Pride does not stand to represent the millions of Muslim women in Germany. The organizations protest does signal the emergence of young Muslim women in Germany as entering into a public discourse via public protest and online hashtags. In addition, Muslima Pride’s counter protest is indicative of an identity change from “The Other” to a distinctly German identity via the reach of circularity. Firstly, FEMEN’s Topless Jihad Day was so truly offensive that the protest opened up the possibilities for further subversion tactics from other organizations. Muslima Pride reacted through a counter protest in which they also held demonstration signs, but most of these signs were written in German. “Ich bin schon frei” [I am already free] and “Gegen Unterdrückung” [Against Discrimination]. Secondly, FEMEN located Muslim women within a German landscape by not demanding they integrate into German society. The assumption is that Muslim women are already German, subverting normative assumptions of an externalized Other. It is

here the reach of circularity is demonstrated. Muslima Pride reciprocated this notion of Germanness linguistically via their demonstration signs. "...their activism works with repletion and emphasizes the act." (Smith-Prei and Stehle 213). Muslima Pride is protesting the access to feminist discourse, rather than the access to Germanness. It should be mentioned that this reactionary protest is the first of its kind against FEMEN in a public space. Muslima Pride "troubles" the assumptions of identity surrounding Muslim women via circularity.

In spite of this noteworthy emergence into the public sphere, Muslima Pride has defined its organization against FEMEN, rather than opening up to the possibilities of expanding. Muslim Women Against FEMEN was created in 2013. "This group is primarily for Muslim women who want to expose FEMEN for the Islamophobes/ Imperialists that they are" ("Muslim Women Against FEMEN"). In a neo-liberal institution, this perceived limitation to their organization may result in undesired media representations. "...they write these questions onto the female body (naked or veiled) and target each other, which, in the public eye, may reduce their political struggle to an entertaining catfight between two marginal feminist groups" (Smith-Prei and Stehle 213). Muslima Pride's online presence via Facebook directly after the Topless Jihad Day was substantial. Many women posted pictures in solidarity with the organizations protest message. However, as time moved on, Muslima Pride's online activity dwindled, as FEMEN's social media presence exploded. In essence, this is the nature of feminist politics. Topless Jihad Day is at an intersection of awkwardness and troubling within circularity. To define themselves against FEMEN was politically productive in the terms of this awkward intersection for Muslima Pride, even though it was also problematic. Furthermore, this limitation opened up the possibility for expansion of activism forthcoming. In recent months, Muslima Pride's Facebook activity has grown away from targeting FEMEN, but now contributes to public

discourses surrounding Muslim women living in Germany, including political activism expanding into socio-economic and cultural realms.

Other Forms of Muslima Activism

Awkwardness and messy political feminist discourses open up the possibility for the dissolution of stereotypical binaries between Muslim and non-Muslim women. There is no such thing as the monolithic Muslim woman implied by Western imperialist discourse. Many women who identify themselves as Muslim are going to online forums and comment sections to voice their disagreement of the strategies of both FEMEN and Muslima Pride. Facebook groups such as Muslim Women Against FEMEN were active directly after Topless Jihad Day, while other women feel that Muslima Pride does not adequately represent their own interests as Muslim women. One woman from the United Kingdom also uses naked protest in online forums to protest the “White Savior” mentality normalized by imperial scripts in Europe. “I thought of combining the two ideas by doing my own photo of my topless, and on my body: ‘I don’t need White Saviors to try and rescue me from my oppression’” (“The Omega”).

In Germany, there are number of organizations, political groups, volunteer positions and social activism in which Muslim women participate on both a local level and on a transnational level. Umut Erel conducted interviews with Muslim women in Hamburg. Though Erel only has two interviews published in her article, both women are politically and socially active in their communities. These two women are apart of a community of women who do participate in public discourses (Erel 171). Gümüşay is a Muslim woman who uses both her blog *ein fremdewörterbuch* as well as public spaces to subvert normalized discourse on Muslim women in Germany and in Europe as a whole. She stresses that there is indeed a bond between Islam and

feminism. Both can work in tandem, rather than in opposition of one another. “Ja, muslimische Feministinnen. Die gibt es. Ein Ding, oder? Mit Kopftuch. Ich zähle mich selbst dazu, wenn mir die Damen das gestatten mögen” (Gümüşay, "Gut gemeint"). [Yes, Muslim feminists. They exist. A thing, or? With a headscarf. I count myself as one, when women allow me to be]. Gümüşay counts herself as a Muslim feminists and wearing a headscarf does not prohibit her affiliation with feminism.

The Muslim political activist and former FEMEN member in Tunisia, Amina Tyler posted topless photos of herself online, sharing her dissatisfaction with the implementation of Shar'ia law in her home country. Tyler is the woman who inspired FEMEN's Topless Jihad Day, though, she did not condone the protests and pleaded for their disbandment while in prison (Gordts, "Amina Sboui Quits FEMEN"). In Egypt, Aliaa Magda Elmahdy became infamous when she posted her nude photos online protesting the Egyptian government in 2011. Using nudity and social media creates a “digital *umma*” for young feminist activists in the Middle East. A digital *umma* is an online community space, where young feminist activists can feel safe challenging normative gender assumptions and marginalization. Digital feminism is a space for bodily reclamation by women in conjunction with revolutionary efforts (Eileraas 46). These young feminists in Egypt are not protesting Islam as a whole, rather the ways in which their governments interpret and implement Islamic doctrine, which inevitably affects the way in which citizens, specifically women, live their lives.

Many Muslim feminists are returning to the Mosque to reclaim their religion with an emphasis on piety. Through their return as religious leaders and educators, women are subverting regulatory laws regarding gendered roles in religious spaces. The women's mosque movement has built presence overtime and has marked a historical shift within the Islamic Revival in Egypt.

“...thereby altering the historically male-centered character of mosques as well as Islamic pedagogy” (Mahmood, *Politics of Piety 2*). Women in the mosque movement search to recode Islamic doctrine to fit their own pious needs.

Activists will use any methodological approach necessary within their conditioned political and social environments, including everything from nudity to piety. Circularity opens up the possibilities for morphing activism to bend and react to neoliberal frameworks, often causing a messy, though necessary, discourse in feminist politics. The necessity of this messiness is an urgency for feminist politics to have flexibility in discourse.

Conclusion

My thesis situated itself in the circular relationship between FEMEN and Muslima Pride in an emerging feminist discourse. Through an analysis based on circularity, troubling, and awkwardness in feminist activism, the binary between success and failure in the context of Topless Jihad Day is dissolved. What lies in the place of this binary is a processual framework. Every performance is productive, as it opens up the possibilities of evolved subversive activism. FEMEN was unable to subvert assumptions of gender, but left open the possibility for more productive protests, which is why Muslima Pride emerges in a public discourse. FEMEN claims to be a radical feminist organization because of its topless and militarized tactics.

The sources I used in my research were primarily visual references of both FEMEN and Muslima Pride. I found images of both organizations, as well as Topless Jihad Day on social media sites and blogs. This visuality is indicative of an emerging feminist activist project that uses easily consumable and accessible ways to distribute information like names and places, but not necessarily of clearly defined goals. FEMEN protests anything from sex trafficking to Vladimir Putin to Islam. The goals of the organizations are not as important as the accessibility

they have to an audience (Smith-Prei and Stehle 211). FEMEN is highly active on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, while Muslima Pride's of social media is unpredictable. Additionally, FEMEN's topless tactics are also widely distributed, which indicates the organizations insufficient subversions of normative gender assumptions. FEMEN uses run way model-like women and their breasts as visual aids during their protests that feed in directly to the already existing predominance of the male gaze.

However, naked protest is a highly contextualized methodology that can be used to subvert existing cultural frameworks, as seen in Nigeria and India. FEMEN, on the other hand, uses naked protest in a way that aligns with imperialist attitudes. The activists demand Muslim women remove their veils as an emancipatory act, co-opting and even obscuring the voices of Muslim women. Nonetheless, during Topless Jihad Day, FEMEN places Muslim women within a German landscape, which essentially places Muslims and Islam inside of Europe, rather than depicting Islam as inherently non-European. German feminists have historically have externalized Muslim women essentializing them as having origins elsewhere, despite the fact that many Muslim in Germany have claims to German nationality. FEMEN does not demand Muslim women integrate, rather that they forgo religion all together. This demand is not specific to Muslim women, rather a demand for all women to emancipate themselves from religious patriarchy. What makes Topless Jihad Day awkward is FEMEN's Islamophobic rhetoric and visual references. FEMEN denies Muslim women the access to feminist discourse, but at the same time locates them in a German landscape. In a counter protest, Muslima Pride demonstrates an inexplicit agreement with FEMEN linguistically by protesting in German. At the same time, Muslima Pride explicitly disagrees with FEMEN's denial of Muslim women's access to feminist discourses. Lastly, in order to dissolve binaries between Muslim and non-Muslim activism that

have arisen as a result of Topless Jihad, I offered an analysis of other Muslim women's organization's protest methodologies. In the context of circularity, troubling, and awkwardness further research on the possibilities of evolved protest among FEMEN, Muslima Pride, and other emerging activism would be of interest.

Previous research on FEMEN, Muslima Pride and Topless Jihad Day deal with the explicit Islamophobic rhetoric and representations of the female body that FEMEN uses during their protests. While this research is highly useful in framing emerging feminist activism, it does not take into account the inexplicit locating of Muslim women in a European landscape, especially within a German context. The locating of Muslim women in a German landscape should not be overshadowed, especially when other Islamophobic protests externalized Muslim women to the margins of society. Acknowledging Muslim women as German opens up the possibility of gaining access to more stable avenues of activism within public discourses.

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