

**Choosing a gendered solution:
Why do some women embrace Islamic and Protestant
Revivalisms in Britain today?**

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Abstract

This is a comparative study concerned with why some women in Britain in the late 1990s choose to join revivalist movements in Protestantism and Islam. Revivalist movements, in reconstructing what they believe to be a 'pristine' form of their religious past in the present, exhibit the nostalgia which pervades postmodernity. Revivalist religions (often called 'fundamentalist') have a reputation for the policing of gender boundaries and roles and the blanket subjugation of women. They do not, however, all do this in a uniform way, nor to the same degree because they are specifically articulated in relation to different people in diverse geographical and temporal locations. This study aims particularly to establish what the attractions might be for women in Britain who choose to swim against the prevailing consumerist current and affiliate themselves with such groups in a liberal democracy when women are supposed to 'have it all'. It aims to establish why some women should make this choice of a gendered solution to present day problems in an atmosphere of postmodern gender scepticism and difference. Using an ethnographic approach the inquiry uncovers a number of differences between Christian and Muslim respondents' attitudes to rights as well as to submission to masculine authority. The stereotypes of revivalist women as compliant, oppressed and mute are challenged by the words of the participants themselves in many ways. There are some shared outcomes, especially in relation to concerns about resistance to sexual objectification and issues related to motherhood and child care. The study, utilising a theoretical base of power and rational choice theory, seeks to identify to what degree these choices could be argued to have some kind of feminist agenda and the implications for feminist theory and women's studies are considered.

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Introduction

At a time when an emphasis on difference has largely eclipsed any shared feminist voice this study began as a quest for shared views amongst disparate groups of women. It is a project that will touch on many areas of women's lives where there are indeed some shared anxieties and concerns. These include issues connected with finance, exploitation through the beauty myth, the avoidance of sexual objectification, marriage, mothering and family life, justice in the workplace and how to balance the difficult juxtaposition of work outside the home with concerns about child care. Although these issues might manifest themselves differently for different women who are from diverse social and ethnic backgrounds they remain matters of importance for many women. Despite earlier feminist struggles and progress made, these problem areas of women's lives have never actually gone away nor found an all-time resolution.

This study is about women who choose a gendered solution to the above problems in the 1990s by joining revivalist religious groups in Christianity and Islam. These are groups which above all have the reputation of producing a highly controlling religious environment with an agenda of the subjugation of women. By 'revivalist' movements, as I shall explain more fully in Chapter One, I mean present day reconstructions of faiths which attempt to reproduce an unsullied tradition of (in this case) Christianity or Islam. In doing so they reflect a longing for an unobtainable authenticity; the nostalgia which pervades post or late-modernity.

Women who join revivalist groups by *choice* in a liberal democracy, if anything, represent a counter culture. This prompts me to ask the questions: What are the possible attractions of such movements to women who are adherents and recruits? Are they really as oppressive as their reputation would

have us believe? If they are, how far do the achievements of Western feminism permit young women in Britain to **choose** to experiment with participation in patriarchal groups, to opt for, for instance, segregation, without a sense of having closed a door behind themselves and having thrown away the key? How far, if at all, do liberal and Western feminist discourses enter revivalist discourses? Most importantly are women who join these religious movements taking the line of least resistance or are they, in some way, resisting? If the latter is the case, to what is the resistance addressed? What does the choice they make tell us about our own society?

Another aim, then, has been to put the stereotypes, such as the belief that women who choose Islamic and Christian revivalist faith communities are compliant, submissive and oppressed, to the test. In reality many women take this path as a matter of informed choice and there is evidence that some women who are high achievers affiliate themselves with these kinds of revivalist movements. So how far do real women involved in Islamic and Protestant revivalist movements fit the acquiescent image?

It is often said that research is biographical (Foucault in Martin, Gutman & Hutton 1982:11) and the motivation for this study is connected with my biography. I was brought up in the world of pre-Vatican II Roman Catholicism and in the 1950s I was sent to Catholic school. This was at a time when there were few opportunities open to working-class and lower-middle-class girls. As a child in infant school, I remember that the girls had one of two ambitions; either to be a nun or a nurse. Most assumed they would marry and have children. Although I didn't articulate it as an 'interest' as such, it was as a child that I first became preoccupied with gender and religion. I wondered why I should never be allowed to become a priest and say Mass. Why could I not be an altar-server? Why did I have to cover my head in order to enter a church? It seemed to me, the Church was acting as if I was in some way deeply flawed, less acceptable to God than my masculine counterparts. Some of the things I mention here have now changed. Girls are allowed to be altar-servers at Mass and women do not have to cover their heads in church but the issue which has not changed within Catholicism is the one of priesthood for women. My early experiences of exclusion based upon gender have stayed with me and have been formative to my present-day interest in the study of religion. In particular it has drawn me to ask, in the late 1990s when some women are opting for religious groups which apparently take

a binary view of gender and the expectation that women and men will perform clearly delineated gender roles - why women would make such choices?

Women who are apparently non-feminist or anti-feminist have not occupied a great deal of feminist theory and yet, there have been some important works on the subject which have been influential in my choice of topic and in my thinking. The first was by Andrea Dworkin (1979), her groundbreaking Right Wing Women in which she examines why some women associate themselves with the New Right in the United States of America. She has shown how in patriarchal society single women and childless women are regarded as having no value. She concludes, amongst other things, that new reproductive technologies are a threat to women as they will no longer be valued as mothers and she sees women as hiding behind theology in order to keep a sacred place for motherhood. The second book was Susan Faludi's (1991) Backlash. Faludi also looked at why some women identify themselves with the New Right but she explored the situation in Britain as well as the USA. She concluded that many of the women she interviewed were exhibiting a kind of closet feminism because, through taking the role of spokeswoman against feminism, they were able to claim many of the things for which feminists were fighting. These included the right to work and have a family as well, a personal income, status and a voice. For some this included a jet-set life style. The third influential writer was Haleh Afshar (1991) (1995) (1995a) (1998) who wrote in a similar, but more generous vein, in relation to why women identify with 'fundamentalism' in Islam. She concluded that it was in response to the double and treble burdens of which Islamists complained: that women were being obliged to be responsible for child care as well as compete in the labour market. Women who worked outside the home returned to another one or two jobs in the home. Since then a number of writers have begun to explore the issue of why some women freely join movements which apparently restrict their freedom. Gerami (1996) Karam (1998) Brasher (1998) are some of the writers who have recently published books on this burning question. It appears to be a subject which is gaining in momentum.

Even so, in Women's Studies, the theme of women and religion is still not popular. Yet women continue to affiliate themselves with faith communities and are largely, through their influence in the

home, the transmitters of religious tradition. Even though the vast majority of religions are patriarchal, women make up the majority of believers (Cornwall 1989) (Batson, Schoenrade, and Ventis 1993). Further, both Islamic and Christian revivalisms appear to be waxing in their appeal in the UK today (Brierley & Hiscock 1994/5) and it is apparent that women are joining these movements.

Contrary to the popular image, there are strands of feminism within revivalisms. For instance, the work of Biblical feminists such as those in the organisation Men Women and God are gaining influence in the house church fellowships with their egalitarian message based on the biblical text and Islamic feminists are changing the way in which the rights and responsibilities of women, set out in the Qur'an, are viewed. Unlike the secularist image of Second Wave feminism, there never has been a generation of feminists who were *all* secular. There were, in the ' seventies, feminists who sought out new kinds of spirituality for women as well as a tradition of feminists who linked themselves with various religious groups. Among the multiplicity of kinds of feminists there are today, there are many who work *within* religions and some of them have participated in this study. It pleases me to imagine all these feminists, working in their own ways and within their own traditions but joined by the fact that they are all chiselling away at patriarchy.

My search for data started with a survey of the various kinds of literature which would give a background understanding of the concerns and status of revivalist women and their choices in Protestantism and Islam. Much has been written about 'fundamentalism' in the Middle East in terms of Islam and about the New Religious Right in the United States. Chapter one is based upon the Survey of Literature but it also draws to some extent upon contacts I made during the early stages of fieldwork and explores some of the literature produced by believers. The survey of literature is fairly wide ranging. This is because there are many differences within the faith communities and the patterns of practice are influenced by locality. Thus revivalist movements in Britain are different from revivalists movements in the USA or in the Middle East. The chapter explores a number of issues: the religious justification of violence against women; postmodernism in feminist theory and how this may affect the degree to which it is possible to make a feminist political stand; the background of Islamic and Christian revivalisms both abroad and in Britain and the role of women within these groups;

strands of feminism within revivalist Christianity and Islam; theoretical explanations of why women join such groups.

Chapter two, 'Reflexive Methodology', was perhaps the easiest to write deriving as it did not only from the literature and my informants but from the vital struggle to make sense of my own lived experience of being a researcher and the difficulties I encountered. Given the now mainstream position of postmodern theory it is hard to say what exactly a feminist methodology in the late 1990s might be. Nevertheless, I explored feminist methodological theory and attempted to discover what might be the feminist way to proceed with my study. I have used eclectic methods in order to gain a textured and in-depth perspective which was grounded not only in individual narratives but also in the groups in which my informants move. Methods include interviews, participant observation both in actuality and in cyberspace, a snowball questionnaire in which I used open questions and in-depth interviews over a period of three years.

Chapter Three is based upon a question in which I asked respondents whether their religious belief required that a woman should be obedient to her husband. In this chapter I explore the extent to which participants believed the necessity for obedience to be the case and what it actually means to them in their daily lives. The problem of misunderstandings based upon our being divided by a common language emerged which highlighted the division between secularist and religious understandings of the same terms such as 'obedience' and 'submission'.

In Chapter four I examine the issue of rights for women in Islam and Christianity and discover that Christianity does not use the language of rights. The language of rights has come to us from Enlightenment discourse. Yet there are specific provisions for women within the Qur'an, in terms of duties and entitlements in marriage and motherhood, in terms of inheritance and being a witness. There are no comparable provisions within the New Testament. Yet both my Muslim and Christian respondents and interviewees gained a sense of freedom and status as well as certainties in marriage and motherhood from their religious affiliations.

Chapter five is about modesty codes and practices within the religious groups. I was largely drawn to explore this issue because these are the things that are seen by outsiders as being deeply problematic. Why do revivalist women differentiate themselves in terms of their dress and behaviour in ways relating to separate and defined gender roles? In Christianity St Paul wrote instructions about head covering but these are largely ignored as we approach millennium. But in Islam, the *hijab* (headscarf) is perhaps the most controversial piece of feminine clothing. Seen by outsiders as oppressive to women, the insiders report that it is the means of gaining liberation from objectification and respect within their faith communities.

Power is a recurring theme throughout this thesis. Chapter six uses the theoretical bases of power (Foucault 1977) and empowerment (Rowlands 1998) and Rational Choice Theory (Young 1995) and attempts to establish the 'why' of women's choices in this respect in terms of the pros and cons of their affiliation. Why do they join these movements? What are the pros and cons of their affiliation? Do their religious choices represent subservience to patriarchy or the subversion of consumerist culture?

This thesis is about the ways in which some women negotiate a path to empowerment within the limits of patriarchal religions, in this case, in particular forms of revivalist Protestantism and Islam located in Britain in the late 1990s. I have chosen to make a comparative study of women in radical Islam and Christianity for a number of reasons. As a non-Muslim, I do not wish to single out Islam as if it were somehow more deeply patriarchal or misogynistic than other religions. I am convinced that this is not the case and I genuinely wish to attempt to discover what it is that women find liberating within the varying strands of both religious traditions.

Chapter One

Survey of literature

Introduction

This is a study about women who seek out certainties, women's space and a gendered solution to the problems they face at the close of the twentieth century. They do this by turning to revivalist religions which, in reconstructing what they believe to be a 'pristine' form of their religious past in the present, are part of the nostalgia which pervades postmodernity. Revivalists, or 'fundamentalist' religions as they are often called, have a reputation for the policing of gender boundaries and roles and the blanket subjugation of women. But they do not all do this in a uniform way, nor to the same degree because they are articulated very specifically in relation to different people in geographical and temporal locations. Particularly my interest is in what the attraction might be for women in Britain who choose to swim against the prevailing consumerist current and affiliate themselves with such groups in a liberal democracy when women are supposed to 'have it all'.

Even in the early stages of my study I found it necessary to meet and talk with people who are the actors involved in revivalist religion. Most of the information gleaned from this process I shall leave for other chapters. Nevertheless it would be difficult to write a review of literature relevant to my project without some reference to examples gathered from the insiders who are the participants in religious revival. In this chapter I consider the available literature, both mainstream and ephemeral; as well as media presentations concerned with revivalisms in general and with those sources which deal in particular with Islamic and Christian groups with whom my fieldwork has been involved. These include material which is both pro-and anti-religious revivalisms in published form, magazines, newspapers, news sheets and leaflets as well as text in cyberspace. I have also drawn on mainstream newspapers, television documentaries and radio presentations which carry their own agendas. These forms of information are fast and transitory and therefore in need of constant updating and have to be

read with care. But they offer an up-to-date information service which is grass-roots as well as opportunities for participant observation in cyberspace.

Because I am dealing with the question of why some women join religious movements which are frequently regarded by secularists and others as being conservative in the extreme it is first necessary to address the issue of religion and the legitimization of violence against women. I also intend to look at the kind of opposition which may or may not be forthcoming through the application of postmodernist and poststructuralist frameworks of analysis which may on the one hand lead to an understanding of the power relations involved in legitimated violence against women but which through a position of relativism may lead to a political paralysis when it comes to dealing with it.

Because revivalist movements are frequently described as 'fundamentalist', by the media as well as by some academics, an evaluation of the use of the term became necessary. Informed by the literature on the subject, in both Christian and Islamic traditions, I opted for the term 'revivalism' for the reasons outlined below in section 4.

My focus then passes to women in relation to religious revival, looking first at secular perspectives, feminist and otherwise, on the position of women in Islamic and Christian revivalist movements. This leads on to an examination of feminist theologies of liberation and the scholarship of Islam by Muslim feminists. Muslim feminists range from those who, like Fatima Mernissi (1991), are pro-Islam and, for instance, anti-*hijab* (the veil) to Islamist feminists who, less published in the mainstream, see feminist solutions in the Qur'an and in the adoption of Islamic codes and dress. There is a parallel here with the differences between feminist theologians who tend towards theological liberalism and Biblical feminists who are Conservative Evangelicals in the Christian tradition.

I then look at the various theoretical explanations of why some women join revivalist groups which have the reputation, at least, of emphasising gender difference and roles.

This chapter is organised into the following sections: 1. An overview of the literature available; 2. Religion and violence against women; 3 Postmodernism: women, politics and violence; 4. 'Fundamentalism' and the construction of a fanatical 'other'; 5. Revivalisms Christian and Islamic; 6. Sociologies of Revivalism; 7. Islamic and Christian Revivalist groups in Britain; 8. Revivalisms and gender; 9. Feminisms within the religious traditions and; 10. Revivalism - why do some women choose it?

1. An overview of literature available

Although many studies are available which aim to address the position of women within Islam, particularly regarding Islamic 'Fundamentalism', most are concerned with women in the Middle East. Similarly material regarding women and the rise of Evangelical Christianity outside the USA is sparse. A comparative study is a means of contextualizing these positions. There are clearly similarities as well as differences between Islamic and Christian revivalist movements in terms of gender relations. However, where gender relations are concerned, the differences between revivalists and secularists are not as significant as popularly perceived.

Of the position of women in Christian and Islamic revivalist movements in the UK, there is generally more information on women and Islam. This is probably because of the interest of feminists, Islamic and otherwise, and polemicists which has resulted in a genre of Islamic books on Women and Islam which have appeared over the last decade or so. Because there are limits to the material available which might throw light on why women, in particular, choose a revivalist way, I soon found myself turning to material published by Islamic and Christian publishers which are written from a perspective of belief.

It is possible to find any number of examples of misogynistic discourse quoted in books on Islamic and Christian 'fundamentalisms'. In Christianity a whole stream of books has come about as a backlash against what is perceived to be a threat of women failing to be properly submissive to male direction¹. In the case of Islam, with regard to the veil, Azza Karam gives the example of Al-Sha'rawi

who suggested the ageing process in women is not noticed by their husbands unless the husbands see younger women with whom they make a comparison. Therefore women do well to veil lest they lead husbands astray or lose them to the lure of younger flesh (Karam 1998:183). Though there may be men who share Al-Sha'rawi's views, this is not the reason why women chose to wear *hijab*; women express their choice in very different terms.

Even though traditional religions are themselves patriarchal and engage in the policing of gender boundaries, revivalist religious groups are popularly perceived to be a hotbed of unmitigated female oppression. Islam, particularly traditional and revivalist, comes under attack in this way². The Muslim feminist Rana Kabbani has related how her typescript of Letter to Christendom (1989) was returned to her from Virago Press, a feminist publisher, with the comment: "Nobody can possibly grow up and be intelligent, articulate and an independent woman in a Muslim culture. If you're saying that you've become an independent and ambitious woman, with a sense of feminism in your own culture, you're lying" (Kabbani 1992:36). Many secularists and Christians believe that women need to be rescued from Islam³. But if Islam is really so negative why do so many women chose Islam as the correct path for them? Is it because Muslim women are passive victims of their religion, all half a billion⁴ of them? Not according to many of them who regard their religion as liberating. Nevertheless, it is difficult for Western feminists, such as myself, to grasp exactly what Muslim women may mean by 'liberation'.

By a 'revivalist' way I mean the modern day path of a total commitment to Islam or Christianity. In the case of Islam this may follow the classic revivalist pattern, described by Yvonne Haddad, of an initial love affair with Westernisation and secularism soon followed by disenchantment and an impassioned return to Islam (Haddad 1983). By 'revivalist movements' I refer to those which seek a 'pristine' tradition of Islam or Christianity stripped of all accretions. Present day revivalist movements in Christianity and Islam share this longing, a quality of postmodern romanticism, for an authenticity which they perceive in the early Christian and Islamic communities. But this authenticity tends to be constructed in the likeness of dominant discourses of the time *from* which believers and scholars attempt to discern it. This reconstructed 'authenticity' is then taken as a model. It is therefore difficult

to piece together a picture of what the early Christian and Muslim communities were really like. For instance, Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza in her feminist analysis of Romans 16 points out, by way of example, how a particular church historian (Edgar Goodspeed in the 1950s) interpreted the Greek term generally translated as 'deacon' (*prostatis*) in St Paul's letter of introduction of Phoebe to the Christian community in Rome, not only as 'deacon' but also as a 'president' and 'benefactor' (Fiorenza 1990:62). According to this reading, Phoebe was a powerful figure in the early Christian church (Fiorenza 1990:64). Fiorenza writes how this term has frequently been translated as 'helper' because exegetes cannot cope with the idea of a woman leader in the early church. In spite of his recognition of her powerful position, Goodspeed goes on to interpret St. Paul's introduction, according to dominant values of the 1950s concerning gender relations in the white middle class nuclear family. He suggests Phoebe was being introduced to the Christian community in order to protect her and to make sure she only met ladylike women⁵. In other words he was projecting the ideas of his time upon Paul (Fiorenza 1990:57-71).

This reconstruction of a pristine past in the likeness of the present has become very much an end of twentieth century experience. But further to this, the Islam and Christianity that revivalist women choose is something more than a nostalgic reclamation of a pristine past. It is also a modern appropriation and reconstruction of the faith in terms of their present needs and experiences.

2. Religion and violence against women

I do not find it surprising, however, that some Western feminists should conclude that Islam is particularly anti-women. This impression is imparted by a literature which gives necessary reports of the most horrifying abuse of women's human rights within Muslim situations but in a context which contains no comparative perspective. For instance, three articles in Faith and Freedom (Afkhami 1995) about the rape, torture, murder and enslavement of women in Algeria (Bennoune 1995), the complete denial of women's dignity in Jordan by Islamists (Gallagher 1995) and the rape and torture of women in Pakistan (Haeri:1995) respectively, provide a distressing picture of atrocities against women in the Muslim world. The problem is that these horrifying accounts, together, give an

unbalanced picture in that they concentrate solely upon atrocities enacted under the name of Islam. In so doing they appear to give a moral credence to the view of Samuel P Huntington that, in the absence of a Communist Bloc, Islam is now the sole adversary of the West (Huntington 1993). But equally appalling atrocities are reported to have been carried out against Muslim women by the Serbs in Bosnia (Ahmed 1995:1-25). Serbs are identified, at least by the media and the outside world, with the Orthodox Church. This means they are perceived by Muslims as Christians committing war crimes against women, furthermore, atrocities are routinely perpetrated against women, by the military elsewhere, for instance in the 'Latin American Terrorist State' (Hollander 1996:41-80). In the UK, it is apparent that violence against women habitually takes place and frequently in a domestic setting (Hanmer & Maynard 1987) (Dobash & Dobash 1980). Violence against women occurs regardless of religious belief or secular affiliation and is exacerbated by war and internal strife. Although it takes a major toll on the women at the disadvantaged end of economic and power relational differences between women, violence is nevertheless a shared problem amongst women, perceived by some writers as "a fundamental element in the maintenance of social control of women by men" (Hollander:52). Women who have not yet experienced a violent attack on their person live in the fear that it may happen to them next. It is a problem which has, perhaps, become partially obscured by postmodern discourse which has concentrated on differences between women to the exclusion of any shared voice.

3. Postmodernism: women, politics and violence

Because postmodern analysis (a heading under which I here include poststructuralism) has become increasingly main-stream across a broad range of academic disciplines, it is inevitable that this study should utilise postmodern and poststructuralist tools of analysis to some degree. The institutionalisation of postmodern discourse is something of a 'two-edged sword': the postmodern discrediting of grand narratives (Lyotard:1984) includes not only an agenda of the deconstruction of feminism as a metanarrative but also incredulity of the category 'woman' itself.⁶ This 'gender skepticism' (Bordo 1990) has resulted in a magnification of the dichotomy which already existed in feminist discourse between an 'essentialist' view of womanhood and a view of gender as the result of

enculturation. This bifurcation of feminisms in relation to the political position of women in current thought emerges as the core concern of this study of why some women in Britain should choose biologically based or 'culturally essentialist'⁷ definitions of themselves which are sanctioned by religion at the end of the twentieth century in an apparent climate of gender equality and equal opportunities. Models of womanhood which view femininity as a social construction have their limitations (Gram-Hanssen 1996). If 'woman' is purely a production of discourses and does not exist per se, how can women claim to be oppressed? Poststructuralism, gender fluidity and 'play' do not take account of the global feminisation of poverty⁸ and the double, and treble, burden in terms of nurturing, child care and working outside the home which is the lot of so many women. Further, as Fatmagul Berktaş has pointed out, the emphasis on difference has "Paradoxically... given rise to an increasing perception of many differences between women, and has shattered 'woman' as a notion. It is no longer easy to believe in the cosy and comforting concept of sisterhood" (Berktaş 1993:110).

On the positive side, the postmodern view that gender is a construction of discourses has facilitated an analysis of masculinity as problematic in relation to violence against women. Poststructuralism, as part of postmodernist discourse, has thrown light on how this power relation is kept in place. Wendy Hollway, in her analysis of media reports of the Yorkshire Ripper entitled 'I just wanted to kill a woman', looks at the way in which Sutcliffe, rather than being an aberration, was the personification of masculine enculturation in the face of his own lack of power. Hollway, a psychologist, claims that it came as no surprise that Sutcliffe, reportedly impotent, stabbed one of his victims in the vagina with a seven inch screwdriver (Hollway 1981).

Sandra Bartky makes a Foucauldian analysis to show how, within the institution of heterosexuality, the patriarchal view is internalized by women: "In contemporary patriarchal culture, a panopticon male connoisseur resides within the consciousness of most women: they stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgement" (Bartky 1988: 72). The problem is not merely external: it is installed in the feminine consciousness. Women throughout their lives are exposed to texts and images which render violence against women unexceptional to the point of invisibility. For example, religious images from the Old Testament, such as, the portrayal of Jerusalem as a whore in Ezekiel 16 and mythologies

more ancient such as the Sumerian Creation Myth where the Goddess Tiamat is split like a fish to provide heaven and earth by the god Marduk⁹ provide an inheritance which normalise the idea of violence against women. Nor is Islam blameless in this respect. Surah 4:34 of the Qur'an is often cited, especially by Christian evangelisers, as an example of Muslim permission to batter women: "As for those (women) from whom ye fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and scourge them".¹⁰ Marmaduke Pickthall here translates the Arabic word "daraba" as "scourge". A 'reformist' interpretation will deny that the word "daraba" means to beat. Ahmad Ali, in his translation of the Qur'an cites examples of pre-Islamic use of the word "daraba" to indicate sexual relations¹¹. But surely, this could be as bad, the idea that sexual relations could subdue the wayward wife is not a million miles from the pornographic fantasy that women enjoy being raped?

Yet, though they may be used to justify such behaviour, it is not particular religions which are the cause of violence against women: the problem is patriarchy, and the vast majority of religions are patriarchal. At the end of the 1970s, the idea of blaming patriarchy was criticised by the socialist feminist historian, Sheila Rowbotham. She suggested that the main problem with the concept of 'patriarchy' is that it might be understood as imputing individual men for the subordination of women and thus generate a call for the abolition of men. She saw "male power" as the problem (Rowbotham 1979:970-71). But two more feminist historians wrote in reply that "The concept of patriarchy points to a strategy which will eliminate not men, but masculinity and transform the whole web of psycho-social relations in which masculinity and femininity are formed"... (and that) "the concept of 'patriarchy'... (allowed) us to confront 'the father in our heads' " (Alexander & Taylor 1980:161). Religion is a provider of multiple opportunities for those of us who wish to confront the internalised 'father'. Many feminists have left mainstream religions on the grounds that they are irreconcilably male dominated and anti-women (Daly 1973, Hampson 1990).

Postmodern Western feminism's concern with difference, which asserts that problems are not shared across class and ethnic differences, means that women no longer have a shared voice (Barktay 1993:110-131). This is the very voice that we need if we are to make a stand against the crimes committed against women in the name of religion and no religion, across cultures, throughout history

and across the globe. Nancy Hartsock has indicated with irony that at the very time when women and non-Western peoples gained a voice, postmodernism and poststructuralism and semiotics, by deconstructing discourses, led to the devaluation of that voice (Hartsock 1987:187-206).

Postmodernism and poststructuralism have a positive as well as a negative value in the analysis of revivalist movements and the association of women to these movements. Poststructuralism particularly facilitates an analysis of power relations which is not fixed but which takes account of the changing nature of power relations according to context. This makes it possible to perceive the manner in which what appears to be collaboration in one context may be resistance in another and vice versa. Postmodernism allows the analysis of similarities and differences and permits reconstruction in that all social phenomena and understandings are deemed to be a construction of discourses. From this viewpoint there can be no fixed authenticity. Hence revivalism and the reconstruction of religion to suit the present needs and circumstances of believers.

4. 'Fundamentalism' and the construction of a fanatical 'other'

At the outset of this study I had intended to use the term 'fundamentalist' to describe forms of religion which are modern movements within the traditional religions but which hark back to a 'pristine' tradition, and which on the surface at least, appear to place an emphasis on the masculinity of God and the submission of women (Barr 1977) (Hawley 1994). It soon became apparent that this is an inappropriate term to describe today's Islamic *da'wa* (missionary) organizations and Christian charismatic movements in Britain. 'Fundamentalism' is inappropriate for three reasons: firstly, it is an historically incorrect term to apply to Islam; secondly, it does not fit the modern charismatic house church fellowships within Christianity; and thirdly, the term 'fundamentalism' is used pejoratively to construct a rational self via a fanatical 'other'.

The Protestant origin of fundamentalism

It is generally agreed that the term 'fundamentalism' arose as an adopted, rather than ascribed term, in the first quarter of this century, from a Protestant movement of Conservative Evangelicals in the USA. They were militantly opposed to modernism in culture and theology, including higher biblical criticism and Darwinism and held the Bible to be inerrant (Marsden 1980). An overview of some of the characteristics which contribute to a 'fundamentalist' profile include: anti-modernism and anti-secularity in movements which are nevertheless born out of secular society (Marsden:4) and which frequently utilize modern technology (Barr:94) (Bruce 1990:487), a desire to return to a pristine tradition, and a belief that, for instance, the Christianity practised by the particular 'fundamentalist' group is synonymous with that of the early Church. This leads to exclusivity (Barr:16) (Shepard: 1987:361), a sense of beleaguerment by the modern and the secular, an essentialist world view which endows things and individuals with immutable qualities (Choueiri:93-94), a belief that their holy text is inerrant (Shepard:359), and a 'pro-family' approach with a policing of gender boundaries and relations (McCarthy Brown 1994:175-176). It is not merely the presence of these characteristics, some of which are shared by the traditional religions, but the degree of their presence which builds a 'fundamentalist' profile.

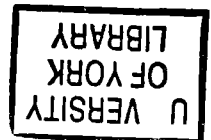
Because of its historic origins in the United States of America, the term, when applied to Islam, is a Western and Protestant imposition upon the Islam which has its own tradition of renewal (*tajdid*). 'Fundamentalism' is projected as a purely modern phenomenon whereas revival, in terms of "the resurgence of orthodox Islam" (as with the Wahhabi movement in Arabia, which, inspired by the teachings of Ibn Taymiyya (d.728), rose up against the corruption of religion in the 12th/18th century), is not a new phenomenon (Rahman 1979:196).

There may be some similarity between the historical Protestant Fundamentalists and the Zahiri sect in Islam, founded by Ibn 'Ali, who died in Baghdad in the ninth century (the Islamic year 270), which attached "primary importance to the literal sense of the sacred texts. It (did)... not recognize analogical deductions, *istihsan* or a figurative interpretation of the texts" (Afchar 1971:93). By having been in existence long before Protestantism was invented, these movements help to confirm the inappropriateness of the term 'fundamentalist' in association with Islam.

Fundamentalism and present day Christian revivalist movements

Present day Christian revivalist movements in Britain, varied as they are, are in many ways manifestations of popular religion. They have bypassed the established religions and, in the Christian case, demand miracles. In the Protestant tradition, 'fundamentalism' is more specifically associated with the Calvinist theological conviction that revelation was complete with the Bible and that St. Paul was the last Apostle. There is however a Pentecostal tradition in Protestantism, which has a 'talking God' (Fitzgerald 1990), where revelation is believed to continue through the activity of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostalist beliefs in being 'born again', in Baptism of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues (glossolalia) are prevalent in the current Charismatic Christian revivalist movements which are often labelled 'fundamentalist' (Cotton 1995). This is because, like Pentecostalists, who are inspired by the descent of the Holy Spirit experienced by the Apostles at the first Christian Pentecost (Acts 2), they share the emphasis upon healing, prophesy and speaking in tongues. Marty Percy (1996) calls them 'the Signs and Wonders Movement' although he also deems them to be 'fundamentalist' on account of their preoccupation with power. It is true that many Charismatic churches will share some characteristics with fundamentalists, for instance, in seeing themselves as the true reflection of Christianity and as more or less synonymous with the early church. Andrew Walker has used the term 'Restorationist' to describe this belief, i.e., Restoring the Kingdom (of God) or 'true' New Testament Christianity (Walker:1985). But there are many ways in which the charismatic movement and 'fundamentalists' would find themselves in opposition.

'Fundamentalism', a term used pejoratively



That which is termed 'fundamentalism' is considered by many feminists to be irreconcilably anti-woman (Connolly 1991) and a response to the uncertainty of modern times (McCarthy Brown 1994:175). Jay M. Harris has argued that to suggest that this control is symptomatic of a type of stress peculiar to modern times is to ignore the fact that religions have historically treated women in this way and that an ideology of gender control is merely the ideology of people attempting to maintain the

status quo (Harris 1994:162). Whilst I accept that many forms of mainstream religion are oppressive to women I would take issue with Jay Harris' acceptance that male dominated religion is normative and his implicit denial of the possibility of change.

Since the Iranian revolution of 1979 the term 'fundamentalism' has been ascribed globally and pejoratively to a diversity of religious and other movements, from Buddhism to feminism. Jay Harris suggests that the term 'fundamentalism' is reserved for those who have the temerity to attempt to project their world view onto others - to formulate a kind of , "Christian man's burden" (Harris 1994:138). It is a word used to demonise the opposition, conjuring up images of book-burning and extremism, a term associated by the Western media with violence and "un-reason" and which has, for some people, become synonymous with Islam itself (Esposito 1991:156). 'Fundamentalism' is a term which prejudices the reader against the group under discussion . Shabbir Akhtar warns Western students of Islam to be careful: "A propagandist political vocabulary, so routinely employed in discussions of Islam, needs to be challenged in the interests of objectivity"(Akhtar 1989:95-96). These Muslim writers definitely have a point: for instance, Ruth Pearson's 'Feminism and Fundamentalism', although containing a token mention of Irish Catholics, Orthodox Jews , Rastafarians and Evangelical Christians, turns out to be about Muslims. Pearson draws upon the findings of 'Women Against Fundamentalism', an organization founded in Britain in 1989, in relation to how respect for difference has allowed leaders in the Muslim communities to oppress women (Pearson 1992: 265-67).

Fundamentalisms and Gender

The original Protestant fundamentalists in the USA were reacting also against what has been called the feminisation of religion. Ann Douglas (1977) has described this process in the case of the United States of America in the nineteenth century. As men had largely ceased to attend church the majority of consumers of Protestant Christianity in the USA were women. This was accompanied by a process of romanticisation and sentimentalisation which was thought appropriate to women with pastors and ministers taking on a kind of pseudo-femininity. The fundamentalist movement of the

1920s emphasised masculine leadership and the masculinity of God. Billy Sunday, an ex-baseball player and the prototype for Sinclair Lewis's Elmer Gantry¹², told his congregation that Christianity was not "a pale effeminate proposition" but the "robust, red blooded" faith of Jesus (Bendroth 1992:22). The drive to recruit men is now being repeated in present day Britain by 'Promise Keepers' and 'Men for Jesus' days organised by the Jesus Army, where men meet in football stadiums for 'praise days'.

Shahin Gerami counters the anti-women stereotype by not only listing the negative effects of fundamentalism but also producing a list of positive impacts which fundamentalism has had for some women, especially in the case of Islam in the Muslim Middle East (Gerami:156).

These movements have:

politicized lower urban middle and working class women who had not been mobilized, as such, in independence or bourgeois movements in Iran, Egypt, or Pakistan; propelled a large number of women, for the first time, to learn the sacred texts and men's way of interpreting them; and could lead to a more "female friendly interpretation of the sacred texts"; created a grass roots cadre of movement carriers to broaden the scope of a women's movement beyond the upper middle class, should it materialize in future; and as a result of the above factors, fostered the groundwork for an indigenous women's movement rather than a duplication of Western ways of pursuing women's rights (Gerami:156).

Among the positive effects of fundamentalist discourse in the USA, Gerami, rightly, I think, suggests the reaffirmation of "motherhood as a legitimate feminist agenda" (Gerami: 156). Brenda Brasher (1998) takes a similar position with regard to 'fundamentalist' women in the USA. She refers to the power women can wield within the confines of their religious community.

Choice of term

Writers on Islamic revival use various terms including: 'Resurgence' (Esposito 1983), 'Islamism' (Faust et al 1992), and 'Salafism' (Al-Azmeh 1991) which "calls for a return of the Koran and the salutary example of pious epigones (the Salaf) ", (Al-Azmeh 1991:44). More recently, attitudes amongst some writers are changing with regard to the term 'fundamentalist' in relation to Islamic resurgence or renewal in the near and Middle East on the grounds that Islamists do not use the term themselves and because it is polarising and alienating (Karam:1998 16-21). Shepard prefers "Islamic radicalism" in the Muslim case, and in recognition of the need for a comparative term to "make sense of a set of

global phenomena" (Marty & Appleby 1991:viii-ix) suggests "radical neotraditionalism" as a common label (Shepard 1987:355).

In short, women participants in revivalist movements, who find the experience positive, are unlikely to call themselves 'fundamentalists'. Overall, the term 'fundamentalist' tends to be adopted by the white secularised Westerner and used to describe zealous believers with whom they cannot agree. The term 'fundamentalist' encapsulates the problem in someone 'other' and avoids the necessity of examining the implicit Western insistence that liberal, secular thought is 'inerrant'. As a by-product, it constructs a rational/reasonable self via an 'irrational' other.

For the above reasons I decided to use the term 'revival' in the case of both Islamic and Christian renewals because it is a term with roots in each tradition. Nevertheless 'revival' has a different meaning in each case and there were those among my Christian informants who were not keen on the word. Specifically, the four members of the organisation Men, Women and God who are Conservative Evangelicals associate the term with events referred to as 'revivals' which happen in various places and times. Nevertheless 'revival' seems a useful working definition and is a word frequently used by members of the house church movement.

5. Revivalisms - Christian and Islamic

Islam: a Background

As in Christianity or within any major religious tradition, there are divisions within the vast heritage of Islam which is divided not only into Sunni and Shi'i Islam but into groups of various kinds of Shi'i and Sunni Muslims (Enayat 1982: 18-51). Sunni groups tend to be led by laity and Shi'is to have clerical leadership (Norton 1986:191-192). Interestingly, this difference parallels a difference between early Protestantism and Catholicism. In terms of Christian revival I am here dealing mainly with New Churches within the Protestant tradition. In Britain, the majority of Muslims are Sunni Muslims. The divisions of Shi'ism most likely to be apparent in the UK are 'Twelvers' (Imamis) and 'Seveners' (Isma'ilis), so called because of their recognition of twelve and seven Imams. But in both Islamic and

Christian cases, revivalisms tend to see themselves as above division and as representing 'true' tradition, whilst those who disagree are represented as sectarian.

Sunnis and Shi'is

Shi'ism also has a mystical dimension. All the Shi'i sects believe in the return of the Mahdi (the expected one):

who will return before the day of judgement. The Mahdi will lead the victorious final battle against the forces of evil and the Earth will then be filled with justice. The Mahdi will then rule for a period of time numbered in years. In Twelver Shi'ism the Mahdi is the Twelfth Imam who did not die but disappeared into *ghaiba* (occultation) in the ninth century. The Twelfth Imam is ever present but unseen by mortals (Norton 1994:189).

There are some similarities between Shi'i chiliasm and the millenarian beliefs of many Christian Revivalists.

Another of the many differences between Sunni and Shi'i Islam relates to *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) which enables Muslims to make an interpretation of how Islam may be applied in relation to any particular situation. In Sunni Islam during the tenth century AD 'the gate of *ijtihad* had been closed' with the establishment of the four great schools of legal interpretation. The Shi'ites too at first prohibited *ijtihad*, "taking it to be synonymous with *bida* (religious innovation) which in Islam is equivalent to heresy since the revelation of the Qur'an is final and complete" (Mortimer 1982:301). It was first reinstated by the Shi'i theologian Allama Ibn al-Mutahhar al-Hilli who died in AD 1325. In Iran, which has been Shi'i for eight centuries, some women have "received enough higher religious education and certification of education to be capable of *ijtihad*,... on legal and other questions" (Yeganeh & Keddie 1986 :119).

Reformers in the Sunni world, have over the last two centuries constantly asserted the need for *ijtihad*. Early on Shah Waliullah (1703-64 CE) perceived a necessity for *ijtihad* if Islam was to withstand the disintegration of the Muslim Empire and the growth in power of Britain (Mortimer:65). In present day Britain there are Islamic revivalists who make the call for *ijtihad* because of the need

to adapt , as one of my interviewees comments below, in order to find ways of being both 'Muslim and British'.

Women and Sunni and Shi'i Islam

There is no global Islamic position on women. For instance the image of Westernised women in Islam is not new to the Ismailis. The Ismailis, or Seveners, having the Agha Khan as living Imam, have been noted in modern times not only for a ' jet set' life style but for the building of hospitals and educational projects in a number of countries (Daftary 1990: 545-547)(Bose 1984:14). Shi'i Twelvers are less 'progressive' (in a Western sense) than Ismailis on women but they show some differences with mainstream Sunnism. Nahid Yeganeh and Nikki Keddie point out that there is a social class element in the degree of Westernisation of women in Islam. They suggest that since the nineteenth century it has, on the whole, been the upper classes who have become Westernised and committed to equality for women (Yeganeh & Keddie:118).

In Shi'ism in Iran some women have had access to Islamic education: there are women mullahs who preside over women's religious ceremonies and women interpreters of the Qur'an (Yeganeh & Keddie:119). Representations of the situation in Iran as unremittingly 'fundamentalist' omit to mention the current debate which is taking place within Iran amongst Islamist women and some leading ayatollahs (for instance: Mohamad Ebrahim Jonati and Musavi Bojnurdi) who are concerned with, among other things, raising the minimum age for marriage . The debate is ongoing in the Iranian journals 'Farzaneh' and in 'Zaneh Ruz' (Afshar 1998) (Mir-Hosseini:1996 285-319).

In all mainstream religious traditions the problem for women is the fact that holy texts have been interpreted by men. In Islam the interpretation of the Qur'an by men has prevented women from gaining their Islamic rights. The revivalist call for *ijtihad* in Sunni Islam, which would allow the Qur'anic teachings to be interpreted and applied in a way that would facilitate the liberation of women, is taken up by Anisa Abd El Fattah, Chairwoman of the National Association of Muslim Women in North America. In an interview with Q News , a journal for Muslims in Britain, she suggests the need, in a

new situation for Muslims (i.e in a non-Muslim environment) for *ijtihad*. El Fattah mentions in the same interview that their monthly newsletter includes *tafsir* (interpretation of the Qur'an) by a woman.¹³

Ecstatic religion

The traditions of Islam and Christianity both have their elements of ecstatic religion. The Islamic tradition of *tajdid* (renewal) has at various points in Islamic history, aimed to purify the religion of its accretions. Islamic Revivalists have historically rejected Sufism, sometimes called 'mystical Islam', as *bida* (innovation). Nevertheless some revivalists have been members of the more sober (i.e., less ecstatic) Sufi Orders. But there is also a tradition of ecstatic or 'intoxicated' Sufism (Baldick 1989) (Schimmel: 1975) which some writers associate with spiritual opportunities for women. But Yeganeh and Keddie suggest that it may be that this very assertion amongst Sunni mystics and Sufi women poets which led legislators to identify women's equality with heterodoxy (Yeganeh & Keddie:118). Indeed, the idea that Sufism is associated with greater female equality than orthodox Islam is not necessarily supported by evidence. A look at the famous Sufi poem Conference of the Birds, by 'Attar shows woman in the stereotype of temptress. Yet today in the UK a recent issue of Q-News evidences a pride in Sufi tradition as integral to Islam. For instance a critical report of a theatrical production of Conference of the Birds suggests that Sufism is being "hijacked in the service of a homespun Bohemian theosophy" as a New Age religion and that Sufism is being dislocated 'from the house of Islam wherein it was born and outside which it has little meaning"¹⁴ the inside cover of the same issue is embellished with the image of an enraptured dervish dancer.

In Protestantism, the Pentecostal movement represents an ecstatic form of religious practice in which the extraordinary events in Acts of the Apostles become lived realities. Three theories concerning the origins of the Pentecostal Movement are: that it emerged from the Wesleyan Holiness Movement (Synan 1975); that it began as a millenarian movement arising out of social deprivation amongst the poor (Anderson 1979); that its roots are in black religion and that as a movement, in its early years, it broke down barriers of race and class (Nelson:1981). Some black writers now see Pentecostalism

as having been hijacked by the white church (MacRobert 1988:81). More recent writers suggest that the ecstatic quality of Pentecostal religion gives women a voice which may be used subversively: a means of transgressing the 'feminine' role (McClintock Fulkerson 1996:131-141). Because the phenomenon of glossolalia is just as likely to give women a voice as men it may be that, in moments, it breaks down the gender barriers to some degree.

The Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles (1906-1914) is said to have been the source of the worldwide Pentecostal Movement (Mac Robert 1988), though others claim the 1904 Welsh Revival as the source (see Burgess & McGee 1988). Contemporary reports in Pentecostalist Journals are remarkable in their similarity to some more recent reports, regarding the Charismatic phenomenon of the 'Toronto Blessing'. This attracted media attention as a phenomenon that had people rolling in the aisles and which was traced by Guy Chevreau (a pastor at the Toronto Airport Vineyard Church) to the year 1993. There are a number of versions of its genesis. Guy Chevreau gives one version of how in November of 1993, John and Carol Arnott, (John Arnott is founder and senior pastor of the Toronto Airport Vineyard) met Claudio Freidson, the head of the Pentecostal Assemblies of God in Argentina :

He (Friedson) had gone to a Benny Hinn meeting and came home powerfully anointed,¹⁶ something that John had been longing to do....John and Carol went up, and as John puts it, Carol went flying (Chevreau 1994:25).

I find it interesting that Carol Arnott is described as being the first to receive what was to become labelled by the media as 'The Toronto Blessing' and yet the greater significance is attributed to the receipt of it by John Arnott. Like women throughout the majority of Christian history, Carol Arnott is cast in the supporting role.

Chevreau continues:

John Arnott fell down, but instantly began to analyse things : 'Lord, was this really You, or did I just go with it because I want you so badly? What am I supposed to do? I don't know if I am supposed to stand, fall, roll or forget it?' After John got up off the floor, Claudio came over to him. John was standing with his hands up, posturing his openness to the Lord, and Claudio looked at him and said, 'Do you want it? He said, 'Yes I really want it' then Claudio said 'Then take it!' and he slapped John on both of his hands (Chevreau :25-26).

This is an account of the origin of the 'Toronto Blessing' which proved, according to Chevreau to be remarkably transferable from one recipient to the next , around the world (hence the title of his book

Catch the Fire). But this phenomenon is not a new one, as can be seen from the descriptions of, for instance, the Azusa Mission, the Welsh Revivals, the Shakers and the early Methodists.

The main point in the accounts of the genesis of the Toronto Blessing is its transferability, through the laying on of hands. It was soon to become associated, in London, with Holy Trinity Brompton which, according to a report by Will Bennet in the Independent in February 1995, had congregations of 2000 and needed to hire 'bouncers' in order to exclude disruptive elements¹⁶.

In a Jesus Alive Street Paper interview with Dave Roberts, a leader of Vineyard Fellowship and editor of Alpha Magazine, by Noel Stanton of Jesus Fellowship, Roberts describes what happens when people are touched by the 'Toronto Blessing':

(T)here are definite patterns about what God does- - some are healed, some have a fairly straightforward intellectual conversation with God, others have visions and dreams which bring healing of real problems in their lives. I want to bring home to people the sort of interior change that is happening¹⁷.

Early this century in the first issue of The Apostolic Faith it was reported that "Proud, well dressed preachers came to 'investigate'. Soon their high looks were replaced with wonder, then conviction comes, and very often you will see them in a short time wallowing on the dirty floor, asking God to forgive them and make them as little children"¹⁸ (MacRobert:87). In the current Charismatic renewal in the UK, New Testament reports of healings and raisings from the dead have become the models for expectations in present times, and the phenomenon of the 'Toronto Blessing' where believers, like the early followers of Wesley, experience ecstatic states and fall to the ground during worship, is said to have become common practice (Cotton 1995, 1995a). Rolling in the aisles in the manner of the early 'holy rollers' in the USA is definitely in the Pentecostal tradition.

Ecstatic Protestantism, then, is not a modern phenomenon. The media emphasis on the Toronto Blessing has waned. Insiders no longer refer to the 'Toronto Blessing' but may use terms such as 'The Father's Blessing' instead. A recent interview in Jesus Life with Roger Forster (1998), leader of Ichthus Christian Fellowship, suggests there is now less emphasis on Toronto type phenomena of falling to the ground without Baptism in the Spirit. Roger Forster says: "I'm not happy that people

collapse under the Spirit and don't speak in tongues. I'd much rather they spoke in tongues and didn't collapse".¹⁹

Millennialism, pessimism and Christian revival

As with Islamic Revivalism, the view that decline has taken place in religious tradition is also at the heart of Christian revival. Millennialists tend to the view that things can only get worse (before they get better), viewing history as a downward spiral which ends ultimately in Apocalypse. Depending on whether they are pre- or post-Millennialists, they will envisage a thousand years of peace either, pre or post the cataclysm.

It may be that the millennialist view is in one sense summed up in the idea that 'the worse things are, the better'. This is because the Second Coming will only take place after the Beast 666 has held sway over the world as described in the book of Revelation, Chapter 13 verses 16-18: "He (the Beast) compelled everyone - small and great, rich and poor, slave and citizen- to be branded on the right hand or on the forehead, and made it illegal for anyone to buy or sell anything unless he had been branded with the name of the beast or with the number of its name"²⁰. Does this sound at all like life in the late 1990s? Some American Millennialists associate the mark of the beast with bar codes (see Ruthven below in Christian Revival in the UK section). Will the bottom fall out of this revivalist fervour in the relation to millennium once the year 2000 has passed? Perhaps not! Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riecken and Stanley Schachter (1956) discerned an "increase of proselytising following unequivocal disconfirmation of a belief". Writing of the Millerites, a Millenarian sect in the United States at the turn of the last century, who in waiting for end times, deliberately failed to cultivate crops and gave their possessions away; the researchers pointed out that it took three disconfirmations of successive projected dates for the tragedy of their situation to really dawn upon them. Prior to this they had increased in fervour (Festinger et al:216).

6. Sociologies of Revival

Religious revivalist movements pose a challenge to orthodox sociological thought which formerly perceived the irresistible spread of modernity as ultimately destroying religion. Peter Berger's famous words from The Sacred Canopy illustrate the expected outcome of secularisation : "A sky empty of angels becomes open to the intervention of the astronomer and eventually the astronaut" (Berger 1990 [1967]: 112-113). In a sense, sociologists of religion who favour secularisation theory share with 'fundamentalists' the nostalgic view that religion is in decline.

Where anti-modern religious movements have arisen, as in the case of Iran where enforced secularisation took place under the Pahlavi Shahs, there was no surprise to the secularisation theorists. However, Protestant fundamentalism in the USA does, according to Steve Bruce: "challenge the assumption that one cannot believe God actually made the world in six days...and that the Second Coming is immanent while living in a city making use of state of the art technology" (Bruce 1990:487).

More recently secularisation theory has been challenged by theories of 're-enchantment', for instance by Stark and Iannaccone who claim present revivals (presumably within the context of Western capitalism) are a result of a vigorous (nineties style) religious 'market'. Stark and Iannaccone have argued that a dynamic and revitalized religious pluralism is the inevitable outcome of the state's relaxation of control over the religious 'market' (Stark & Iannaccone 1994:234). This is very much a 'market forces' view.

Philip Mellor and Chris Shilling, on the other hand, suggest that the form of (Protestant) embodiment which facilitated the 'emptying of angels' was vulnerable all along "to 'heretical' knowledge, the sensual experience of the sacred, and to melancholy unease and anxiety". They argue that "the corporeal consequences of both the Protestant reformation and the baroque cultures of Counter-Reformation Catholicism provide central, if markedly divergent, sources for ... 'two contrasting and potentially conflicting modernities. Various commentators have noted that the seventeenth century assumed a 'Janus-like' aspect, with the emergence of scientific developments coexisting with intense theological controversies" (Mellor and Shilling 1997 :132)²¹. Charismatic Christian groups which grew

out of the late 1960s and which have largely been the source of respondents for this study, are very much postmodern church movements offering a pick and mix menu of styles of worship and activities. These New Churches range in style from Puritan culture to club (as in 'rave') culture and some manage to somehow include both. Interestingly I can see this Janus-faced aspect reflected in the Jesus Fellowship which represents on the one hand a baroque religious organisation (for instance a report in Jesus Life gave an account of oil coming from the palms of people, during worship, so they might anoint others²²) and on the other an example of Puritan piety (no television, no newspapers, no pop-music). Mellor and Shilling see emotional renewals as a desire for "sacred carnal knowledge" (Mellor and Shilling:132), the sacred incorporation of the body which had been denied by Protestant asceticism and which becomes enticing when the promise of "'redemption through consumption' ... wears thin" (Mellor and Shilling: 171). This present day representation of baroque religion in the form of "the signs and wonders movement" (Percy 1996) is almost like a reinvention of Medieval Catholicism, although I know that these Protestant groups would profoundly deny this to be the case.

With regard to 'emotional renewals' Daniele Hervieu-Leger writes that the new religious movements and religious renewals which arose out of the late sixties and the seventies started amongst students and counterculture but later were taken up by the middle-class and upper middle-class with "high cultural capital"(Leger 1993:130). This of course could mean that the same people went up market. Leger broadens the Weberian view that "the religion of emotional communities is characterized by communities of disciples gathered around a bearer of charisma"(Leger:131 from Weber 1930:452-57) to include "forms of religious communalization in which the expression of affect by individuals and the group is paramount and fundamental".²³ This is applicable to present-day Christian renewals: "The religion of emotional communities is first and foremost a religion of voluntary groups, implying personal commitment (or even conversion, in the revivalist sense) from each of its members" (Leger:131). Leger suggests that testimonies and recognition by the group are a source of bonding, a bonding which is particularly strong when under charismatic leadership- yet this intensification is not always "effervescent". Indeed, Leger states that "hot religiosity", where "song, dance, and glossolalia are used to bring participants to a state of trancelike collective excitement (is) relatively rare" (Leger:131).

This may have been the case when Leger wrote this, because it was prior to the couple of years when the 'Toronto Blessing' swept through the faithful accompanied by a great deal of media hype but Leger seems to have his fingers on the pulse regarding the "emotional" nature of present-day Christian revival.

Regarding the significance of emotional communities in relation to traditional patterns of secularization, Leger asks the question: "Is it...a 'return' phenomenon, exposing the limits of secularization in modern societies? Or is it a more complex process, involving a recomposition of religious activity in 'rationally disenchanted' modern society?" Weber saw the primitive emotional experience as a fundamental form of religious behaviour. These ecstatic experiences are reached through drugs, music, food or sleep deprivation "orgy (being) the social form in which ecstasy occurs in the earliest form of religious communalisation" (Weber 1991 [1930] :530-31). In an argument which is not unrelated to that of Mellor and Shilling (above) Leger posits one possibility as being "the advance of instrumental rationality" which has caused "an impoverishment of the religious imagination "thus these "returns to ecstasy" could be manifestations of a "regressive desire for immediate contact with the supernatural, a reversion to the meagre universe of orgy and magic". This hypothesis, which posits an emotional conclusion to the process of secularisation, fits well with the Mellor-Shilling scenario. Leger points to the fact that the paradigm of healing has changed to come in line with present ideas about the self-fulfilment of the individual (Leger:142). I find this interesting in that personal accounts of healing experiences, in relation to the Toronto Blessing, often take on what I would regard as a psychotherapeutic form.

Islamic Revival is theorized as being a response to a sense of Islamic decline: Esposito (1992) writes that "at the heart of the (Islamic) revivalist world view is the belief that the Muslim world is in a state of decline. Its cause is departure from the straight path of Islam; its cure, a return to Islam in personal and public life which will ensure the restoration of Islamic identity, values, and power (Esposito 1992:19). To take a present day illustration of this, Hizb ut-Tahrir (an Islamic revivalist movement active in Britain today) advertised their "The Vision for Khilafa Conference 1996" ²⁴ with the statement that "The Muslim Ummah today is in crisis around the world... .The reason for this decline is our

misunderstanding of Islam. Islam today has been relegated to a mere religion, only to do with the affairs of the Masjid"(Mosque). Islamic revival does not generally share in these emotional or baroque kinds of renewal which are historically anathematized by revivalist Islam with its concern to strip away cultural accretions.

In explaining resurgence in the Islamic world, both Khurshid Ahmad (1983) and Sivan (1992) emphasise the imperialist past and economic failure, the movement of rural populations to cities and high unemployment and illiteracy levels. But Ahmad points out that conversely, economic success, in terms of the oil states may also be contributory. This theme is taken up by Kepel, who sees the rise of oil prices in 1973, as a result of putting pressure on Israel's allies, and "petro-Islam" in terms of being able to "buy...a leading role in world affairs", as contributing to global 'fundamentalism' " (Kepel 1994:22).

Khurshid Ahmad uses the term 'resurgence' to mean a recurring movement in the context of Muslim history which takes the form of "an almost continuous chain of Islamic movements operating amongst the Muslim people in all parts of the world" (Ahmad 1983:222). He describes it as " a critique of the Muslim status quo" and also of dominant Western culture of our time which is prevalent in many of the Muslim countries.... It represents a reawakening of faith "(Ahmad 226-227). Esposito writes how, for Islamic political activists, Islam is a total way of life as set out in the Qur'an. Revelation in the Qur'an is reflected in the life of Muhammad (the *Sunnah*), in the first community of Muslims and in the *Shariah*, God's revealed law. If there is a difference between Islamic resurgence and Islamic revival, it may be that resurgence takes place within the Muslim world and revival sees the world as potentially Muslim. Bryan Turner has drawn attention to the fact that Islam has increasingly become part of the 'inside' of the West (Turner 1994:183). Nevertheless, resurgence in the context of attempts to purify and invigorate Islam within Muslim countries is a different enterprise to the Islamic revivalist project in Western, non-Muslim countries.

The attempt to recreate the past in the present is symptomatic of the age (Game 1991). I would argue that the movement towards revival and the desire for certainties is part of postmodernity itself

and that this shift to revival and a requirement for assurances is not only to be found in Christianity and Islam. For instance, Marion Bowman, in her study of New Age activity in Glastonbury, found that "Celticity" had become a high status quality with spiritual connotations, and that "one of the most striking contrasts between Celtic experts and New Agers is the degree of certainty with which the New Age adherents present their vision of the past" (Bowman 1993:147). This is an interesting point relevant to the research process where the researcher is by definition an inquirer without certainty and the informants, as revivalists, generally speaking have a sense of certainty which borders on the absolute.

7. Islamic and Christian revivalist groups in Britain

The revivalist movements I shall discuss, although anti-modern in terms of their perception of the moral decay of a secularised society, are very much present-day movements, at home with technology and well represented on the Internet. Shahin Gerami (1996), who compares Islamic 'fundamentalism' in Iran and Egypt with Protestant fundamentalism in the USA, argues that the apparent contradiction arises in their being "modern in the public domain and traditional in the private domain" (Gerami 1996:152). Many Christian revivalist groups use the Internet as a means of proselytisation: for instance, Jesus Fellowship have a colourful Website which includes an E-mail prayer service where one is invited to : "E-mail your 'troubles' to our e-prayer mail-box and we will pray for you" ²⁵ . Young Muslims UK also have a Home Page on the World Wide Web where they set out their purpose: "The aim of YM is to invite the youth of the UK to the pristine message of Islaam." ²⁶

Muslim communities in the UK- A new generation

Islam is popularly associated with the British South Asian communities. According to the 1991 Census, about 47 percent of all South Asians in the UK were born here. But there is a divergence of opinion about why the Pakistanis came here and what it has meant to them to be migrants. Some researchers such as Iqbal Wahhab, see them as "dispossessed": up-rooted by economic needs, flooded out of their homes by the Mangla Dam project near Mirpur, whereupon they moved to the UK (Wahhab 1989:6). In his opinion it was only later, during the Rushdie affair, that the Muslim

community found its sense of identity in Britain (Wahhab 1989:7). However, others (such as Verity Saifullah Khan) contest that this is too dramatic a view and does not take account of the existing immigrant networks that facilitated the process of migration to the UK, a process that had started long before the dam (Saifullah Khan 1977 :67).

Although much of the detailed studies on the Muslim migrant community has been conducted in Bradford (Saifullah Khan 1977) (Barton 1986) (Mirza & Nielson 1989) (Lewis 1994) it is necessary to be wary of any form of generalisation or exoticisation of Muslims and of Bradford. Even in Bradford the Muslims are diverse in terms of origin, class, occupation, political and social aspiration and degree of intensity of their commitment to their faith. The situation becomes far more complex once we take a wider perspective which could, for example, include London with the input of Muslims from around the globe, and not from South Asia alone. Fuad Nahdi, the editor of Q-News has reported on some research he carried out on behalf of the An-Nisa Society²⁷ regarding Muslims and drug use. He writes of the diversity (and poverty) of Muslims living on an estate in Harlesdon where there are "Muslims from all parts of the world including: the Caribbean, Africa (Ghana, Nigeria, Morocco, Egypt, Somalia, the Sudan and Kenya), the Middle East and others from Afghan, Kurdish, Malay, English and Irish communities"²⁸.

It is also necessary to note the important divergence of view amongst the different generations of Muslims. According to Paul Vallely and Andrew Brown in their Independent Cover Story -

The English education system has encouraged young Asians to analyse and to argue... The impact of external events - from Iran and the Salman Rushdie affair, Saddam and the Gulf War, to the persecution of Muslims in Bosnia - has prompted an emotional identification with the idea of what it means to be a Muslim. Many of those so aroused have begun a more serious exploration of the faith and have begun to practice. The result is an Islamic revival. But this is not a "descent into some kind of 'fundamentalism' ".... It is something altogether different. A new type of Islam is beginning to manifest itself: a British form of Islam.²⁹

I am not sure that these Islamic Revivalists would like the description of "a British form of Islam", especially if it is the case, as Ron Geaves states, and Fuad Nahdi implies, that young Muslims in the UK have shifted from reliance on models, such as Jamaat i-Islami in Pakistan, as described by Jorgen Nielson (Nielson 1992:136), and now look to a world Islam (Geaves 1995). Geaves has pointed out that the internationalist flavour of the organization Young Muslims UK derives from the worldwide

associations formed in universities. Young Muslims UK, a group, at home in, and yet rejecting of, many facets of Western culture, have numerous members who are among the children of these migrant peoples. Some of them will be third generation and some, of course, are not from South Asian British communities at all as their group includes members from the Yemen and Somalia as well as non-Asian British converts to Islam (Geaves 204). Islamic Revival differs from traditional forms of Islam in that students and young converts universalise the *ummah* (Muslim Community) in their aim to rise above sectarianism, and tend to write in those terms (Ahmad:223).

Philip Lewis, an advisor to the Church of England on Islamic matters sees monolingual, English speaking Muslims as debasing Islam (Lewis 1994:206). This viewpoint seems somewhat purist in an age and condition where so many of us are in a state of "cultural hybridity" (Werbner & Modood 1997) and unable to return to our roots. Jasbir Puar writes of this inability to say that one comes from anywhere in particular in terms of her being "a second-generation South Asian Sikh woman born and raised in the United States" (Puar 1993). Lewis points to the fact that South Asian Muslim youth in Bradford who are unable to speak Urdu (the main means of transmission of Islam in Bradford) "bypass the 'ulama' ". According to Lewis their Islam is assembled from pamphlets translated into English which according to Lewis contain "polemic and diatribe against the West" and "discount 1,500 years of scholarship" (Lewis:206). I find this limiting as a view, especially when one considers that the majority of Christians cannot read Hebrew or Greek. It may be that Lewis inadvertently highlights the essence of present day revivalist movements and their refreshing appeal to the young. They are movements which free themselves from old Islam and old Christianity, adapting religion to meet the needs of present times.

The separation of faith and culture is a strategy used by modernists and revivalists alike in both Christianity and Islam. For instance, an example from Islam is given by Wenonah Lyon in relation to her research amongst young revivalist women in Manchester. Lyon mentions the separation of Islam and South Asian custom as being important to the young women she interviewed, who are attenders at the West Didsbury Mosque which was described as "the Middle Eastern Mosque"(Lyon 1995:51). By "customs" I do not mean *Hadith* (the sayings of Muhammad) but the cultural and social customs

of the various South Asian Communities which were brought to, and have been modified or intensified in, Britain. One such custom is that in South Asia women pray at home but at West Didsbury women attend and listen to a sermon in Arabic (Lyon:51). "The young women in this group that I interviewed are concerned with separating religion, Islamic, from culture, Pakistani. Islam is very important to them; Pakistan is not"(Lyon:51-52). This distinction is important to the young women because it is custom which oppresses them and Islam which is seen as liberating.

But in spite of the specificities and the generalities of the 'new' and 'old' forms of Islam and the different practices within their particular associations of the various groupings within both, they all claim a generalised universal form of Islam. What is of interest amongst the new revivalists is that they do not scrutinise the denomination of the participants the way that the older generations used to do. There is a sense of solidarity created by the universal context represented by the global presence in London and Internet communications.

Christian revival in the UK

There are marked differences between the Christian and Muslim faiths, and the revivalists differ from each other in a number of ways. For Muslims who are revivalists (who generally reject Sufism) there is no celebration of inexplicable healings, no requirement for the ecstatic state and no expectation of miraculous intervention. They unite to a form of solidarity and adhere to the correct path pursuing their revivalist way with the intention of overcoming an inferior world image which has been projected onto them. There are differences amongst the Christian revivalists, but some of them go for the miracle option, a kind of immediate salvation which may improve their lot in this world as well as in the next. The Muslims have their miracle too; it was the Qur'an. Now they just have to understand it.

In terms of Christian revival in Britain, it is clear that the growing churches are the charismatic ones, the ones that choose the miracle option. The UK Christian Handbook (1994/95) estimates that the membership of this kind of church has grown from 12,000 to 140,000 since 1975. Ian Cotton writes of the growth of the British house church movement that these New Christians are Charismatics who

"really do believe that God intervenes on a daily basis, heals the sick, helps out believers, raises the dead" (Cotton 1995:1). Cotton claims that today, there are 400 million Charismatics in the world (a number which has doubled in ten years) and that they now represent 25 per cent of the world's Christians. In the UK the Evangelical/Charismatic meeting 'Spring Harvest' drew two thousand seven hundred in 1978, and eighty thousand in 1993.

Similarly the house church movement numbered one hundred (house churches) in 1970 and was estimated by Cotton to stand at one hundred and twenty thousand in 1995 with the expectation of a rise to two hundred thousand by the end of the century. A series of new church groups have sprung out of them, especially in prosperous areas of the South East of England (Cotton 1995:3). Sometimes, new church communities are 'planted'³⁰ by bigger fellowships and at other times small churches affiliate themselves with larger churches such as as Vineyard Fellowship, Ichthus and Pioneer.

Ian Cotton, a journalist, opens his book The Hallelujah Revolution, a description of Christian revival in Britain today, with the following account. A Yorkshire family had recently flown Lloyd, a charismatic healer from the USA to heal John, a dying man. It happened that John died before the evangelist's arrival. The family and Lloyd, the healer, fully expected that the corpse would raise from the dead and they kept a vigil going for four days. Eventually they all had to admit that John was dead. In the face of this disconfirmation Susan and Mary reinforced their belief by explaining the situation as "God's way of temporarily softening the pain" whilst Lloyd, the charismatic healer believed his mission must have been to "resurrect God's church (in Yorkshire) rather than John" (Cotton 1995:ix-xiii). This is an interesting example of the mechanism, of which Festinger et al (1956) write in relation to the Millerites, regarding the increase in proselytisation in the face of disconfirmation of prophecy (Festinger et al :216). Cotton comments: "This is something Charismatics have in common: however confusing events may seem at first, a divine pattern always seems to emerge at last, given thought" (Cotton 1995:xiii).

The current boom in the UK in a charismatic style of Christianity has a strongly ecstatic element (Cotton 1995). In terms of Christianity I have, for my study, concentrated, largely on 'Restorationist' groups, many of which have this charismatic style (Walker 1985) and who have grown out of the house church movement. House churches started as do-it-yourself prayer groups, formed by "denominationally dissatisfied Christians" that usually begin by meeting in members' living rooms and who later rent halls (Cotton 1995:1). Martyn Percy (1996) suggests that rapid church growth is promoted by miracles and rumours of miracles" (Percy: 140-141). Malise Ruthven describes the extent of belief some charismatics in present day Britain hold in the miraculous in the following terms: "The revival of supernaturalism - the belief that God intervenes routinely in the mundane affairs of the individual, that diabolic powers can dominate, even control physical spaces like problem housing estates, to be exorcised by prayer - is the hallmark of Nineties populist religion"³¹. Frightening indeed is this idea that prayer not policy is the answer to all problems caused by poverty and alienation. The Natural Law party, came up with similar claims before the 1992 general election. They claimed to have reduced the crime rate in Liverpool through positive thinking ³².

Martin Percy, I think rightly, points out that these new Christian movements tend towards dualist interpretations of the Gospels which desist from concentrating on the suffering involved in the crucifixion and the imitation of Christ and instead emphasise super-human experience. Percy insists on calling all "anti-liberal" movements "fundamentalist". Yet many of the groups he describes as "fundamentalist" are shot through with liberalism which itself has an innate tendency toward a conservative position because of its emphasis on individualism. The emphasis on 'signs and wonders' and on the continuing revelation of the Holy Spirit links these Fellowships to the tradition of Pentecostalism.

Much of Christian renewal in the 1990s appears to be connected not only with the expectation of urban and suburban miracles but also with the millennium. Malise Ruthven (1995) describes new Christian revivalism, which looks for signs and portents of end times in world events and attempts to match them up with revelation in Scripture, as a "Manichean, do-it-yourself faith". He suggests that ideas like "the Beast mentioned in the Book of Revelation is to be found in Supermarket bar-codes belong

to pre-millennialist ideas directly imported from the US³³. In a less extreme example Bryn Jones, of Covenant Ministries, stated in an interview with Noel Stanton of the Jesus Fellowship in 1993:

My present conviction is that we're in the end times. I look at what Jesus and Paul describe as the characteristic trends of the end times. The trends in world economics, in international relations, in the social conditions of every nation. There's clearly a divine arrangement of these trends. They all indicate the collapse and passing away of our present age; they all point to the end of the end times.³⁴

These thoughts are echoed by many other revivalists of the time.

Ian Cotton praises achievements of New Christian groups like the Peckham-based Ichthus, whose projects include nurseries and primary schools, and Pecan, which provides training schemes for the young unemployed and claims 40 per cent placement rate in training schemes or work (Cotton 1995:76-90). I find myself less applauding of their achievements. The fact that Ichthus and Pecan clearly have an agenda of converting their customers makes me question what kind of service it is that is being offered. What happens if someone refuses to convert? Do they continue to get the same service? What happens if a potential client has a problem related to something which is disapproved of by the group, for instance abortion. What if the client is homosexual? Yet the fact remains that some of these New Churches are filling gaps in social provision. They provide help and services and friendship which are not offered by statutory services.

8. Revivalisms and gender

Islamic Revival: Science and 'Naturalness'

Islamic revival today sometimes exhibits this scientific face. The book The Bible, the Qur'an and Science written by the surgeon Maurice Bucaille, in which the author claims that modern science proves the veracity of Qur'an as Divine revelation and, at the same time, that the Bible is lacking in this respect³⁵, is popular with some young Muslims. For instance, I attended a talk at the York University Student Islamic Association where the speaker claimed that the Qur'an contained the 'Big Bang' theory³⁶ as well as an account of human gestation³⁷. The tendency to scientism was first evident in the Manar publications (c. 1900) in the commentaries of the modernist Rashid Rida (1865-1935)³⁸ who thought that the technological wonders of the modern age were foretold in the Qur'an. Later, Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) who became leading theorist of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in the early

1950s, drew on the writings of another French surgeon, Alexis Carol (1935)³⁹ (Choueiri:1990). Ibrahim Abusharif, a contributor to Q News, attributes the present tendency to the fact that the majority of Muslim students are involved in science subjects.⁴⁰ Barr (1977) suggests in the case of Christian 'fundamentalists' that secular education imparts a materialistic and scientific idea of truth and that this is transferred to religion (Barr:94). But in the case of Islam I think the idea of the need for the discoveries of science to be prefigured in the Qur'an is a consequence of the concept of *fitra* (that which is in conformity with natural law) and the idea that the Qur'an and the Natural Law are in harmony. Further, if the Qur'an is the final revelation, which Muslims believe it to be, then for the scientifically minded, it should contain in some way all the discoveries which are to come.

In modern Islamic revivalism, the idea of *fitra*, which is thought to be accessible to the faculties "of any right thinking individual", has been accentuated. Islam is considered to be "the primeval religion *din al-firta*, a sort of natural religion in conformity with natural law" (Al-Azmeh 1993:77). The idea that science can prove the veracity of the Qur'an as revelation is a logical step based upon this belief. It is thought that the order of the universe reflects the order of the revelation of the Qur'an and that this will be confirmed by the scientific uncovering of 'Natural law'. The emphasis on *fitra* may be partially attributable to polemic with Christian missionising evangelicals, as a counter to Christian fundamentalist beliefs. Fundamentalist Christians by resisting science in the form of the Darwinian scheme of evolution (because this was contrary to Genesis), laid themselves and Christianity open to ridicule. To be able to point to proofs of how the Qur'an is in harmony with science, and how it indeed contains all science in encapsulated form, could be seen as a proof of Muslim superiority.

Ziba Mir-Hosseini has written that, in Iran, the idea of the 'naturalness' of Islamic law, was a modern discourse to which Ayatollah Motterhari largely contributed. But more recently, there are signs that this idea of naturalness is being questioned in some Islamic circles in the Islamic Republic of Iran (Mir Hosseini:1996). This is no bad thing because the idea of 'naturalness' has been used to make women's 'biology their destiny' and to define and limit women's role to domestic and nurturing tasks. 'Essentialism' or the unreconstructed view of 'naturalness' held within some religious discourses is a problem because it has previously been the means by which women have been locked into a

biological destiny . Yet in the longer run, a recognition of lived realities of the body (however they may be constructed or derived) may contain the 'baby' that the postmodernists throw out with the authorial bathwater. ⁴¹ From a feminist viewpoint it is necessary to interrogate that which is deemed to be 'natural' on the grounds that naturalness is defined by dominant discourse. Nevertheless, following Mellor and Shilling (1994) (1997), I would argue that the opposite extreme which is represented in poststructuralist analysis and which defines gender relations as *purely* a construction of discourses results in "disembodiment". This in turn denies women the right to any special role or consideration in any time or condition of their lives. This is not good news for women because such an analysis takes place against a backdrop of unchanged power relations and dominant discourses. This other extreme to 'naturalness', is in my view, also disempowering for women because it denies the possibility of collective political struggle and has the potential to strip women of their hard won rights. From this viewpoint we cease to be women: we are just masquerading as such (Riviere 1986). In applying poststructuralism as a feminist tool of analysis it is necessary to reevaluate its political potential and to find ways of grounding it in a wider discourse which uses its possibility for an analysis of power relations but which also acknowledges the lived realities of the body such as pregnancy, child birth, ageing and so on. These are not phantasms but realities with which women have to contend in a society which remains sexist, inconsiderate towards mothers and their children and ageist in its treatment of older women.

Christianity and women

St Augustine's (354-430CE) writings on marriage and sexuality have, more than those of any other church father, contributed to the development of later Roman Catholic teaching on these subjects both in medieval times and in the twentieth century. Unlike many churchmen of the early Christian era, Augustine had engaged in a long sexual relationship in his youth, fathering a son by a mistress whom he dumped upon his conversion. Augustine was convinced that he had to renounce sexual life in order to embrace Christianity and his Confessions were about how enormously difficult this was for him. Before he became a Christian, Augustine was a member of a Manichaeian sect which originated in 3rd century Persia and which spread to North Africa, birth-place of Augustine, in the 4th

Century(Clark and Richardson 1996:58). According to the dualistic Manichaeic teaching it was thought that “bringing new human beings into the world only further dispersed the sparks of light that had become entangled with matter as a result of the defeat of light by darkness in a primeval battle” (Clark & Richardson:58). By reaction, in opposing this teaching in his Christian writings, Augustine formulated an ethic which bound intercourse to procreation and found marital procreation good. Augustine’s teaching on abortion and contraception, arrived at by way of reaction to Manichean teachings, became central to Catholic teaching and later Christian debates⁴². Unlike the later Protestant reformers, Augustine did not endorse family life, but those who insisted upon marriage did not necessarily do much for the position of women either.

In the Late Middle Ages, the works of Aristotle became available to the West via the Islamic world. Aristotle had a biological theory that the female was a ‘misbegotten male’, resulting from an imperfect conception. Perfect humanity was humanity in a male form. Although Thomas Aquinas thought that women were also made in the likeness of God, he still basically saw women as inferior⁴³. This is inescapable if we have a model of a male God. Aquinas thought that the soul in the female was weakened by being associated with a weak body. Aquinas says that conception and birth are the two unique helps that women can offer their husbands. For any other task another man would be better suited. Women’s ‘feebleness’ and subjugation are another reason Thomas Aquinas gives for women’s exclusion from the priesthood although he does not deny that women have received spiritual gifts such as Prophecy. In fact he concedes that some women exhibit spiritual gifts to a greater degree than men but that these endowments do not make them fit candidates for clerical office.

The Reformation did not necessarily improve things for women. In 1522 Luther wrote The Estate of Marriage in which he bases his directive that all believers should marry and procreate on God’s commandment to ‘reproduce and multiply’ in Genesis. Protestantism forged the belief that a woman’s place is in the home (Armstrong 1987) (Wiesner 1990). Merry Wiesner discusses the way that the Reformation displaced a sublime model of femininity, largely rejecting the ‘two Marys’, i.e; the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene. She quotes from Martha Behrens:

Idealized by Luther, marriage was a masculine institution calling for complete self-abnegation by a woman, either as mother, wife, or daughter. Rather than freeing her from the medieval

ideal of celibacy, this idea chained her to a restrictive ideal of servitude. Moreover, this teaching that God was pleased by this servitude served to spiritualise or hallow these biological roles, causing resistance against development in other areas.⁴⁴

Women were no longer permitted to live alone or together as unmarried women. All had to come under the authority of a man. Wiesner points out that this may even have been a contributory cause to the witch hunts. Women choosing to remain celibate were believed to be fighting an insatiable sex drive⁴⁵ (Rowbotham 1973:6). This is interesting, from a comparative viewpoint, because it echoes the description of Fatna Sabbah (1988) regarding the construction of 'omnisexual woman' in Muslim discourse and the imperative that she be controlled and made to reflect the inert and silent 'feminine' ideal (Sabbah 1988:25).

Luther thought that marriage and child birth was a woman's sole function and he advised that the way to console women in childbirth was "Say, yes, dear lady, if you were not a wife, you would certainly wish to become one, so that you could do God's will by suffering and perhaps dying through these delicious pains" (Wiesner:127)⁴⁶. Some modern Christian groups appear to draw on Luther's model, especially those which aim to develop a new brand of 'muscular Christianity'. The Protestant fundamentalists of the 1920s clearly did.

Rosemary Radford Ruether writes:

The reformation represents a revolt against the eschatological counter-culture institutionalized in monasticism. It abolished monasteries for either men or women and also clerical celibacy. But this meant that it rooted itself all the more exclusively in the patriarchal type Christianity. The patriarchal family is now stressed as the nucleus of the Church, to be modelled by the married pastor and his obedient wife and children (Ruether 1990:144).

Celibacy was lost as an option but it is now being reinvented by some groups as a possibility today. Ruether points out there have been millennialist sects who have adopted celibacy because they thought they were living in the last days. In the Shakers she sees a sexual equality based on celibacy and an idea of a Christ who is beyond gender, encompasses both genders. Today, in the Jesus Fellowship in Britain, celibacy is regarded as the highest state⁴⁷. This idea of celibacy within Protestantism is unusual. For some it may represent a practical way of dealing with the issue of homosexuality within a situation where sex is not allowable outside marriage and can therefore only be heterosexual. This is also the case in Islam.⁴⁸ In terms of both Protestantism and Islam the ideal

state is the married one. This is what Carter Heyward has termed "Heterosexist Theology"⁴⁹. Homosexual activity is proscribed by both Islamic revivalist and Christian revivalist groups. This does not mean that a person cannot recognise that they are lesbian or gay but because sexual activity outside marriage is prohibited in both cases the only option is to remain celibate or marry anyway.

Protestant fundamentalism and gender

As mentioned above, the Fundamentalist movement of the 1920s, through preachers such as Donald Grey Barnhouse and Billy Sunday, emphasised masculine leadership and aimed to reassert the masculinity of God. In the USA, these preachers were reacting against the so called 'feminization' of religion, a term which refers to the process whereby men (generally speaking, ceased attending church and the majority of churchgoers were women). Barnhouse offered feminine submission as a recipe for the reversal of the 'feminization' process (Bendroth 1992:22). The epitome of the cult of feminine submission arrived in the 1970s in the form of Marabel Morgan's book The Total Woman. Morgan wrote, "It is only when a woman surrenders her life to her husband, reveres and worships him, and is willing to serve him, that she becomes really beautiful to him" (Morgan 1975:96).

It often goes unnoticed that women play a *consensual* part and that the return to muscular and masculine religion depends upon the submission of women in order to reinforce masculinity against the threat of erosion. This reinforcement of masculinity does not always come easily to men. In the late 1980s, Carl of the Covenant Community in the USA told Susan Rose "my wife is actually better at accounting than I am, but we know that as a man, I should be running the finances...I'm not a natural leader; I've had to work at it". Marcie, Carl's wife describes her husband in the terms of the submitting wife: "He is my spiritual father in the Lord; he brought me to Christ and he is my cover and the head of our household. I sit at his feet in amazement, much as the church sits at the feet of Christ, the bridegroom" (Rose 1988:66). It seems that women have the role of not only producing 'femininity', by submission, but also by way of contrast to their enactment of obedience and dependence, the appearance of 'masculinity' in their men as well. But religious submission for women, is a special problem: it is frequently a double submission, submission before both men and God.

Gender, separation, spaces and covering: covering in Christianity

Modesty codes are not at all the same thing in Islam as they are in Christianity but not only are there inter-religious differences but intra-religious ones as well. In Christianity there is a teaching on head covering in the letters of St. Paul 1 Cor 11 v 4-11 but although some restorationist churches take this on in general this is ignored.

The requirement by some Christian groups that women submit to male authority is also drawn selectively from St. Paul. The house church or restorationist movement has its dissimilarities from Pentecostalism. These differences are described by Andrew Walker as being in particular, linked to the practice of 'shepherding' whereby a believer has a personal leader who is given authority as a shepherd over his or her private life. This approach has recently been given less emphasis, perhaps because of criticism in terms of the potential it offers for exploitation and abuse. Walker, Davies and Percy all see the house church as being unmitigatedly male-led (Walker 1985) (Davies 1986) (Percy 1996). Walker and Davies were however, both writing in the 1980s, and in a decade things can change. Martin Percy was focusing upon one particular fellowship, Vineyard, which may not be entirely representative. William Davies wrote:

Of course, the teaching may vary slightly according to the particular strand of the house church movement, but in general women do not figure in its authority structures, not significantly at any rate. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers and elders are offices for men only" (Davies 1986:66).

Domestic arrangements follow a similar pattern where the husband is head of the household. Wives should submit to their husbands and children to their parents (but especially the father) (Ephesians 5:22-6:4) (Davies:61).

Head covering

The covering of authority in evangelical and restorationist discourse and the covering of the veil in Islam is not the same. Although Christian women wore hats or veils to church in the past (and some still do) head covering is less of an issue in Christianity than it is in Islam. This is partly because of the

manner in which veil wearing has been perceived as retrogressive by non-Muslims with regard to Islam and as an imposition by Muslim men on women. Conversely, in the Islamic world, colonial practices of enforced unveiling only helped to reinforce the *hijab* as a potent symbol of Islam (Ahmed 1992). This will be discussed at length in Chapter 5.

Although, in the context of restorationist Christianity, Davies mentions the feminine practice of head covering in some house churches as a sign of submission to the husband's authority (a practice in line with Paul's recommendation in 1 Corinthians 11:5 (Davies:68)) this is not widely applied amongst the house churches today and was a concern mentioned by only one of my Christian respondents. What is most interesting about this state of affairs is that the failure to follow one Pauline directive on head covering and the emphasis placed upon another i.e feminine submission illustrates the selectivity with which these new churches draw upon the writings of St. Paul. This point is made by Shepard (1987) regarding the contradiction between the importance which fundamentalists attach to making an unbiased and uncontaminated reading of scripture and the reality of the resultant reading which is actually highly specific.

Writers on the *hijab* in Islam have indicated that the practice of veiling relates not only to head covering but also to architectural spaces and the separation of women from the public sphere (Stowasser 1984:32)(Mernissi 1995:42). Martin Luther also believed in 'purdah' (segregation of women). He writes how the woman and wife as mother " enjoys staying at home, enjoys being in the kitchen... does not enjoy going out...does not enjoy speaking to others" (Wiesner:127). Mernissi sees the veil as marking out the woman as being in a domain in which she does not belong (Mernissi 1991a) yet not all writers interpret the spacial aspect of *hijab* so negatively. Oakley (1982) following Makhlouf (1979) shows the subversive element of veiling in that it allows women to witness the transactions which take place in the world of men whilst the reverse is not possible. Frequently treated by Westerners as a form of oppression this subversive feature of *hijab* tends to be overlooked.

It is important to note that some Muslim feminists who do not favour veiling describe the practice as either related to cultural conventions of various Muslim groups from different backgrounds or as

historically connected to customs among ancient peoples and as having no particular connection to today (Afkhani:13). For instance, Mernissi suggests that privileged women in pre-Islamic times veiled as a sign that they were neither prostitutes nor slaves (Mernissi 1991a: 182-8). Afkhani points to the Qur'anic verses Surah 33 : 28-32 which relate particularly to the wives of the Prophet. She suggests that veiling applies only to them (Afkhani:13).

Following colonial attacks on *hijab* (Ahmed 1992) and the resultant reinforcement of the hijab as a symbol of Islam, twentieth century secularizers, like Ataturk in Turkey and Reza Shah in Iran, brought in dress reforms as part of their sweeping attempts at modernization. These were perceived by many Muslims to be neo-colonialist assaults on Islam. Ataturk's uniformity of dress law (1926) forbade the wearing of the fez by men. Instead they were required to wear Western style brimmed hats. They each were also required to wear Western style shoes, trousers, a shirt and waistcoat (Mortimer:141). In Iran Reza Shah promulgated a 'uniformity of dress law' "that not only required men to wear western dress but legally obliged women to renounce the veil" (Mortimer: 309). These drastic reforms helped to reinforce Islamic dress as anti-secularist and anti-Western. Because colonial feminism advocated unveiling feminism was linked in Muslim minds with imperialism and neo-imperialism (Kandiyoti 1991:7)

Lama Abu Odeh has written how in 1970s Jordan, Algeria and Egypt, Western women's clothes carried a "capitalist' construction of the female body: one that is sexualized, objectified, thingified", by being identified with consumerism. Because capitalism co-existed with pre-capitalist social formations in post-colonial societies "women's bodies were simultaneously constructed 'traditionally': 'chattelized'..., terrorized as trustees of family (sexual) honour" (Odeh:27). This led to a conflictual situation between 'seductive' and 'asexual' formulations of the body which resulted in the impossible balance of being the "attractive prude" (Odeh:28)

I think this "attractive prude" syndrome is similar to the formulation to be found in the writing of Beverly LaHaye, also of the 1970s, but in this case from a proponent of female Christian submission in the USA. On the one hand, in The Spirit Controlled Woman (1976), LaHaye advises that the "Spirit-

filled...women will be totally submissive to her husband” and, on the other, in the book The Act of Marriage (which she co-authored with her husband, Moral Majority co-founder, Tim LaHaye), counsels: “Many women are much too passive in lovemaking...Lovemaking is a contact sport which requires two active people” (LaHaye 1978:126). It is hard to imagine how a woman is supposed to do a complete turn around from total submission to an involvement in a “contact sport” with one to whom she is supposed to submit totally. Is this configuration of contradictory messages so different than the dilemma of the “attractive prude”? This combination of innocence and invisibility in public and being a whore at home has been eloquently made by Fatma A Sabbah (1984).

Young Islamic revivalist women in the 1980s found a solution to the dilemma in the adoption of Islamist dress. This allowed women to take the moral high ground and appear with decorum in public and wear Western dress in private (Odeh:1993). The difference between wearing *hijab* in a Muslim country where it is a requirement and wearing it in a liberal democracy, such as the UK, where it produces higher rather than lower visibility, will be discussed in Chapter 5.

9. Feminisms within the religious traditions

Muslim and Islamist Feminist Scholars of Islam

In order to make an assessment of the degree to which feminist thinking has (or has not) been taken on board within revivalist discourses it is necessary first to explore feminist scholarship, of the ‘liberal’ kind, which has already taken place within both traditions. I use the term ‘liberal’ here in order to differentiate, in the Muslim case, between Muslim feminist scholars who are grounded in Islam but who incorporate some Western values (in terms of an Enlightenment view of equality) and Islamic feminists who regard Islam as the source of feminism and who draw solely upon that tradition.

Historically, it is necessary to look at the development of colonial feminism in the Middle East in order to understand some of the difficulties. Leila Ahmed has traced the history of feminism in Egypt and has described how colonials tried to import the very feminism they were aiming to suppress in Britain as a means of disrupting Muslim society in Egypt (Ahmed 1992:175-183). The British occupation of

Egypt, which began in 1882, and which exploited Egyptian raw materials, especially cotton, accentuated Egyptian class divisions. The beneficiaries of British reform and involvement in European capitalism were the European residents and the Egyptian upper and the new middle classes. The lower classes were the losers and therefore attitudes towards Western ways were class linked. Islamic practices in relation to women were viewed through Western eyes as inferior to Western customs. Ahmed points to how, threatened in Britain by an increase in feminism, the colonial establishment in Egypt, while opposing British feminism, appropriated the emancipatory politics and language of feminism 'and redirected it, in the service of colonialism, towards Other men and the cultures of Other men'(Ahmed:151). Lord Cromer who was the British Consul General and champion of the unveiling of Egyptian women was, in England, founding member and sometime President of the Men's League for Opposing Women's Suffrage. A criticism that can be levelled at Leila Ahmed in her analysis of colonial feminism in Egypt is that she undervalues the vigour of the Egyptian women's movement of the time. Ahmed goes along with the idea that Qassim Amin, a modernist and upper class Egyptian servant of colonialism, through his book *The Liberation of Women* (1899)⁵⁰ was the source of Egyptian Feminism. Amin admired civilization built upon science and perceived European culture as pointing the way to progress and he reexpressed the colonial belief in the inferiority of Muslim culture. The outcome of the history of colonial feminism in the Middle East has been the association of feminism, by many Muslims, with imperialism, a view which is still current for some.

Ahmed has made a distinction between two kinds of feminism based in Islam and which had their roots in Egypt earlier this century. These were modernist feminists who were in favour of unveiling and women's suffrage and who had dialogue with the West, and Islamist feminists who were opposed to Westernisation and unveiling (Ahmed:180). Leila Ahmed distinguished, historically, between modernist and Islamist feminism within the context of Egypt. Ahmed cites Huda Sha'rawi, founder of the Egyptian Feminist Union in the 1920s, who favoured unveiling and women's suffrage and who had many connections with Western feminists, as an example of a feminism which looks Westwards. Malak Hifni Nassef was, however, in the first two decades of the twentieth century, already representative of a form of feminism which was opposed to Westernization and unveiling

(Ahmed 175-183). Ahmed gives these as two examples of the way feminism in Egypt could go, both of which were not created in a vacuum but in relation to the West.

Islamist feminists

Both these threads of modernist and Islamist feminism described by Ahmed (above) have influenced the later forms of Islamic feminism which are now apparent in the West where there is, amongst some Islamic revivalist sisters, a desire to wear the veil and reject certain Western consumerist ways at the same time as claiming rights. Azza Karam differentiates, in present-day Egypt between 'Muslim feminists' whom she says use Islamic sources "but their aim is to show that the discourse of equality between men and women *is* valid" (Karam 1998:11) and 'Islamist feminists' who hold the view that "women are oppressed precisely because they try to be 'equal' to men and are therefore being placed in unnatural settings and unfair situations, which denigrate them and take away their integrity and dignity as women"(Karam:9-10). Islamist feminists are complimentary in their approach to gender and this differentiates them, not only from Muslim feminists but from the majority of Western feminists as well. Both Muslim and Islamist feminists argue for *ijtihad*, and against "existing patriarchal formations ... and the implications of their formations on gender, and both use similar 'tools' of analysis and argumentation" i.e referring to Islamic texts. But the difference is in the Muslim feminist's contextualisation (like Biblical higher criticism) of Quranic and other religious requirements (Karam 1998:12).

The Islamic feminism which does not look to the West as a model and which bases itself upon the provision for women within the Qur'an appears to be growing in the present time. They are not to be found in Egypt alone. They are in the tradition of Islamic feminist activists who do not reject *hijab*, feminists who go back to Malak Hifni Nassef of Egypt at the beginning of this century (Ahmed 175-183). But they have been joined by activists in the West (such as Anisa Abd El Fattah, Chairwoman of the National Association of Muslim Women in North America) who have launched a programme of home study for Muslim women to enable them to claim their Islamic rights⁵¹.

Karam writes that these activists do not generally like the term 'feminist'. It is often argued that there are 'no women's issues' within Islam (Karam:209) but Karam uses the term for two reasons: to distinguish them from 'non-feminist' Islamists and to "indicate... possible points of intersection with other women activists" (Karam:10). The latter is an important point, linked to the purpose of my quest which is stated in the introduction and which is about shared views and the endeavour to discover where interests between women with disparate beliefs intersect and where it might be possible, for a moment, to find a shared voice. This is a necessary response to the postmodern atomisation of feminisms into a myriad particularities and specificities with no common articulation.

Muslim feminists

Feminist theologians and feminist scholars of Islam who take a progressive approach from within their religious traditions seek ways of improving the situation of women by using methodologies which facilitate a progressive reading of primary sources of their religions. Riffat Hassan, a feminist scholar of Islam, has pointed out that because, through the centuries the sources of Islam - the Qur'an, the Sunnah (the example of the life of the Prophet), the Hadith (the sayings of the Prophet), the Fiqh (jurisprudence) and the Shariah (Islamic law) - have been interpreted by men (although there are some exceptions to the rule), "the fact remains that the Islamic tradition has, by and large, remained rigidly patriarchal until the present time, prohibiting the growth of scholarship among women particularly in the realm of religious thought" (Hassan 1991:42).

Ghazal Anwar turns her attention to the Qur'an as the primary source of Islam and describes the various strategies or positions which may facilitate a feminist reading of the Qur'an (Anwar 1996:57). She includes: 1. the apologetic; 2. the reformist; 3. the transformative; 4. the rationalist; and 5. the rejectionist (Anwar 1996:57). These categories are also useful in terms of sorting out the various kinds of feminist theology. For the purpose of this study I would narrow these down to the apologetic, which is the revivalist, 'fundamentalist' or 'traditionalist' stance, the 'progress within' position which includes 2, 3 and 4 and the rejectionist position which sees progress as only possible from without. The

rejectionists are those who decide that their tradition is hopelessly patriarchal and leave (Daly 1973) (Hampson 1990) and who take on a post-Christian feminist position.

Progressive readings of Islam

Like Riffat Hassan, scholars who seek to reclaim that which they believe to be liberating within their tradition look to “elements in scriptures or tradition that have been suppressed, forgotten, or erased by patriarchal power relations and theory” (Cooey, Eakin & McDaniel 1991:ix). Muslim feminists, such as Leila Ahmed and Fatima Mernissi attempt then, to make a progressive reading of the primary sources: The Qur’an, the Hadith and the Sunnah. They also make a feminist reading of early Islamic history and both conclude that their religion, especially the legalised aspect, has been appropriated by men. They see the codification, which took place three hundred years after the life of Muhammad, as a misrepresentation of an earlier revolutionary Islam which has been influenced by Zoroastrian attitudes to women (Ahmed 1992) (Mernissi 1991).

Rana Kabbani also makes a positive reading of the teachings of Muhammad. She points out that Muhammad’s teaching promised liberation to women in 7th century Arabia, promised them money and economic independence and the right to inherit so they would no longer be chattels that were passed between men. The teachings of Muhammad also gave women the right to refuse to be married, yet now Islam is seen through Western eyes as a religion which forces women into arranged marriages. In Britain it was the passing of the Married Woman’s Property Act in 1925 that enabled married women to have control of their money. Kabbani points out that Islam gave women economic independence in 7th century Arabia. Kabbani indicates that with regard to the Qur’anic story of the fall, Adam bears equal responsibility with Eve. Kabbani sees an inbuilt sexism in Christian scriptures with regard to this story (Kabbani 1992:37).

Like Kabbani, Bouthaina Shaaban is another of the writers who suggests women were empowered by early Islam to become “queens, doctors, warriors, poets, and literary critics” (Shaaban 1995:62). If one way of assisting women’s struggle within Islam is to accentuate the positive teachings in the

Qur'an in relation to women, another is to question the validity of the Hadith, with regard to those utterances, attributed to Muhammad, which appear to encourage the oppression of women (Mernissi 1991:49).

An extension of this approach, which gives flexibility in an environment hostile to Islam, is to discount the Hadith altogether, a method practised by the *Al-Ahl Qur'an*, (People of the Qur'an) (Wolffe 1993). This was one of the responses to colonial rule in India, a way of being able to stay Islamic under unIslamic rule. It is a method currently utilized by members of a present day group, the Submitters (discussed in Chapter 2), who are based mostly in Canada and the USA but who make their presence known in the UK through the Internet. There are also members of this group in Britain.

Feminist theology and Biblical feminism

Making a feminist reading of Islam or Christianity is still a minority activity and largely suspected by the main stream. But the more liberal dimensions of feminist theology, like liberal Muslim interpretations which for example deny the validity of *hijab*, tend to be written off by revivalists as irrelevant to their cause and as playing into the hands of the enemy. In the case of Christian revivalists this is because feminist theology begins with "a hermeneutic of suspicion, expecting that close study asking the right questions will uncover many levels of patriarchal bias, some in the Bible itself" (Katherine Doob Sakenfeld in Russell and Clarkson 1996:27) whereas Biblical feminists/ Evangelical feminists start from a "hermeneutic of faith" (Kroeger: 1995) which takes a more optimistic view of the Bible, assuming it to be a book of liberation rather than of oppression. This sums up the difference between Biblical feminism and feminist theology and runs parallel to the difference between Islamic feminism and Muslim feminism. Feminist theology starts from women's experience and the promotion of full humanity. Biblical feminism starts with the Bible. Elaine Storkey (1985) is one of the key people in Britain who take an Evangelical feminist position. Organisations which promote Biblical feminism are the CBE (Council for Biblical Equality) and in Britain, MW&G (Men Women and God). They work in 'the lion's mouth' as it were, as Conservative Evangelicals who are insisting upon gender equality:

Nor should women be reluctant to study Scripture because of past hurts or present injustices inflicted on women in the name of Scripture. Once again, the paradox is that the only true liberation for women is found in upholding the authoritative Word of God who promises, 'I will not violate my covenant, or alter the word that went forth from my lips' (Ps.89:34). It is not some contemporary female wishful thinking, but God's inspired word which cannot lie that grants both men and women full membership in the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:5-6), (Kroeger, Evans and Storkey 1995:6).

Biblical feminism is not a new movement. As early as 1974, Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty wrote a book All We're Meant to Be in which they call themselves Biblical feminists. But Biblical feminism comes out of a long tradition of evangelical feminism, for instance Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote The Women's Bible in 1898. Nancy Hardesty (1984) writes a topography of evangelical feminism in the nineteenth century and Ruth Tucker and Walter Liefeld quote a number of evangelical feminists from the late nineteenth century (Tucker and Liefeld 1987: 402 ff),

Although women have participated in theological debate, Ann Loades dates feminist theology back to Valerie Saiving's (1960)⁸² article in which she points to the specific burden women carry in a religion "where women's realization of full self identity was likely to be characterized as sin or temptation to sin" (Loades:81). Ann Loades points out that feminist theology, within the Christian tradition, covers many different positions just as the terms 'feminist' and 'theology' do separately (Loades 1990).

Feminist theology implies a reclaiming of Christian history and a feminist reading of the Bible, both in terms of interpreting the earliest Christian community as being egalitarian (Fiorenza 1984) as well as in discovering women's story in the Bible story (Trible 1984). Other feminist theologians develop feminist Christologies which are more 'woman friendly' ways of understanding the person and message of Christ (Ruether 1990).

In the last decade, theologies which take a feminist position have multiplied along lines of difference, a paradigmatic shift to liberation theologies which reflect the "experiences of women who have endured double or triple burdens" especially in the United States where there is Womanist Theology (African American), a term coined by Alice Walker, Mujerista Theology (Latina), Evangelical Theology (or Biblical Feminism), Queer Theology, Indigenous Women's Theology (Native American) and so on (Russell & Clarkson 1996:283-300).

All feminist theologies may be considered as part of liberation theology as all theologies of liberation depend upon the concept of "the hermeneutical (epistemological and interpretational) privilege of the poor" (Solle 1991:69). This means that in theologies of liberation oppressed peoples are deemed to be more able to understand the Bible than the oppressors: the poor are the teachers. This situation is described in the Magnificat in the New Testament, Luke 1, 50-53:

All ages prove that he is there
 For those who look to him in earnest
 his power is against the rulers
 And he thwarts their plans.
 he casts down from their seats those who are on high
 And exalts the humiliated;
 he fills the hungry with good things,
 And the rich go away empty.

Dorothea Solle writes that it is no coincidence that these words, "a collection of verses from the Hebrew Bible" (Solle: 70), were spoken by a young woman, Mary the mother of Jesus. In this context, Mary, because of the radical nature of the words she speaks, stands as a witness to the distortion of scriptural tradition. This is because she has been turned into "the 'Ave Maria' with bowed head, extreme humility in her gestures, (who) tells of this destruction of biblical reality" (Solle: 70). This belief that an early, more egalitarian Christian tradition had been distorted by patriarchy is an approach shared by a number of feminist theologians.

Feminist theology also implies a 'feminist' reading of the Bible, which involves, rereading it in terms of what the Bible has to say about 'women's story'. An example of this is to be found in the work of Phillis Tribble who gives an interpretation of the stories from the Hebrew Bible dealing with women's terror (Tribble 1984): in Judges 11 30-40. Jephthah, a general, is promised victory if he sacrifices the first thing that he encounters on his return home. His daughter and only child runs to meet him. Solle writes "no angel intervenes as in Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac" (Solle:70). In another example, Lot offered his daughters to the men of Sodom in order to protect a male guest. Tribble writes that these narratives show women as the property of men who have control over women's bodies. Tribble writes that this perspective uncovers evidence of the subordination of women in Scripture and that it has led to different conclusions. "Some people denounce biblical faith as hopelessly misogynous, although this judgement usually fails to evaluate the evidence in terms of Israelite culture. Some reprehensibly

use these data to support anti-Semitic sentiments. Some read the Bible as a historical document devoid of any continuing authority and hence worthy of dismissal" (Trible 1990:24). But Trible's way is to make a reading sympathetic to the abused woman and, in memoriam, tells her story.

The Womanist theologian Delores S Williams (1993) finds a parallel in Hagar's Story (Genesis 16:1-6), the story of a black slave woman compelled to conceive a child by Abraham, by Sarah her mistress. Williams connects Hagar's plight with poor black American women now who may find themselves forced into the situation of maternal surrogacy in the production of white babies (Williams 1993:15-33). Williams, elsewhere, reclaims Christianity for black women, by developing "a womanist notion of sin informed, in part, by Black female and Black male sources". Sin has been defined for us by men and largely, by white men (Williams 1995:130-147).

Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza takes a 'transformative' approach which reconstructs, rethinks and reformulates aspects of the tradition which have legitimated the oppression of women (Cooley, Eakin & McDaniel 1991: x). In In Memory of Her Fiorenza (1984) reconstructs the history of a Jesus movement at the outset of Christianity and describes it as consisting of equals. For instance Fiorenza has four disciples at the end of Mark's Gospel, who are women: "Mary of Magdela, Mary, the daughter or wife of James the Younger, and the mother of Joses and Salome" (Fiorenza 1984:320).

Reconstruction may also take the form of feminist Christologies (Hampson 1990: 62-66) and Womanist Christologies (Grant 1989) - ways of understanding the person or message of Christ in a manner which is more accessible and meaningful to women. According to Caroline Walker Bynum, in the late middle Ages there were feminine images of God which allowed women to be more Christlike (Bynum:1982). According to Rosemary Radford-Ruether the androcentric bias of the church in terms of its definition of Christ as male and God as male comes from the Greek and Hellenistic Jewish tradition which was shaped in a patriarchal culture (Ruether 1990:138). Aristotelian biology, appropriated by Aquinas, led to the conclusion that "the maleness of Christ was an ontological necessity and not just a historical accident...because only the male has the fulness of human nature" (Ruether:140). This was added to the Augustinian idea that only men were made in the image of God

and without being "joined" to a man a woman alone was not in God's image . Ozorac turns the tables by suggesting that women are, in reality, more Christlike than men, "women shed their own blood, sacrifice themselves, in the service of new life" (Ozorac 1996:25).

A rejectionist approach

Some feminist theologians have concluded that because the Bible is a patriarchal text they have to depart from the Christian tradition and have thereby produced the post-Christian wing of feminist theology. The trajectory of Mary Daly's writing describes this process. She started out writing The Church and the Second Sex (1969) which takes a reformist stance from within the Catholic Church. As a theologian she was optimistic that things could be changed for the better. But she soon concluded that she must leave the Catholic Church and break with Christianity, which she eventually regarded as irreconcilably patriarchal. In Beyond God the Father (1973) Daly criticises Phillis Trible's (1973) approach by suggesting that a "depatriarchalized Bible" would retain enough material to make an interesting pamphlet (Daly 1973:205). In Gyn/Ecology (1978) Daly writes of the masculine nature of the Trinity as " a love story performed by an All Male Cast", "a disguised homoerotic myth" (Daly 1978:38).

Daphne Hampson also takes a post-Christian feminist position which she outlines thoroughly (Hampson 1990: 41ff). She argues that to be a Christian is to be in a heteronymous position but that feminism favours autonomy (Hampson: 1996). I would argue that autonomy is not necessarily a feminist position but more of a masculine ideal. In order to be autonomous women need to be young, healthy, in receipt of an income and have no dependents. It seems to me that to succeed the feminist project needs co-operation amongst women, not autonomy.

But white feminist theology generally has failed to identify any commonality with non-feminist Christian women, especially those revivalist or Pentecostalist women who self-abnegate. But recently Mary McClintock Fulkerson (1996) has attempted to extend the boundaries of feminist theology "to interpret the working of Christian traditions in the lives of non-feminist women" (McClintock Fulkerson

1996:131) and Sarah Coakley (1996) has attempted to reframe the Christian practice of 'self-emptying' (*kenosis*) as a means of enrichment.

As in feminist theology, where there are those like Mary Daly and Daphne Hampson who take a 'Post-Christian' route, so also in Islam there are those who argue that Islam is so deeply patriarchal that it is unmitigatedly antagonistic to women's rights. Afsaneh Najmabadi sees the Islamic Republic of Iran as pushing women into that position. She has concluded that "to have a room of her own, the Iranian woman is now faced with subverting god and State"(Najmabadi 1991:70).

10. Revivalism - Why do some women choose it?: some theories

From the literature it is possible to derive a number of theories as to why some women choose to associate themselves with radical religious groups which stress gender difference. From the many there are six which I shall briefly touch on, the first three being: 1) rational choice; 2) choices concerned with rationality; 3) a response to social or psychological distress. The next three theories are far more interesting to myself being those which offer explanations which relate to feminist theory, that is, that women make the choice through : 4) a need for assistance with mothering (Rose 1988) and the reinforcement and preservation of motherhood (Dworkin 1988); 5) anti-feminism or a closet feminist agenda(Faludi 1991); 6) a shared agenda with feminism (Afshar 1991) (Garami 1996). The last of these is a theory I most favour but it is problematic because many secular feminists do not accept religious 'feminists' as being feminist (Karam:13) and Islamist feminists do not generally wish to use the term 'feminism'. The aim of my research process is to test out this thesis in particular and my reason for doing so is a desire to extend the boundaries of feminist theory in a move towards a more inclusive women's studies.

1) Rational choice:

Rational Choice theory is based upon a 'market forces' model of religion. It theorises the genesis and growth of religious movements in terms of a response to popular demand (Warner 1993). It hypothesises that when people join specific religious movements they do so as a rational response

after weighing up the pros and cons in terms of material and spiritual gains and losses which would be incurred by themselves (Elster 1986) (Becker 1976). This is a model which is appropriate to those who are able to make 'lifestyle' choices in Western consumerist society but it cannot be applicable to societies where people are unable to make religious choices. Nevertheless, this study is about women who make such decisions in Britain today and Rational Choice theory is therefore at least partially applicable.

This theoretical model, when applied to women and religious decisions, is helpful in finding the kind of approach I wish to take in terms of making an evaluation of what the plus side of allegiance with a revivalist movement might be. Although I do not intend to take such a scientific approach, I find the model attractive in terms of understanding women's religious choices. Such a model combats the idea that women join revivalist movements out of passive compliance to male demands or because they are victims or 'brain-washed' in joining movements which may not have media and popular approval. 'Re-enchantment' (renewal in religious interest) comes at a time of change in Welfare provision and the National Health Service. It seems quite possible in this climate that many new churches attract followers, at least in part, because they offer tangible benefits as well as spiritual ones. In the case of Islam, in a 'testimony' on the Sister's Page of Essex University's Student Islamic Society⁵³, Sister Noor, a convert from Hinduism, makes a practical point which supports 'rational choice theory'. She writes how she changed her faith from Hinduism because of the way in which widows were treated in the Hindu religion as well as the need for a dowry in marriage. Her statement implies a unromantic weighing up of the benefits offered by Islam in making her decision.

2) Choices Concerned with Rationality:

Where Rational Choice implies an evaluation of a multiplicity of pros and cons which may not be an altogether deliberate procedure, a concern for rationality is here used to mean a concern by the potential convert that their faith should make rational sense to them.

This is the antithesis of once popular 'brainwashing' theory which was used as an explanation for conversion, especially in relation to New Religious Movements deemed to be 'cults'. It was originated

during the Cold War by J.A.C Brown (1972) who suggested that “an ideology can be implanted in a person’s mind permanently and regardless of his original beliefs.”⁵⁴ This fitted popular American incredulity that anyone could deliberately choose to become a communist. Heelas writes how advocates of Brain Washing theory “maintain that it is possible to ‘capture minds’, those afflicted consequently losing their autonomous agency” (Heelas 1996:195).

Conversely, Larry Poston (1992) portrays converts to Islam as being deeply rational about the choice they make. Poston in his study of conversion to Islam in the West, found conversion to be the result of ‘process’ rather than ‘spontaneity’. This is not unlike the approach to conversion theory which emphasises choice, for instance James Richardson sees it as a rational decision: “Converts to new religions are active human beings seeking meaning and appropriate life-styles” (Richardson 1985:107). Lofland and Skonovd (1981) point out that in this search for meaning and ‘new grounds of being’ some people ‘convert themselves’ through informing themselves about a religion without any actual physical contact with devotees (Lofland and Skonovd 1981:376). This is likely to be increasingly the case at a time when it is possible to form virtual religious communities from around the globe via the Internet. Many converts to Islam say they have always been Muslims. This is because some Muslims believe that everyone is born a Muslim, a submitter to the will of Allah. Poston found that his converts often described their conversion experiences as being “the end result of a long process of seeking, a deliberate choice made after careful examination and consideration of alternatives. This is a rational as opposed to emotional approach to religion” (Poston 1992:169). Ali Kose, in his study of converts, found the presence of another “significant Muslim” to be important to the conversion process and that there is often a period when the new convert tries Islamic practices out “to test out the new faith experimentally rather than embracing it without thought” (Kose 1995:358). This is in contrast to the “intensity of emotions” noted in relation to converts to Christianity by Starbuck⁵⁵. Poston points out that some of his sample of converts to Islam six of the Christians (total 41), expressed “dissatisfaction with the ‘irrationality’ of the concept of the Trinity, the doctrine of transubstantiation, and similar teachings” (Poston:166).

One of Ali Kose’s respondents mentions the Trinity as a problem. This theme is also included in

the statement of a woman who is a convert to Islam on the "Sister's Pages" of the electronic journal of the Essex University Islamic Society (see note 53). The convert from Christianity writes ": (I) was becoming increasingly unhappy with the concept of Trinity and deification of Jesus". I find myself wondering how many people find themselves in a state of angst about the teaching of the Holy Trinity. It may be that converts to Islam (and Christianity) in published testimonies, focus upon what they feel they are expected to say. For instance, Shepard (1987) has suggested that the particular tenets of belief which become emphasized by Protestant 'fundamentalists' are those which act as a kind of code to their belief status and are produced in opposition to liberal beliefs. Therefore, a belief in the virgin birth becomes accentuated in its importance rather than, say an emphasis on Christian love, which would be a shared belief with liberal Christians. The Trinity is certainly an issue for Muslims because they regard it as a polytheistic belief.

But my study is not only concerned with converts or reverts but also with those who have never left their religion.

3) Social and Psychological Distress:

Some Christian Evangelical literature portrays women as joining revivalist (or fundamentalist) Christianity out of a position of social and psychological distress. Ruth Carter Stapleton wrote in 1976 in the USA, how her own conversion came after having four babies in a situation where she had moved four hundred and fifty miles away from her family. After a suicide attempt she found a male religious mentor (Stapleton 1976:18). Marabel Morgan, the advocate of female submission, has also described herself as "helpless and unhappy" in her marriage in the years preceding her discovery of "God's will" (Morgan:8). Stapleton and Morgan, afterwards, both prescribe 'submission' as the solution to all marital ills. Many of the testimonies published in present day Jesus Fellowship magazines describe the route through social and psychological distress. The testimony of Ludivine who's father committed suicide, who's mother disappeared, who's uncle "sank into alcoholism", and who attempted suicide herself, before her conversion, is one such of many⁵⁸.

Ian Cotton, who works from a secular perspective, carried out a series of interviews with a woman called Pauline who owned the franchise on six Body Shops and a chain of accessory stores. Pauline appears to have made her religious choice through loneliness. Having previously been an atheist "into 80s materialism" she had gradually become increasingly lonely, her marriage broke up, she broke up with her fiancé, she had business problems and took an overdose. Pauline moved from North London to Surrey and was completely friendless. She went into hospital for an operation and no one came to see her, not even her children. She read Ian Cotton's Sunday Supplement article (Cotton 1995a), in which a young woman remarks how friendly evangelical Christians were before her conversion. Pauline called the Catholic church and they said they would call back, but never did. Pauline then telephoned Gerald Coates of the Pioneer Fellowship (some members of which have participated in this study) and someone came round straight away. She still wasn't sure, but on a trip to Marks and Spencers in Tolworth (recommended by the Pioneer visitor) Pauline found that the Marks and Spencer's sign was on fire. She decided it must be a portent and joined the Pioneer Church. This however was not the end of story because she soon fell out with them and joined another church (Cotton 1995:94). This saga is of interest because, unlike the testimonies to be found in the religious magazines, it does not have the 'happy ever after' ending. Pauline clearly did not find the solution to all her problems. Interestingly, she joined the Pioneer Church because of their rapid response. She was determined to join a church group and Pioneer was the first to offer her fellowship. This is in line with the idea that people convert themselves (Lofland and Skonovd 1981), that is, that converts exert a large degree of autonomy in making a religious choice.

Janet McCrickard (1991) and Claire North (1996) have both written as former members of Evangelical/ Charismatic church groups and they take a very different view of conversion from that of Lofland and Skonovd (above). McCrickard emphasises her vulnerability as a, then, susceptible university fresher to whom "the idea of belonging to a group which had all the answers, in which I would feel right all the time, and never wrong" was irresistible. She suggests that "Assertions that 'power', (spiritual, social or otherwise) can be obtained in such and such a way are only attractive, however, to those who feel (or who can be persuaded to feel) in some way powerless... that there is something wrong with the individual... that can easily be put right if only one knows the correct

techniques... a belief that one is personally helpless is essential for the would-be fundamentalist" (McCrickard 1991 :60-61). Claire North suggests that women who join such groups often have a history of having been sexually abused. Like Pauline who joined Pioneer, North also cites the friendliness of House Church groups and the willingness of people to offer assistance as a draw ⁵⁷.

The testimonies of some women who have joined the Jesus Fellowship, (reported in Jesus Life), speak of a life of oppression and abuse. The Jesus Fellowship can represent a refuge from exploitation and violence. Lyndsey, a victim of rape, who turned to multiple drug use and who became homeless "decided to put the church (Jesus Fellowship) to the test". She reports "No matter how I hurt them they kept coming back for more ...All at once I realised this was my family and I loved and trusted them". ⁵⁸ The celibacy option is one which offers people a freedom they may not have in the every day world.

These women have, in some way, been made to feel powerless and various forms of Charismatic or Evangelical Christianity have offered them a solution to their sense of personal distress. The problem is whether the teachings associated with 'submission' to the authority of the husband, which are discussed at length in the Chapter 3, help to reinforce or even excuse abuse. I am not aware of the same sort of writing in relation to Islam. Ali Kose in his research concerning British male and female converts to Islam names disillusion with society at large and "cognitive concerns" or "emotional distress (emerging from such personal problems as divorce)" as motivators as well as the presence of a 'significant other' who is a Muslim (Kose 1995). When distress is described in the ensuing testimonies of conversion to Islam it is often depicted in a more impersonal and political way, as an experience of societal oppression. In the Christian case, the causes of unhappiness are frequently described as personal.

4) Assistance with mothering and the reinforcement and preservation of the institution of motherhood:

In a society which takes a pejorative view of families without visible fathers women who rear children alone may find the acceptance, friendliness and genuine assistance of a community to be of inestimable value. Susan Rose spoke to two single mothers at the Covenant Christian community in the USA, both women were in their forties and both were lone parents of young children (Rose 1988). This was a live-in community, and in that sense bears some similarity to the Jesus Fellowship New Creation Community in England. The women reported that people baby-sat for one another and that older boys and men acted as big brothers and fathers to their children.

Within revivalist circles there may also be the opportunity of marriage or remarriage. Andrew Walker suggests that, unlike many evangelical circles, the restorationist groups which he discusses, welcome divorcees, who are able to remarry (Walker:207). This same point could also be made about Islamic groups.

The place which Islam gives to motherhood is frequently eulogised by Islamic writers. Haleh Afshar quotes the Iranian writer Zahra Rahnavard: "Islam praises motherhood, orders men and women to bring love and peace to each other and recognizes the centrality of this biological specificity" (Afshar 1991:310-311). Religious affiliation with Islamic or Christian groups may give tangible protection to mothers and their children as well as status.

The attraction to affiliate with such groups may be on the increase in relation to the acceleration in the advance of reproductive technology which Andrea Dworkin predicts (from a radical feminist viewpoint), will eventually make women more dispensable (Dworkin:191). Dworkin maintains that this recognition will cause women to resort increasingly to religious ideologies that extol the sanctity of motherhood because this will be the best available way in which:

under the sex-class system women can make claim to a sacred nature.... Against the secular power of male scientists women will try to pit the political power of misogynist males in religion. Women will try to use male theology and religious tradition wherever and however it sanctifies the mother giving birth. Women will hide behind theology; women will hide behind orthodox religious men; women will use conservative religious ideas against the science that will make women less necessary than they have ever been" (Dworkin:191).

Dworkin sees the Right to Life Campaigners as playing into the hands of secular science in that they ultimately "will establish absolute state control of the uterus" (Dworkin: 192).

Where in secularized society being a mother frequently carries a negative value, those involved in Christian and Islamic revival elevate the role of motherhood. Further, in a situation of lone parenting, assistance in the tasks of child rearing may be gained from the group and surrogate fathers or new husbands found. Frances Fitzgerald ([1981] 1986)⁵⁹, suggests that these husbands will be prohibited the “traditional male vices” and positive commitment to the family will be expected and a trajectory to middle-class citizenship found (Fitzgerald in Brasher:169).

5) Anti- feminism or a closet ‘feminist’ agenda: concern with power and the moral high ground

Not unconnected to the lionisation of motherhood is the opportunity revivalisms may offer in terms of gaining power and a sense of taking the moral high ground. What appears as anti-feminism may, according to Susan Faludi (1991), be a closet feminist agenda; a desire for empowerment for instance.

Faludi has written how Beverly LaHaye, who whilst “preaching anti-feminism”, had a Washington D.C office and led a jet setting lifestyle (Faludi 1992:285). Faludi comments that New Right women were “voicing anti-feminist views - while internalizing the message of the women’s movement and quietly incorporating its tenets of self determination, equality and freedom of choice into their private behaviour” (Faludi:289). Because of their political position these New Right women met with less resistance than many career women.

McCarthy Brown has suggested that American ‘fundamentalist’ women leaders, “may look like contortionists, but in some ways they have managed to construct a no-lose situation. Women leaders in fundamentalism get to exercise their power and their passion, while defining themselves as safe and submissive women”. (McCarthy Brown 1994:192). The extreme of this position was taken by American evangelical Mary Pride (1985) in her book The Way Home: Beyond Feminism, Back to Reality who described herself as a former “radical feminist” who had now adopted a conservative complimentary view of gender roles which included no contraception, home schooling for the children and no work or ministry from outside the home (Pride 1985). Whether the writer ever really was a radical feminist

is a moot point but there is no doubt a lot of mileage in some Conservative Evangelical circles in claiming to have been a feminist and to have seen the error of one's ways. Such writing makes the work of the Biblical feminists who work from within Conservative Evangelicalism all the harder.

Yesim Arat describes a comparable situation in Turkey with regard to the position of women employees of the Kadin ve Aile (Women and Family), a journal. In acting as champions of feminine submission, the employees find themselves empowered and their independence enhanced. In an interview, the assistant editor remarks: "I did not want to have an outside job because you are readily harassed, but this job is perfectly suited for me. It allows me to work for what I believe in". Arat comments: "Ironically, the journal, with its restrictive ideology, allows this person to assert her autonomy. She can thus explore her interests rather than succumb to what is considered appropriate by her parents" (Arat 1990:21).

Ayesha Jalal has made a less sympathetic study of middle and upper class women in Pakistan. She points out that as these women get some accommodations within the system they have a stake in maintaining existing structures of authority. According to Jalal, they therefore remain, in some degree, 'subservient as a convenience' (Jalal 1991). This fits in with Denise Kandiyoti's notion of the collusion of women with the state to "control" women's sexuality, morality and behaviour (Kandiyoti 1997).

Poston, a non-Muslim researcher in the USA into *da'wa* (Islamic mission) in the West, concludes that women convert to Islam because they think it allows them to be feminine. According to Poston, this is an anti-feminist agenda: "Such was the case with a young mother interviewed at the 1989 convention of the Islamic Society of North America. She expressed her frustration with the pressures brought to bear upon her by the "women's liberation movement" and said that her conversion to Islam and subsequent marriage to a Muslim involved a change in lifestyle which she felt was more conducive to her perception of herself as female. This phenomenon was also observed among British women converts to Islam by Mrs. Harfiyah Ball in her study Why British Women Embrace Islam (Harifiya Ball 1987). I think these attitudes may be considered to be somewhat outdated by many Young Muslims who wish to project an image of Sisters as active participants in Islamic Revival. Many

women appear to be turning to radical Islam as a means of obtaining their Islamic rights rather than relinquishing them in terms of being 'feminine' in a passive (Western acculturated) way.

Some recent writings show signs that feminism is no longer considered as the polarity of Islam, even to the point of claiming that feminism is an invention of Islam itself⁶⁰. There is some evidence that this might be the case: Islam in the Seventh Century AD, offered women the right to inherit (albeit half the amount of a man) the right to have their own wealth and the right to refuse marriage (Kabbani 1992:37).

6) A feminist agenda:

By utilising Parvin Paidar's minimalist definition of feminism of 'aiming to increase women's rights, opportunities and choices within any ideology or context' (Paidar 1995:xi) as a model, it is possible to see feminist struggle taking place *within* Islamic and Christian groups and, at times, having no little success. Further the identification with the group may have come in the first place from some feminist or quasi-feminist aspiration. Because of the perceived Westernising tendency of feminisms and echoes of an imperialism which utilised feminist discourse to disrupt Muslim societies (Ahmed:1992) the term 'feminism' is problematic for many Islamist women. This leads to the kind of scrupulous description made by Azadeh Kian of such an activist: "She is part of a new generation of modernist-Islamist women who, though not feminist in the Western sense, are gender-conscious and have discovered politics as an agent for radical change in women's status"(Kian 1997: 75).

Revivalist Islam, in harking back to a 'pristine tradition', takes the view that early Islam improved the rights of women over previous custom. This is also a view taken by some Muslim feminists (Mernissi 1991). It may be used by women as a means of obtaining their Islamic rights (i.e. those provisions that are set out for women in the Qur'an as their inalienable rights), if women know how to claim them. The possibilities of liberation which Islam may offer women need to be viewed from a global perspective and there are examples of traditional Islam improving the lot of women in the twentieth century. The description of Aziza, the Bedouine woman who went to Shariah law for an annulment of marriage (Shahan 1993) is one such account. Islamic revivalist Sisters look to an Islam, purified

of local cultural practices, which allows women greater independence than is generally available to them - for instance, in the modern British Pakistani community (Lyon 1995) (Afshar 1995). They may also be looking for rights which they consider to be superior to their current rights within British secularised society, especially in the present welfare climate. Some women, for example seek the right as a mother *not* to work outside the home. In Britain, Fozia Bora, Features editor of Q-News, is quoted as saying, "Many young Muslim women who are feminists increasingly see no contradiction between Islam and feminism" and "Muslim women who want to wear headscarves do so as a feminist statement because it says don't treat me like a pin-up. Islam is a feminist option and one which does not denigrate motherhood. Islam gives feminism a transcendental nature"⁸¹ .

In terms of Christianity in times of revival, the sense of urgency means that all available people, male or female are called to missionise. Women who are usually silenced find a voice as the basis of the authority to preach shifts from formal ordination to anointing by the Holy Spirit, a move which is given credence by the 'egalitarian thrust' of Paul's Epistle to Galatians 3:28, where there are "no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, but all are one" (Dayton 1976:48). Burgess and McGee write that organizations like the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, the Young Women's Christian Association and the missionary societies historically offered women unprecedented opportunities for leadership: "By the turn of the century, women had a far greater status among Evangelicals than ever before or afterward" (Burgess & McGee:897-8).

Burgess and McGee suggest a number of reasons for the loss of the gains made by women in the Pentecostal movement. They suggest, for instance, the attainment of the vote for women in the USA in 1920 meant an end to much of the activity for women's rights. This achievement followed by the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy meant people became fearful of apostasy. People began to worry about the collapse of the home and family (Burgess & McGee: 898-899). The Protestant Fundamentalist movement of the 1920s represented not only a backlash against modernism in theology but also against the possibilities of independence which modernity offered women.

Nevertheless, dependence upon the Holy Spirit might, if one takes Dayton seriously, offer women the opportunity of a voice in the New Churches. Ian Cotton suggests that the Ichthus Fellowship, which has grown out of a house church movement, has taken on board some feminist ideas. Ichthus leader, Roger Forster replied to Noel Stanton's question : "What do you think about female leadership?"; with the following statement: "The relationships in corporate leadership not only make room for female leadership but then also appreciate it. But I think the females that participate in it have sometimes to drop their cultural conditioning if it means for instance that if someone disagrees with you, you react in a weak way that females are sometimes expected to." ⁶² I find it intriguing that Roger Forster has taken on board the 'nurture' model of gender , as opposed to a 'natural' (given) model. Noel Stanton, the interviewer in this instance and founder of the Jesus Fellowship, which has grown out of the Baptist Church, states that "our view would be that the main leadership should be male, while accepting certain female leadership roles". ⁶³

Martin Scott of the Pioneer Fellowship in Surrey like Forster with his mainly lower middle class congregation⁶⁴ (Cotton 1995), sees no reason why women should not be in situations of leadership and he uses St Paul's Epistle to Galatians 3:28 as a scriptural source upon which he bases this view. Martin Scott offers this as a justification without recourse to the feminist theologians of the liberal or radical kind. He does, however, quote from Gretchen Gaebelein Hull, an evangelical (Biblical) feminist who has written: "secular feminism centres around gaining equal rights; biblical feminism centres around equal opportunity to serve"(Hull 1989:56) (Scott 1992:44). This difference between rights and service is one which is dealt with in greater length in the chapter on 'Submission'.

Martin Scott's position is not unlike that of the feminist Ayatollahs in Iran of whom Ziba Mir Hosseini writes and whom, she claims, do not refer to feminist scholarship of the Qur'an. Rather, they take their source from the Qur'an itself and come up with a feminism which is legitimated by primary sources, rather than looking to the West for justification and inspiration (Mir-Hosseini 1996).

In relation to the situation in Britain, Daphne Hampson, who takes a post-Christian feminist position, has suggested with some hopefulness that, "We are not trapped" because in Britain at least there is

a younger generation who are profoundly ignorant of the Bible (Hampson 1990:36). There may be some clue here as to how these modern religious movements are able to be so innovative. The followers have been brought up in a largely secularized society and are not bogged down with orthodox and establishment interpretations. This offers them the possibility of making new feminist readings of holy books.

Conclusion

Even though 'fundamentalisms' are deemed to be the gender-restrictive religious groups in society, many traditional religions emphasise gender roles and differences. Gender policing is not only the prerogative of Islamic and Christian revival today. Although I have found it to be inappropriate, the term 'fundamentalism' has been difficult to escape. This is because writers frequently use the word when they are discussing groups and attitudes I wish to address. It has therefore been impossible, at times, when quoting, not to use the term.

Despite the volume of literature available on Islamic 'fundamentalism' and women in the Middle East and, to a lesser degree, women and fundamentalism in the USA, there is a lack of material on women and revivalist Islam and Christianity in the UK. The comparative lack of literature on women and present day Protestant renewal or revival may result from the image that Christian groups have, in general, of being apolitical and less threatening to Western secularity and consumerism than Islamic groups. Part of the reason for this may be the individualism of Christianity as it is practised by 'born again' Christians. Muslims involved in revival look to the Islamic State as a means of the complete implementation of Islam. Islamists frequently see the problem as being with *jahili* (pagan/ignorant) society whereas Christian revivalists tend to see the problem as being in the individual. Pablo Dieros has pointed out how, in Latin America, the focus of evangelicals turns from politics to individual sin: criticism is reduced to the evils of individual behaviour such as alcoholism, smoking, dancing etc. (Dieros 1991:142-143). In this way, born again Christianity is not as apolitical as it first appears because its adherents tend to lend their support to the status quo. In the instance of which Dieros was writing, this was General Pinochet's Chile. More recently, in the case of the

British housing estates which are perceived by some house church groups to be demon possessed (Cotton 1995), injustice by the state and community and the inadequacy of social and housing policy is not denounced. Some of these new Christian movements in the UK, such as Jesus Fellowship and Ichthus, have the added dimension of being engaged with homeless and disadvantaged people, thereby acting as an unpaid (by the state) agent of social care and control.

As Bryan Turner has pointed out, Islam is now within British and North American society and is no longer 'out there' (Turner 1994). In a liberal democracy the pivotal part which women play in Islamic revival is perceived not only by those who regard Islamic groups as 'other' but also by the male membership. This means that women have a greater leverage than they might have in an Islamic State within such groups in order to obtain their Islamic rights. As the cornerstone of revivalist movements, women are strangely powerful. Yet to obtain their rights they need the co-operation of men who are believers. Nevertheless, submission to men, for women, in a religious context seems to me to be a double submission because they are required to submit themselves to both God and men.

Islam is frequently accused of misogyny and yet it is evident that Christianity could also be equally accused of the majority of crimes against women that some of its more fervent Evangelicals tend to blame onto Islam. I was struck by the incredible similarity between the views of Luther and the early medieval Islamic view, for instance, of Imam Ghazzali (1056-1111) quoted in Sabbah (1984) concerning the role of women: "she must remain in her private quarters and never neglect her spindle....Let her exchange but few words with her neighbours and not visit them" (Sabbah:3). This leaves me with a number of questions as to how this similarity came about. Is it because of the Abrahamic roots of both religions? Is it because of a cross fertilization which took place via the Crusades? Ali Shariati, iconoclastic Iranian thinker, has suggested that Protestantism really represents the "Islamisation of Christianity" (Sachedina:1983).

Reading the book Heirs Together, a book about marriage by Biblical feminist Patricia Gundry (1980), I came across the following: "The Jurist Gratian said: Woman's authority is nil; let her in all things be

subject to the rule of man... And neither can she teach, nor be a witness, nor give a guarantee, nor sit in judgement"⁶⁵. I am struck not only by the similarity to the interpretations of Ayatollah Khomeini concerning the role of women but also some present day conservative interpretations of the position of women in Islam in the UK. For instance see Shamsad M. Khan (1993) Why Two Women Witnesses?? where Khan makes over fifty medical citations as to why women are incapable of acting as a witness throughout their entire lifespan. Yet they are dealing with *different* religious traditions at vastly different times: Gratian (1090-1155) was the Christian founder of canon law, Ayatollah Khomeini made interpretations of Islamic sources this century and I picked up the Khan book at a student Islamic exhibition only three years ago. How do they make their religions into the *same* religion? I can only conclude that it is because their shared 'religion' is patriarchy.

Nevertheless, some women are opting for forms of religious practice which preserve or reserve a special, biological role for women. Dworkin's argument that it is in an attempt to hold back the tide of medical and scientific appropriation of childbirth may throw some light on this matter (Dworkin 1988). But there are more simple and pressing daily needs to be met in the task of mothering, especially in the situation of lone parenting where assistance from a community and/or remarriage and, in the case of Islam, the right to one's own money, may be a great attraction.

Women have found ways of making their own agendas within these movements. There is an interesting shift in Iran in terms of a recognition of a feminist agenda by some Ayatollahs who do not, however, cite the work of feminist scholars of Islam, but who claim the Qur'an as the source of their feminism (Mir-Hosseini 1996). The writing of Martin Scott echoes this in Christian terms of the Pioneer Fellowship in the UK (Scott 1992) whereby 'mainstream' feminist theologies and readings have been taken on board but not accessed directly. Martin Scott is, however, referring to a number of Biblical feminists from within his own tradition. Biblical feminists, like Islamic feminists, are often rejected as non-feminist by secular feminists. Neither Islamic nor Biblical feminists look to secular sources for their inspiration, yet it is probable that secular feminism has been influential by making education available to many women, who then have raised expectations and enhanced skills for study. This broadens the scope of feminism and makes Parvin Paidar's (1995) minimalist definition of feminism

as "aiming to increase women's rights, opportunities and choices within any ideology or context"
(Paidar 1995:xi) all the more relevant.

Notes

1. For instance see David Pawson (1988) Leadership is Male UK: Highland Books or the collection of essays edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem (1991) Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood, Crossway books, representing the viewpoint of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood.
2. See Runnymede Trust (1997) Islamophobia: A Challenge For All, Runnymede Trust, 133 Aldersgate Street, London EC1A
3. Humara Khan 'Muslims, Be Careful of Europe' Q-News 172, 14-20 July 1995 pp 6-7
4. Figure given by Smith (1987) p 235. Mahnaz Afkhami suggests that there are over half a billion women in the *Muslim* world which implies a larger number of Muslim women globally (Afkhami 1995:1).
5. E.Goodspeed (1951) 'Phoebe's Letter of Introduction' Harvard Theological Review 44, p.56
6. Julia Kristeva (1974) 'La femme, ce ne'st jamais ca', Tel Quel 59 Automne, 19-24 in *Moi* 1985:16
7. A term used by Toril Moi in 'Patriarchal Thought and the Drive for Knowledge' in Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis Teresa Brennan (Ed) London and New York: Routledge 189-205 (191)
8. Pateman, C (1992) 'The patriarchal welfare state' in Mc Dowell & Pringle (Eds) Defining Women 223-245 (224)
9. Stephanie Dalley (trans) (1989) Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, The Flood, Gilgamesh and Others Oxford. New York: Oxford University Press 254-255
10. Marmaduke Pickthall translation, Everyman 1992
11. Al-Qur'an, a Contemporary Translation by Ahmed Ali, Princeton University Press, NJ, USA
 "As for women you feel averse
 talk to them suasively;
 then leave them alone in bed (without molesting them)
 and go to bed with them (when they are willing). ***
 If they open up to you, do not seek an excuse
 for blaming them. Surely God is sublime and great".
 *** the translation of "daraba"
12. Gausted (1983):195
13. Fuad Nahdi (1994) 'Conversation with Anis Abd El Fattah' Q-News Vol 3 No 29 14-21 October 1994: 4-5
14. 'A tale of two classics' Q-News April 1988 - Dhul Hijjah 1418 No 287-8 p15
15. The term 'anointed' is used by Chevreau (1994) and others involved in the 'Toronto' movement to signify 'anointed in the Holy Spirit' which may lead to emotional release, speaking in tongues, receipt of spiritual gifts such as prophecy and other phenomena.

16. Independent 27 Feb 1995 'Church hires holy bouncers to 'keep peace', Will Bennet: Home 3
17. Jesus Life No 30, 4th Quarter 1994 p.2
18. The Apostolic Faith (The journal of the Azusa Mission) Vol 1, No 1 December 1906 p.1 in MacRobert:55
19. Roger Forster in an interview with Noel Stanton 'Men of Vision and Action' Jesus Life Second Quarter 1998, p 14
20. Jerusalem Bible (1974) London: Darton, Longman & Todd
21. Martin, 1977:12 in Mellor and Shilling 1997:132
22. 'Miracle' Oil Brings Anointing and Healing' Jesus Life No 38 Fourth Quarter 1996:16
23. Champion and Hervieu-Leger: 1989 in Leger 1993:131
24. The Vision of Khalifa Conference 1996 was held on Sunday 7 April at the Holiday Inn, 29 St. Nicholas Circle, Leicester.
25. Modern Jesus Army Street Paper, No 41, First Quarter 1996 p.8. Current access to Jesus Fellowship Website is URL: <http://www.jesus.org.uk> E-mail: info@jesus.org.uk 20/5/98
26. Young Muslims UK Website: <http://www.idiscover.co.uk/ymuknet/> 1/7/96
27. A Muslim women's organisation based in Brent, North London
28. Fuad Nahdi (1998) 'Drugs and Muslims in Harlesdon' Q-News May 1998 26-29
29. Independent Cover Story 2,3,4 Dec 6 1995: 'The best place to be a Muslim: Paul Vallely and Andrew Brown
30. Intentionally started by a few missionary members of a larger fellowship
31. Malise Ruthven 'Hallelujah for the Sceptic' Independent 1995 July 13
32. From a Natural Law Party leaflet distributed before the 1992 General Election.
33. Malise Ruthven 'Hallelujah for the Sceptic' Independent 1995 July 13
34. 'Men of Vision and Action' No 24. Bryn Jones is interviewed by Noel Stanton Jesus Lifestyle No. 24, 2nd Quarter 1993 (12-14)
35. I was handed a copy of Bucaille (1993) The Qur'an and Modern Science, a booklet on this subject, by a member of the Student Islamic Association who was setting up his book stall outside the University of Bradford in November 1995. Around this time a film on the subject was also shown by the Islamic Society of the University of York.
36. Qur'an 21:3, 51:47
37. For instance: Qur'an 22:5; 23:14
38. Rashid Rida attended Mohammad Abduh's lectures and took notes which he reworked and expanded. These lectures began to appear in Al-Manar C. 1900 as the commentary of Mohammad Abduh. They were continued by Rashid Rida alone from Sura 4:125 -12:107
39. Carrel, Alexis (1935) Man and the Unknown

40. Ibrahim Abusharif (1994) 'Brain Wane' Q-News Vol. 3 No 29 14-21 October 1994 pp6-7
41. See Roland Barthe 'Death of the Author' in IMAGE-MUSIC-TEXT
42. John T. Noonan Jr. Contraception: A History of Its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists enlarged ed. Cambridge, Mass./London: Harvard University Press, 1986 in Clark & Richardson
43. Summa Theologica 1.92.1 ad 1 (in Clark and Richardson:69)
44. M. Behrens (1973) 'Martin Luther's View of Women', MA thesis, North Texas State pp34-95 in Weisner (1990):124
45. In Keith Thomas (1971) Religion and the Decline of Magic London: Weidenfield and Nicholson pp568-69
46. D. Martin Luthers Werke Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Weimer, 1883- 17, 1, 25 in Weisner (1990:127)
47. Fiona MacDonald Independent 29 Apr 1995 'Jesus Army Wants You' Features 16-22
48. In answer to a gay Muslim's inquiry, "Is it possible to be a good Muslim and to remain unmarried?" Dr Syed Mutawalli ad-Darsh quotes Qur'an: 7:80 and suggests:
- Islam recommends marriage for those who have the physical need to avoid falling into fornication. Persons like yourself who have an aversion towards physical, sexual relationships with the opposite sex, are not under any pressure to get married. As you put it succinctly, you "would just end up making some poor girl unhappy". As for your question about the possibility of being a good Muslim while not getting married, the answer is; absolutely. Particularly in your case. You are classified in the category for which marriage is not good. You will be rewarded spiritually and psychologically once you feel you have been able to ward off such temptation and enjoy your Islam much more. The advice is to keep this matter between you and God, the Exalted, and resist any temptation of falling into sinning. 'What you ought to know' Dr Syed Mutawalli ad-Darsh Q-News no 285 February 1998:27
49. Carter Heyward, 'A Sacred Contempt: Heterosexist Theology' in Touching Our Strength (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers (1989) 61-63, 67-71 in Clark and Richardson: 297-8
50. Quassim Amin (1899) Tahrir al-Mar'a (The Liberation of Women) Cairo, in Ahmed (1992)
51. Fuad Nahdi (1994) 'Conversation with Anisa El-Fatah' Q-News Vol 3, No 29 October 14-21:5
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54. J.A.C. Brown (1972) Techniques of Persuasion. From Propaganda to Brainwashing Harmondsworth: Penguin:261 in Heelas (1996):195
55. Edwin D. Starbuck (1900) The Psychology of Religion New York: Charles Scibner's Sons p. 169 in Poston (1992)
56. 'Ludi, Jesus Loves You!' Jesus Life No 36 Second Quarter 1996 p.27
57. Claire North, 'Crushing the Bones: the attraction of Christian fundamentalism for women' in Women Against Fundamentalism Journal No 8 (1996):19-20
58. Jesus Life No 36 Second Quarter 1996 p.27
59. Fitzgerald, Frances [1981] (1986) Cities on a Hill: A journey through Contemporary American

Cultures New York: Simon & Schuster

60. Mary Ali and Anjum Ali, quoted in Muslim Parliament Home Page URL: <http://www.ummah.org.uk/mp/> 4/4/96. On Website entitled 'About Islam and Muslims' <http://www.ummah.org.uk/unn.htm> 16/9/96

61. Paul Vallely and Andrew Brown 'The best place to be a Muslim' Independent Cover Story 2,3,4 Dec 6 1995

62. 'Men of Vision and Action' No 2, Roger Forster Jesus Lifestyle No 8, second Quarter 1989 P. 10

63. Ibid

64. Roger Forster in an interview with Noel Stanton, 'Men of Vision and Action' Jesus Life No 44, 2nd Quarter 1998 (13-14):13

65. Patricia Gundry cites Julia O'Faolain and Lauro Martines (Eds) (1973) Not in God's Image New York: Harper and Row: 130 in Gundry:48

Chapter Two

Reflexive Methodology

Introduction

This chapter addresses the methodological processes upon which this study is based. Given that I am engaged in the study of minority groups who, though strong in belief, are frequently vulnerable as individual believers who swim against the prevailing consumerist current, I shall discuss not only the means by which I have gained access to informants and the manner in which I have collected data, but also how I deliberated on what might be a feminist way to proceed with my research and the conclusions to which I came. In the interviewing and follow-up process I discovered that the interviewer is not always in the power position and that there were converse issues of power in the process for which the body of feminist theory on interviewing did not prepare me. This will be discussed below in the section on power.

This study has necessitated contact with Islamic Revivalist groups in terms of Muslim respondents and House Church fellowships and Conservative Evangelical groups with regard to Christians. Often I have been warmly welcomed, but this has not been universal and there have been times when I have felt I should give up. This has especially been the case in moments when I have found myself located in the crossfire between secular feminists and religious revivalists. Like Nilufer Gole (1996) in Turkey, I found there were some members of each group who insisted I represented the position of the opposing view. In other words, each believed in the stereotype of the other and assumed I embodied it. This is discussed in greater detail in the penultimate section of this chapter.

My methods of data collection have been qualitative and ethnographic. In this chapter I shall describe the theoretical and practical issues which informed this process and the choice of mixed methods I used in the process of data collection, i.e. a snowball questionnaire consisting of open questions, interviews and participant observation. As shall be discussed later, the snowball questionnaire and the interviews yielded different profiles of respondents but, overall, all the Christian interviewees were white and lower to upper

middle class, the Muslim interviewees were from a greater variety of backgrounds. The respondents to the questionnaire were more ethnically diverse, especially in the Muslim case where only 5 out of twenty nine described themselves as white British. In the Christian case the majority of the respondents were white and middle class. All the interviews were carried out in English.

Because of the complexity of feminist methodological issues the chapter is divided into two parts: Firstly: methodology and epistemology; and secondly, method. Methodology, here, is concerned with theoretical issues of how the research should proceed and epistemology, the theory of (in this case feminist) knowledge (Edwards 1990:478). 'Method' relates to the practical details of my own fieldwork in terms of gaining access to informants and the means of gathering data. Below I commence with a discussion of some of the main issues of feminist methodology and their implications for the method of this particular study.

1) Feminist methodology and epistemology

Postmodernism

Postmodernist theory, in terms of critical theory, deconstructionism and poststructuralist analysis, has profoundly affected the way in which we can look at feminist research. The way in which it "effectively negates the possibility of fruitful political interventions" (de Groot & Maynard: 157) has already been discussed. It does this by dismantling gender as well as race and class, for instance suggesting that women exist only as a "binary category in a hierarchical relationship to 'Men'" (Stanley & Wise 1993:204). If this is the case then women's experience ceases to exist, it becomes a shadow; it is: "to put theory in an imperialistic relationship to life" (Stanley & Wise [1983] 1993:204). According to Stanley and Wise, "Deconstructionist, like post-structuralist, approaches imply change at the level of language and texts and categories alone; but, as part of a worldwide political movement, academic feminism necessarily retains a praxis firmly concerned with more than a 'linguistic turn'" (Stanley & Wise 1993:205).

An emphasis on 'difference' is also an aspect of the postmodern repertoire. To concentrate on difference *alone* and to ignore any shared interests, like the dismissal of the category 'woman' also results in the inability to act politically. Fatmagul Berktaý writes, "if women, as a marginalised group, are to be able to transform existing power relations, they have to communicate, to hear each other's voices, to learn about each other, and to forge alliances" (Berktaý 1993:111). Angela Davis points to the shared interests of working class women and how, like their black sisters, white working class women in Britain were, until the turn of the twentieth century, used as beasts of burden. This is because they were cheaper to produce and keep than a horse (Davis 1982:10). Davis shows the interests of groups of oppressed women to be linked in that "Low wages for women of colour establishes a standard which leads to low wages for white women. So that white women are victims in any upsurge in racism" (Bhavnani 1989:71). To explore afresh where interests may be linked is a way out of the sense of political paralysis which is symptomatic of an overemphasis on difference and postmodern relativism.

As a feminist, based in a Centre for Women's Studies, it seems clear that my research will use feminist methodology. But changes in feminist epistemology have cast doubt on the idea that there can be a feminist knowledge and, by implication, feminist research. Formerly it was said that feminist research was 'by women for women' but now, as described below in Chapter 1, not only has it become clear that there is no unified women's voice but that there is even doubt in some postmodern or perhaps post-feminist quarters, following the influence of French Feminist, Lacanian and poststructuralist theories, that 'women' can be defined.¹ Politically, this is problematic in that it may lead to a denial of oppression (Berktaý 1993, Hartsock 1987, Maynard 1994, Moi 1985). Theoretically, the inability to define 'women' can be construed as negating not only the idea of feminist methodology but of feminism itself. Embarking, then, on a piece of feminist research at this time and place is not without its problems. One is in danger of being deemed to be "essentialist" (in its pejorative usage), especially if one is studying groups who not only believe in womanhood but also in its being a creation of God.

In view of the fragmentation of feminism into a multiplicity of feminisms where does one start to piece

together an appropriate methodology and method? Feminist research has been about praxis, the idea that it should *do* something. It has tended to use qualitative methods and has been regarded as potentially empowering to the participants and as directed towards social change (Kelly et al 1994). Even though the emphases on deconstructionism and difference have thrown a sense of theoretical unease over the current relevance of feminist methodology, de Groot and Maynard conclude that a "women centred" approach to women's studies which connects "the empirical and the analytical... (and) made with a concern for practical interventions" is the way forward (de Groot & Maynard 1993:174). Feminist scholarship is enriched by adopting the positive insights of poststructuralism, deconstructionism and critical theory in respect of power relations - but should not such analyses be set within social and historical contexts thereby linking them to political action? It is my intent that this study should point in the direction of a more inclusive approach to Women's Studies, a shift to embrace not only secular Western feminists but also feminists who are working within the religious traditions. For although there are many differences, some of which are no doubt irreconcilable, the global picture is one of feminists chipping away at patriarchal power within all manner of different religious traditions and in a multiplicity of ways. Surely this is something all feminists can celebrate.

I think Stanley and Wise (1993) have here identified a current problem for Women's Studies, where a shift to 'interdisciplinarity' may actually mean 'literary criticism' where postmodernist feminists from many disciplines look at data merely in terms of a 'text' to be deconstructed. This has a peculiarly distancing effect from the content of the data whereby emotional contact is replaced by an intellectual exercise. The 'text' when treated in this way is often divorced from its historic and social context.

Some writers claim, rightly I think, that postmodernism can potentially be used as a tool in the backlash against feminism (Hartsock 1987) (Harding 1987). Hartsock writes that the postmodern claim that "verbal constructs do not correspond in a direct way to reality has arisen precisely when women and non-western peoples have begun to speak for themselves and, indeed, to speak about global systems of power differentials" (Hartsock:187-206). She sees postmodernism as an attempt by dominant culture to subvert

oppressed people from obtaining a voice. One could visualize it as a virus being introduced to feminist thought systems which turns all research findings into fiction. One way to address this problem of the nonviability of making a truth claim is to admit to the biographical nature of research (Foucault [1982] in Gutman & Hutton 1992:11) and to make the researcher visible in the research process so that the reader can make their own evaluation (Harding 1987:9). Hartsock suggests that the postmodern view that truth and knowledge are contextual and multiple could be seen to be a truth claim in itself. This is an interesting point. It seems we cannot get away from the idea of truth.

Objectivity

Not only postmodernist and poststructuralist theory but also feminist methodology in general has treated the goal of objectivity in research as a non-obtainable phantasy. This, in the feminist case, is because of the masculine bias of the notion of objectivity in mainstream studies. In order to combat the distortions of the unconscious male bias Rosalind Edwards attempts to monitor and reveal her own effect upon the research process and makes her reasoning process explicit (Edwards:479-480). Harding writes that this overt presence of the researcher helps to avoid the deception of the "objectivist" stance that veils the researcher's cultural practices and beliefs, "whilst simultaneously skewering the research object's beliefs and practices to the display board" and that the best feminist analysis positions the enquirer herself "in the same critical plain as the overt subject matter thereby recovering the entire research process for scrutiny in the results of the research. That is, the class, race, culture and gender assumptions, beliefs and behaviours of the researcher her/himself must be placed within the frame of the picture that she/he attempts to paint" (Harding 1987:9). I agree that a representation which allows the reader to make an analysis of the ways in which the tendencies of the researcher may have influenced the research is more genuinely informative than where the researcher has retained invisibility. This presents the problem of how much to write about oneself, especially if the act of writing has inevitable autobiographical qualities. Why for instance have I chosen to do this particular study? There are definite connections between my choice and my own background and experiences. My childhood, lower middle class experience of 1950s, pre-

Vatican II Catholicism has left me with a deep interest in the relationship between truth claiming religious organizations, women and gender roles. My experience has left me struggling throughout my adult life with the Janus faced dynamic of oppression/liberation which I have found in organized religion. From a poststructural viewpoint, Roman Catholicism has installed a patriarchal God within my subjectivity. Wrestling with this unwanted personal reality has led me, from a religious viewpoint, into a position which is largely that of post-Christian feminism.²

Objectification

It has been regarded as essential that the feminist researcher should not be in the business of objectifying women (Oakley 1981), objectification being regarded as a masculine preoccupation. Feminists should not objectify their sisters because it necessitates a power relation. But the problem is that feminists *are* in hierarchical relationships with feminists because of the structures in which we live and move. It is also not possible to conduct any research without objectifying the researched. "The very idea of representing women, even if in the form of 'letting them speak', is to constitute women as object. To claim that 'they' are subjects is to avert the question of authorship and the constitution of a 'feminist self' via an other" (Game 1991:31). Not only is a degree of objectification integral to the research process but Ann Game also points to the manner in which non-feminist women are the means through which the researcher constructs an academic feminist self. Further, because historically, Western women have been defined as object of the gaze and not the subject, the idea that feminists should not objectify their sisters is in fact in line with the dominant ideology of femininity which also, by implication, states that women should not be in the business of objectifying other women. So I find myself wondering whether feminist research techniques do in fact challenge Western middle class notions of femininity. There is of course no universal construction of femininity. Sojourner Truth made this plain in her much quoted "Ain't I a Woman" speech, that the construction of white women's femininity is different from that of black women (Carby 1982:214). Further, the construction of white working class femininity differs from that of white middle class women (Davis 1982). Therefore I see the dilemma of objectification as potentially paralysing in terms of carrying

out feminist research. I find myself concluding that there can only be a partial solution to this problem and I have therefore aimed at being scrupulous in sending transcripts and notes from interviews to informants for comment as well as permission or otherwise to use their words. But without a degree of objectification there can be no research since my informants' words ultimately become data for my analysis.

Feminist empiricism and standpoint

Sandra Harding sets out two "transitional epistemologies" on which theories of feminist research methods are based: "feminist empiricism" and "feminist standpoint". She identifies "feminist empiricism" as a feminist response to the biases and problems of traditional disciplines (Harding 1983). This stance is largely a response to existing mainstream methods and is demonstrated by Hilary Graham in her title for an article on women and the survey method: 'Do her answers fit his questions?' (Graham 1983). Surveys were viewed by many feminists as being appropriate to dominant male culture and inappropriate as a means of gathering women's experience (Finch 1991:196). Although there may be truth in the fact that few of us fit the questions in questionnaires my personal experience of the use of a snowball questionnaire, as part of my own eclectic approach to data collection, has been positive. Because the respondent generally chooses a time appropriate to herself in which to answer the questions and has time to ponder on her responses, as well as anonymity, many answers have been deeply illuminating. A questionnaire does not have to consist entirely of multiple choice questions but can give space for free expression of reactions and ideas. Multiple choice questions may make for easier processing of data but open questions elicit more richly textured and sometimes surprising answers. In this case, the data collected through the questionnaire was processed through a method of coding as suggested by Coffey and Atkinson (1996) whereby similar statements are collected under a general heading. This is a good indicator of the overall response. Later, variant statements were analysed.

Implicit in the idea of appropriate and inappropriate means of collecting information however, also, is "feminist standpoint" because "knowledge based on a feminist standpoint is identified as scientifically preferable since it is more complete and less distorted" (Stanley 1990:39). So in a sense, feminist

standpoint still has the goal of objectivity. Feminist standpoint implies a true feminist knowledge and, as Stanley has indicated, this necessitates the acknowledgement of further feminist standpoints as equally valid (Stanley 1991:27). This equalisation of standpoints can present a problem if it is used to revalorise white, middle class feminist standpoints, which were criticised as being dominant by black feminists in the first place.

Moral Concerns

Feminist Piety: The Pristine Researcher

As a researcher looking at the relationship between women and religion I cannot help but detect traces of religiosity within the secular feminist project. This is not to say that the various kinds of feminisms, secular and religious, do not overlap at times but I use the term 'secular feminist' to describe a feminism which does not have its foundation in a religious text, even though it may be argued that modern Western feminism may derive from Christian Evangelical beginnings (Hardesty 1984) (Tucker & Liefeld 1987). The religiosity to which I refer is a kind of moral imperative which makes its imprint throughout all but the most anarchic of Western feminisms.

As already mentioned, it has been thought that feminist research should be by women, for women (Finch 1991:195, Oakley 1981, Stanley & Wise 1983) and that few feminist researchers would feel comfortable with producing work which actually damaged the interests of other women (Finch 1991:199). But this implies that a feminist, such as myself, will necessarily know what will and what will not damage the interests of other women. In the case of feminisms within religious traditions there is a division between themselves and some of the Western secular feminisms. Some religious activists for women's rights wish to dissociate themselves from secular feminisms on particular issues and some secularists and postmodernists are concerned as to whether the religious feminists, located as they are within patriarchal traditions, can be sufficiently feminist. But one could say the same for feminists who are located in Women's Studies Departments in Universities who are, like myself, working for higher degrees. We too

are located within a patriarchal structure and engaged in a hierarchical enterprise. This is an example of feminists holding divided views as to what is in the interests of other women.

Intrinsically linked with academic feminism is the matter of the relations of production as to who is able to possess the research and who is not. Liz Stanley describes the approach of academic feminists as a reformist one: "For the last twenty years one of the aims of academic feminism has been to join (the official and unofficial gatekeepers of academic inputs and outputs)..., but another (aim) has also been to dismantle at least some of the sources and uses of their power over 'peers' "(Stanley 1990:5). This is not dissimilar to the way in which many religious feminists work *within* religious traditions. Nevertheless, the idea that feminist research is by women for women paints a picture of an altruism which structurally can only be partial. The idea that feminist research is for women also avoids the issue that there must be a sense in which the research is largely for the researcher.

Ethnography

Feminist methodology prioritises the merits of qualitative over quantitative research (Finch 1991:195) (Oakley 1981) (Stanley and Wise 1983). A great emphasis has been placed upon the benefits of the "small-scale, qualitative research methods which aim to make visible the experiences and needs of women" (Finch 1991:195). This overlaps with the reality that feminist projects are frequently small-scale owing to financial constraints. Because qualitative methods are regarded as those which make gender issues most visible many feminists see ethnographic methods as the best suited to feminist research. In the early 1980s much feminist writing was concerned with feminist research methods which drew on qualities that were viewed as being traditionally female (Oakley 1981) (Duelli Klein 1983) (Du Bois 1983) (Graham 1983) (Stanley & Wise 1983).

Judith Stacey takes a moral stance by questioning the justification for this belief in the ethnographic method as she is concerned about the possible exploitation of respondents. She suggests that the

relationship between researcher and researched may appear as genuine friendship and egalitarianism, and mask the reality of a hierarchical relationship which is dropped on completion of the fieldwork. Stacey uses empathy, and human concern and egalitarianism to describe the kind of ideal non-exploitative feminist relationship of which she approves and which has its basis in caring (Stacey 1988). But much has been written by feminists about how women are the ones who constantly find themselves cast in the caring role: "compulsory altruism" is the powerful phrase used to describe this reality (Land & Rose 1985).

At first it had appeared that postmodern or poststructuralist ethnography would solve the problem of 'masculinist' research methods. Using a "critical and self-reflexive ethnography... like feminist scholars, critical ethnographers (tore) the veil from scientific pretensions of neutral observation and description"... (they showed that) "ethnographic writing is not cultural reportage, but cultural construction" (Stacey 1988:24) and that ethnographic truths are "partial truths"³. Stacey envisages "partially feminist" ethnographies which are "accounts of culture enhanced by the application of feminist perspectives" as possible (Stacey 1988:26).

Stanley and Wise write how they looked for a methodology to be used in "recovering the personal". Working from an interactionist viewpoint (from which everything including structures and belief systems are in a constant state of negotiation) they were attracted to ethnography, with its 'egalitarian impetus' and its broad sense of data in terms of the everyday and personal as well as the relational. It appealed to them the more because it has been described as "Sociology without balls" (Stanley & Wise 1983, 1993: 138-142). Working, as I am, on a study of members of religious revivalist groups, ethnography, in terms of 'being there' is a good way of meeting believers who have not been specially selected to meet the researcher and to get an overall sense of group dynamics and gender relations. I here include participant observation in religious groups in cyberspace. This is because in order to understand it more, I wish to feel open to experience the attraction of the group myself. Further, an ethnographic dimension is important if one is to explore the interactional aspects of becoming and remaining a member of a revivalist group (Ayella 1993). Work with individuals alone will not reveal this interactional level.

As with any research method, there are contradictions in ethnography as a suitable tool for feminist research. A number of feminist scholars using a universalist standpoint seem to gloss over the issue of difference in claiming the ethnographic method. This is the other side of the egalitarian coin. For instance, Du Bois in her statement: "The actual experience and language of women is the central agenda for feminist social science and scholarship" implied that women have one sort of everyday language, life and experience that they share (Du Bois 1983:108). On the other hand, the more recent dismissal of the possibility of shared experience and therefore what might constitute feminist research has come about partly as the result of the development of feminist epistemology and partly because feminism has taken on postmodernism, deconstruction and difference. Stanley argues that "feminist standpoint" needs to incorporate a number of feminisms, including black and lesbian standpoints" (Stanley 1990:33). At the same time postmodernist anthropologists have pointed to the constructed nature of ethnographic accounts, that is, research as writing (Mascia -Lees, Sharpe & Ballerino-Cohen 1989:9) (Clifford 1986:15).

A debate between Judith Stacey (1988) (1994) and Elizabeth Wheatley (1994) (1994a) addresses some of these ethical and authorial problems in ethnographic research. Stacey (1988) is concerned as to how achievable the aims of empathy and egalitarianism are and thus implies that feminist research should be ethical. It is extraordinarily difficult, in a discussion of feminist methodology, to emerge from this bell jar of caring in which women have been placed.

Stacey sees two main areas of contradiction, the first being fact that ethnographic research depends upon the human relationship, thus woman can reveal things about themselves they might later regret or which could in some future time be used against them (Stacey 1988:23). Stacey's second area of contradiction is that although the ethnographic method appears to lead to collaboration between the researcher and the researched, ultimately it is the researcher who authors the ethnography. Stacey is concerned that the ethnographic method, in being considered women-friendly, "masks... a deeper form of exploitation" and opens respondents up to possible "abandonment" and "betrayal". Further, that the presence of the researcher is "an intrusion and intervention into a system of relationships...that the researcher is far freer

than the researched to leave" (Stacey 1988:24). I too would argue that the stance of phoney friend is exploitative and that this would especially be the case in relation to gaining information from disadvantaged groups.

Stacey sees a contradiction between feminist principles and ethnography in that the researcher ultimately owns the product even if it has been modified by informants (as has been the case with my interviews where I have sent transcripts for comment to informants). Stacey sees ethnographic method as ultimately more exploitative than masculinist research methods (Stacey 1988:24). I cannot help but see this as something of an overreaction. It is based on the idea that all feminists should be scrupulously 'moral'. Elizabeth Wheatley views the dilemma as "not uniquely feminist in character" but as an ethical and epistemological problem faced by all ethnographers (Wheatley 1994: 406). I agree with her in her conclusion that the demand for a fully ethical ethnographic study as a feminist criteria makes "insurmountable requisites for anyone"(Wheatley 1994:407). She suggests "rather than avoid any risk through abstaining from ethnographic endeavours, scholars might draw on diverse feminist insights in a sensitive manner when facing the dilemmas that are bound to emerge through the ethnographic process and product" (Wheatley 1994:407). But this brings us close to "intentionality" as a criterion of feminist research (Poland 1990:160-5). But intention is flawed as a criterion by its dependence on the researcher being well informed by discourses, none of which, as poststructuralists have shown us, are value free. One is reminded of the saying "The way to hell is paved with good intentions". The only way to carry out a feminist ethnographic study without a complete sense of moral and ideological paralysis is to work empirically with the permission of informants and accept the fact that one will end up being in a partially ethical position. For just as it is not possible to carry out research without a degree of objectification, so too in the case of a study undertaken in order to obtain a higher degree, it is not possible to be completely non-exploitative. Things are likely to be more equitable if the exploitation factor is recognised and which in being overt, can perhaps work both ways.

2. Method

Sources of Respondents and interviewees

Data upon which this thesis draws has been collected from a snowball questionnaire (through which I have received seventy two returns) and information gained through semi-structured interviews with eighteen Islamic or Christian revivalist Sisters of different kinds, nine of whom are Muslims and nine Christians.

The seventy two respondents to the questionnaire ranged in age from thirteen to eighty one, both the thirteen and the eighty one year old respondents being atypical. The age range of Christian respondents was between fifteen and eighty one, the majority being between the ages of twenty and forty. The Muslims were younger, the entire group of twenty nine respondents being between the ages of thirteen and forty four. Of these, twenty three were below the age of thirty. Of the seventy two completed questionnaires forty three were from Christians, the majority of whom belong to house church or independent church groups but four of whom are Conservative Evangelicals. These four respondents belong to an organisation called Men Women and God, a group of Biblical feminists who seek a gender 'equalitarian' interpretation of scripture and are drawn from different denominations but come under the umbrella of the Evangelical Alliance. Men Women and God have links with the Campaign for Biblical Equality based in the USA. According to Valerie Griffiths, one of the founder members of the British association, the name of the group was intended to be Women, Men and God but it was registered wrongly here in Britain (though not in New Zealand). The title stuck.⁴ The views of Men Women and God are not typical yet they form part of Conservative Protestant Christianity, which from the outside is portrayed as being unremittingly anti-feminist.

House churches, as described in the preceding chapter, are quintessentially postmodern church movements offering a pick-and-mix menu of styles of worship and activities. These house churches range in style from Puritan culture to club (as in 'rave') culture and some manage to somehow include both. The various groups from which respondents come are Christians in York a fellowship which has evolved out of a Christian student group, Pioneer People in Cobham Surrey and other church groups who come

under the Pioneer Network umbrella. Two of these churches had women in leadership roles. One respondent was from Vineyard, the church which was founded by Wimber, ex-drummer of the 1960s band The Righteous Brothers. Ten completed questionnaires were returned from Ichthus Fellowship whom I approached on the advice of a member of Men Women and God on the grounds that it had a more enlightened view of gender equality. Both Ichthus and Pioneer have been described by Ian Cotton (1996) in his journalistic account of the House Church movement in Britain today, The Hallelujah Revolution.

One Conservative Evangelical interviewee spoke of the house church movement as lacking in a knowledge of church history but this bypassing of tradition is common to the majority of the groups in which I am interested. Pioneer People from Cobham, Surrey, are a good example of this. Not tied to any particular permanent building, they use a cinema in Leatherhead and Leisure centres for their meetings. On Sunday meetings they can have five hundred people in their congregation. They are flexible and focus upon the individual. Like the other Christian respondents, the majority are white and lower middle to middle class.

This is not always the case with Jesus fellowship, (also known as the Jesus Army) an Independent Baptist Church. Jesus Fellowship, which is a charismatically based Church which split from both the Evangelical Alliance and the Baptist Union in 1986 was founded by Noel Stanton in 1969. It appears to be successful in attracting young people who are experiencing difficulties, and especially young men. Noel Stanton was a part-time minister at Bugbrooke Baptist Church in Northamptonshire, who according to Fiona Macdonald, felt called "in 1973, to establish a community along the lines of the early Christian Church."⁵ In the UK Christian Handbook 1994/1995, I find that compared to other churches the Jesus Fellowship is an expanding one. This may be because of their use of all the modern methods of evangelising such as producing youth centred printed material, utilising the media, holding multi-media events, using the Internet and owning a conspicuous fleet of colourful buses.

Jesus Fellowship has had a forty fold growth from 431 members in 1980 to 10,640 in 1992 (Brierley & Hiscock 1994/95). Meanwhile, Anglican and Catholic and other Baptist church attendance is on the decrease. This is an interesting statistic as it perhaps helps to explain the reason why I am not unwelcome when I ask questions. But there is also the possibility that the Jesus Fellowship is wishing to engage with enquirers who are not out to prove them to be a 'cult'. In their information on their homepage on the World Wide Web, the Jesus Fellowship state the Christian orthodoxy of their beliefs: "The Fellowship is an evangelical Christian church with a charismatic emphasis and Baptist roots and is orthodox in doctrine, upholding the universally-accepted Christian creeds. It is linked with other churches and groups in the UK and overseas through the Multiply Christian Network." ⁶ It has live-in and live-out members and has a special ministry with young people for whom it holds rave-style worship sessions. But in Jesus Fellowship communities there is no television or rock music. This is an example of the combination of Puritan and club culture.

The three interviewees from Jesus Fellowship were middle and upper-middle class and highly articulate. They were hand picked for me to interview and I do not think they reflected the class makeup of the Jesus fellowship as a whole. (See the issue of sensitivity to outsiders and impression management, discussed below). Nevertheless I think they do reflect the beliefs of the Jesus Fellowship and the questionnaires which were distributed for me by John Campbell do clearly reflect a wide range of abilities and backgrounds.

As mentioned above, the Muslim respondents were mainly from a younger age group than the Christians and were between the ages of thirteen and forty four. This may be because of the routes through which I accessed the Muslims. Only five of the Muslims respondents to the questionnaire were converts to Islam, the rest being born into Muslim homes. In both cases I started out with the Internet as a means of accessing organisations. The Muslim respondents came through a number of sources described below.

The first source is Young Muslims UK (YMUK) which is based in Britain and which was founded in 1984.

Most of its members were born in Britain, many into Muslim homes. The majority of members are of Pakistani origin but there are also members from Somalia and the Yemen as well as some white British converts. They are apologists in that they make the differentiation between culture and Islam. But in adapting their understanding of Islam to the conditions in which they find themselves living, they are also reformists. For instance, as "Zainab", a member of YMUK explained, YMUK are finding ways to be "both Muslim and British". A Sister at a YMUK meeting which was held at the Islamic Foundation near Leicester, to which I was invited in March 1996, described how members, being born and educated in Britain, know both the Western way and the Islamic way and have chosen Islam. Many of the YMUK sisters are reverts who have tried the Western way and have been disillusioned.

The second source is an Islamic forum in Cyberspace where I encountered members of a group who call themselves "Submitters". The word 'Islam' of course means submission, but Rashad Khalifa, an Arabic speaker and scientist, their founder, states in his introduction to his translation of the Qur'an that 'Submission' is the universal religion.⁷ The Submitters are unusual in that they are modern day 'Qur'an alone' people or *Ahl al-Qur'an* (People of the Qur'an). They reject the *Hadith* (the sayings of the Prophet), the *Sunnah* (the example of the Prophet) and *Shariah* (Islamic law) as unsound and manufactured. They are mainly based in the USA and Canada but there are also some Submitters in Britain.⁸ Their 'Qur'an only' strategy may well prove useful in societies which are intolerant of Islam. It lends them a degree of invisibility as Muslims, for instance, by rejecting *hijab* (the headscarf) on the grounds that the Qur'an requires only that women should dress modestly but does not suggest they should cover themselves from head to toe.⁹ This private (both in terms of becoming less visible as well as in permitting personal interpretation of the Qur'an) approach to Islam is not a new idea. A Qur'an alone strategy was used by the *Ahl al-Qur'an* formed in Delhi in the late nineteenth century as one response to the dreadful reprisals against Muslims, by the British following the First War of Independence (the Indian Mutiny) 1857-1859. Submitters are also very unusual in following Khalifa's belief that the Qur'an is divinely-constructed on the basis of multiples of 19¹⁰. Submitters clearly think that other Muslims are misreading the Qur'an and battles rage in Cyberspace between themselves and more orthodox believers who are appalled by their

rejection of Islamic tradition and their belief that Rashad Khalifa, who was murdered in 1990, was "God's messenger of the Covenant" based on Qur'an 3:81, 33:7 and 33:40. When I inquired as to the history of the Submitters, Yasmin, a member based in the USA, replied that the movement goes back "to the beginning of time". She continued: "According to the Qur'an, Abraham was the first to use the word 'submitter' to describe one who worships and submits to God alone".¹¹ So although they do not wear what I have come to regard as Islamic revivalist dress, these Submitters qualify as 'revivalist' in that they are seeking a 'pure Islam'. Yasmin expresses it in terms of their particular movement as being an expression of a pristine Islam which goes back to "the beginning of time". Only one respondent to the questionnaire, from Scotland, belonged to this group. Participant observation on an Islamic forum in cyberspace¹² where this particular group has a powerful voice led me to also encounter some opposing and more orthodox voices. One of these voices came from a member of Young Muslims UK who invited me to attend a weekend meeting of YMUK (see 'Access' below).

The third source of respondents and interviewees has been student Islamic societies at the universities of Bradford, Newcastle and York. Interestingly, Jorgen Nielsen links the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS) with "a close identification with the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood" (Nielsen 1987:388). Four interviewees from the first two of these sources are white British and Irish converts to Islam. All of them are married and have children. None of these four women are students. 'Linda' from Newcastle explained that a lot of Muslims in Newcastle "who do not feel they fit in at Mosques which are specifically Pakistani or Iranian and which use languages other than English, meet up at the Newcastle University Mosque". They wear the headscarf in the same manner as the sisters from YMUK. That is, showing only their faces and hands in public. They, like the YMUK members, refer to the *Sunnah* and the *Hadith* as sources of legitimation. All four regard Islam as a total way of life.

The fourth source of Muslim respondents to the questionnaire was a mosque in the South of England where a group of young women are studying for their GCSE in Islam. This is because they are unable to take GCSE Islam at school. All of them have been born into Muslim homes, some are still at school and

some at University. These young women have a high pass rate in the GCSE, some with as many as ten passes. One had four A levels. According to their teacher, many of them are the daughters of fathers who are taxi drivers and mothers who work at a mushroom farm. All these young women, including the youngest who was thirteen, dress in the Islamic revivalist manner.¹³

Some sisters whom I met through being referred on by other respondents or interviewees are members of the Islamic Society of Britain. Although only five of the Muslims described themselves as 'converts' many of the Muslims have tried living the Western consumerist lifestyle and rejected it. Most of the Muslim respondents to the questionnaire are second generation British Muslims, born to Muslim parents of Pakistani, Indian, Syrian or Moroccan descent. Among the interviewees the situation was reversed in that six of the nine were white European converts to Islam. The majority of the Muslim respondents and interviewees were highly articulate, often high academic achievers and some were professionally trained.

The majority of the Christians, twenty nine of forty three, described themselves as converts to Christianity even though many of them were born into Christian homes. This is because the majority are 'born-again' Christians with the exclusivity this implies and in contrast with the Muslim respondents to the questionnaire, only five of whom described themselves as converts or reverts to Islam. The rest were born into Muslim homes.

Access

There are particular difficulties associated with studying proselytizing groups, not least the fact they may wish to convert the researcher or cease to cooperate when they realize that the researcher is not a candidate for membership (Gordon 1987). 'Conversion-oriented' groups may hold 'potential convert' as their only conceptualization of outsiders (Ayella 1993). I think the researcher may overestimate their own appeal as a prize. Further, for reasons of public relations, it is not in the interests of a revivalist group to convert a potentially non-antagonistic researcher because, should the researcher join them, her findings

would be devalued by the view that "she would say that anyway".

A more serious difficulty, in my view, is that of the sensitivity of the group to outsiders through fear of misrepresentation. This may be the result of adverse media coverage. For instance a covert researcher (a journalist) posed as a homeless person in order to get taken back to New Creation Community, Jesus Fellowship's Northampton Headquarters. She later describes them as a 'cult'¹⁴. Although it could be said that Christianity started out in the first place as a Judaic 'cult', 'cult' is a dangerous word as it alienates and isolates the group thus named. At the same time, a researcher who is anticipated to give a favourable report and thus improve public relations might be welcomed (Ayella 1993). This may take the form of 'trading' which enables access. In the later stages of my fieldwork I was able to send papers I had written to 'gatekeepers' who could then ascertain that I was not in the business of stoking the fires of Islamophobia nor the vilification of Christian groups.

Muslims, in a post-communist, secularized society have been identified as the enemy of the West (Huntington 1993) and many Muslims live in Western countries as the 'other' within (Turner 1994), pushed into a defensive position. Larry Poston, studying conversion to Islam in the United States, found that because Muslim groups were suspicious of his motives, it was impossible to get responses to his questionnaires. Poston had to resort to the published testimonies of converts (Poston 1992). Poston cites Yvonne Haddad and Adair Lummis as experiencing similar problems.

This problem experienced in the USA led me to expect that I might experience similar difficulties, especially as a white, non-Muslim. I was surprised then, when, in the earliest stages of my study, I found a student member of Bradford University Islamic Association setting up his book stall outside the university library and that his immediate response to my self introduction was that I should meet some of the Sisters. He was as good as his word and it was through this contact that I was led to my first informant. Further, when I approached Inayat Bunglawala, who declared himself, on the CompuServe Islamic Forum in cyberspace, to be on the executive committee of Young Muslims UK, he not only agreed to distribute some

questionnaires but also invited me to the YMUK meeting at the Islamic Foundation, even going to the trouble of meeting me at Leicester Station. Muslims who offered access were clear that they were interested in being better understood by non-Muslims.

In terms of Christian groups I received a warm welcome from John Campbell, communications officer for the Jesus Fellowship, whom I first contacted by E-mail, and also from Martin Scott of Pioneer People in Cobham after I contacted him in response to reading his book Women and Ministry, a book which had been recommended to me by an informant. Both these contacts distributed questionnaires and helped to arrange interviews. E-mail has also been my first contact with some of the individual respondents to my questionnaires, and indeed, one of my questionnaires was completed by E-mail.

But it was not always so easy. Some of the contacts I attempted to make by letter and E-mail and requests for distribution of my questionnaire were not so successful. Letters to some six Evangelical ministers and to two Muslim leaders in London, a number of E-mails to two Vineyard missionaries from the USA who were working in Berkshire (to whom I had an introduction from a Vineyard member) as well as an E-mail to a self-proclaimed member of Hizb-ut-tahrir, all met with a wall of silence. All these points meant I needed to be flexible in my approach to gaining information and at the same time attempt to make an analysis of the reasons why access is being granted or denied.

Ayella suggests that "One should question the kind of access one is being given, ever conscious of the possibility of sanitization or impression management" (Ayella 1993:111). On the whole this impression management is understandable by groups who feel they are considered 'fair game' by journalists and researchers. For instance, representation as a 'cult' has deeply practical outcomes. Not only are 'cults' "considered by many to be deviant" (Ayella 1993:108) but such labelling makes it more difficult for the group to mobilise resources (Ayella:121). In a phone call where I had requested the opportunity to visit the Jesus Fellowship group in Sheffield Ian Callard, the area leader, had suggested I was a PhD student who would 'bowl googlies' at poor unsuspecting young people. I was conscious of not wanting

to 'catch people out'. But I could understand the pastor's concern and why it is that interviewees would be hand-picked. This is where participant observation helps as a means of getting a wider picture.

Participant Observation

At the outset I felt that my most pressing need was to visit revivalist groups, not only to gain access to respondents but to get a feel of the social milieu in which they moved. The culture of a group can only be experienced by 'being there'. We learn about a culture by observing people and by participating (Spradley 1979:8) (Richardson 1991:62). I therefore attended meetings, talks, meetings of worship, classes, lectures and exhibitions as well as visiting the homes and communal homes of believers to gain a more rounded view of the groups of which my informants are a part.

The most famous accounts of participant observation are generally of covert research where the researcher is cast in the heroic model. The writing reads like tales of derring-do. Examples of this genre are Lofland (1977) Doomsday Cult, and Rosenhan, D.L (1973) 'On being sane in insane places'. The reader is in suspense at the possibility of the researcher being discovered in their duplicity, or worse, what if Rosenhan's researchers who get themselves admitted to psychiatric hospitals are not released? There are also strong ethical reasons against covert research, a study often cited to illustrate this is L. Humphries (1975) 'The Tearoom Trade' where the researcher acted as a 'look-out queen' for gay men having sex in public lavatories. Humphries then conducted a covert follow-up on his research subjects by obtaining their addresses via their car registration numbers. Yet Roger Homan points out that critics of covert methods tend not to be squeaky clean themselves in terms of their methods (Homan 1991:119). He cites, for instance, Dingwall (1977) who takes a high moral tone with regard to covert research but who was involved in drinking sessions with his subjects¹⁵ and Belson 1975 who fed his subjects before interviewing them about their experiences of thieving (Homan:126).

The above kind of participant observation is very much in the style of sociology as grand narrative. There

is also overt participant observation where the researcher participates in order to observe, but there is a grey area with regard to overt participant observation as to how overt can it be. This is especially the case in relation to proselytising groups who might see the researcher as having been sent by God for some reason not yet known to the researcher (Richardson 1991:67). Some feminist social scientists have wrestled with the issue of creating a more feminist kind of participatory observation which shares power between researchers and subjects (Gergen & Gergen 1991: 768). Gergen calls this 'dialogic participation'.

I was participating in order to do experiential research and at the same time my aim was to encourage participation in my research project by the subjects of the research. This was not only for feminist ethical reasons but because the informants are the people who know how it is to live a life in conformity with revivalist religion. Although I was aware that ultimately I would have authorial control, I hoped my informants would participate in the process of interpretation. To this end I sent transcripts of interviews to all interviewees for their comments and drafts of papers to some.

Participant observation is 'non-linear', being both verbal and non-verbal, and accesses data which would be outside the frame of a classic interview as a means of trying to ascertain the insiders' viewpoint. This is especially the case in terms of religious movements where the insider viewpoint is frequently obscure to the outsider (Jorgenson 1989:9-12). Some researchers, as mentioned above, have actually joined religious groups in order to engage in covert research. My whole instinct has been to do the reverse, that is, to be honest from the outset regarding my researcher role and to see how far this would allow me to collect data.

In November 1995 I attended my first Christian 'revivalist' meeting advertised thus by a Christian student group in York: "Toronto Blessing Come and See". It was a group to which one of my earliest informants belonged. I had decided from the outset that when I visit a group I should tell people that I am engaged in a research project, what that project is and what it is for. I also informed them that I was based at the University Centre for Women's Studies, not only so they are able to locate me if they wish to, but also

because of the, at times, strained relationship between feminisms and revivalist religions. I felt that the responses to that piece of information also constitute data. This may have prejudiced some groups against responding to my requests for access.

I soon discovered that the fact that members of a group know I am a researcher did not preclude their welcoming me as a participant. This could of course be for the reason that one might be viewed as a potential convert (Richardson (1991) above). At the Christians York meeting, I decided to stand up when they did, sing when they did (fortunately the words of the hymns were projected onto the wall) and I think I smiled a lot. I came to this last conclusion as one of the participants asked me if I was there for 'business or pleasure'. Just 'being there' enabled me to absorb some of the atmosphere of a meeting and get a better picture of the group. I found out, for instance, that a number of the men were scientists and mathematicians. It is an interesting point that scientists and mathematicians are disproportionately represented amongst revivalist religionists (Barr 1977). Further, although I had read a great deal about 'Toronto Blessing' and the poster for the meeting had mentioned the same, I was disappointed to find that no one fell to the ground (as in the description of the experience of John Arnott in Chapter 1). I think the poster was an interesting example of a group turning media hype to its own purposes.

In March 1996 I attended a weekend workshop held by Young Muslims UK, at the Islamic Foundation near Leicester where I was able to participate in a Sisters' work group at the back of the hall. The Sisters all wore *hijab* and were seated behind the Brothers. Actually 'being there' gave me the feeling that they had not been 'relegated' to the back (as is so often imagined by non-Muslim observers) but that this was a choice, which allowed them, as young women, the freedom to operate away from the masculine gaze. I could see that the Sisters were able to address the whole group from the stage and that they took a dynamic part in the overall organisation of the event. For instance, one sister signalled from the back of the hall for a male speaker to hurry up because it was time to draw a particular item to a close.

I was able to visit the *masjid* with the Sisters, share their lunch of what appeared to be Kentucky Fried

Chicken and listen to a talk by a visiting speaker from Egypt. The talk was about marriage and I had expected the sort of Christian talk on the subject, about 'give and take', that I was used to. But instead it was a highly political talk, about the importance of the family as the basic unit of Islamic society and the extended family as a support network which could actually liberate women to work for Islam. The visibly pregnant speaker pointed out that she would not be present if it were not for her extended family taking care of her children while she was in England. The act of being present at this meeting for the day was informative in a way that talking with an individual alone can never be. For a start it quickly abolished any stereotypical ideas I had about women who wear *hijab*. The speaker on the stage was certainly not without a voice. I was deeply impressed by the goodness, tolerance and kindness of the Sisters, one of whom led me by hand from place to place if I was in doubt where to go. I could not help thinking that the Sisters, because of their visibility, might be better Muslims than the Brothers.

This contrasted with my attendance in November 1996 at a Leeds University Student Islamic Society "Islamic Awareness Week" exhibition and talk where Sisters had their own entrance and sat on one side of the auditorium and all three speakers were male. I found it interesting to observe the many degrees of veiling and numerous ways there appeared to be of wearing the veil. My informant who had arranged to meet me there eventually appeared fully veiled from head to toe in black, but only as I was leaving. I had not been able to recognise her. But this 'being there' offered some insight into some of the practicalities of the veil, for instance, the anonymity it can bestow as well as a sense of what it feels like to sit on the women's side of a large auditorium. To me as a non-Muslim and being on my own it was pleasant to be seated amongst women. But I found myself bothered that the speakers were all male and that they were answering written questions from the floor on what seemed to me women's issues, for instance *hijab*.

I have also visited the Jesus Fellowship New Creation Farm and Headquarters in Northampton on two occasions. This gave me a completely different feel from the impression I had from visiting their WebSite on the Internet and from reading their magazines. From Jesus Fellowship publicity I had gained an impression of brash exuberance but my visit made me think them more like a monastic group who live

a simple and wholesome lifestyle. These two impressions sit rather oddly together and called for further investigation. When I mentioned this to John Campbell, their media officer, he suggested that in today's world it was necessary to give such an effervescent impression in order to gain attention. My most lingering impression of New Creation Farm is the unforgettable scent of a profusion of mainly unobtainable, old-fashioned varieties of apples in the farm shop. Is this the perfume of a lost world or of late modern nostalgia? I fancy it is a little of both.

A visit to the Sheffield branch of Jesus Fellowship gave a different picture. In this respect I found it really useful to attend a house warming party at a Jesus Fellowship Sheffield community house and a meeting for worship on the following day. There I was able to see that a cross-section of people, certainly in terms of gender and class attended. Nevertheless the vast majority of attenders were white. Many of the members at the house and at worship were incredibly different from the hand-picked members I had met at the Northampton Headquarters. This was a ministry which incorporates marginalised people, ex-prisoners, young people in trouble, homeless people. When I visited, Jesus Army (Jesus Fellowship in action) were out on the streets at night, cooking baked potatoes to feed the homeless. Northampton Jesus Fellowship members also do this in London.

When I visited Martin Scott, one of the leaders of Pioneer People, at his office in Cobham in 1996 I had thought I should dress in a sober manner to meet my stereotypical vision of an evangelical pastor. I was amazed to be greeted at the door by a woman who was dressed in leggings and to find Martin Scott wearing an earring through one ear and dressed in jeans. By 'being there' some of my prejudices and stereotypical images are melting away. In May 1997 I attended a Pioneer People meeting held at the Tolworth Leisure Centre in Surrey where people were welcoming. The response to a request for prayer on an important issue for the group gave me an impression of a crowd of private individuals, each praying alone, a postmodern phenomenon of the 'lonely crowd',¹⁷ a group of isolates, each with their own concerns. A cacophony of groaning sounds went up, as if a groping for some intangible reality was taking place. Individuals wandered around praying, some speaking in tongues whilst one young man

raised a staff over his head, Moses-like, his body quaking. Others went to the ground; a couple of men appeared to be prostrating themselves in prayer, like Muslims, whilst some women giggled on the floor. I wondered if the impression I had gained of the casualisation of dress amongst these mainly white, middle class suburban people was related to the fact they might find themselves on the floor.

Questionnaires

Early in my research process I sent out a pilot questionnaire which was "like a fishing net to catch indications"¹⁸, in this case, of what kinds of questions I should be asking in interviews. It soon became evident that the completed questionnaires were a viable source of information in themselves.

Just contacting the organizations from 'cold' and asking to have access to the Sisters did not necessarily bring a positive response. Sending a sample questionnaire was a means of showing gatekeepers the kind of questions I wished to ask. So besides providing me with valuable information upon which I could draw for the interviews and proving to be a rich source of data in its own right, the questionnaire has acted as an ice-breaker. Inquiring about the willingness of a religious organisation to distribute questionnaires gave me something tangible to ask the men and women who were in leadership roles and therefore able to offer or deny access.

Another function of the survey was that it helped to establish a wider picture against which to measure the degree to which a particular respondent may be atypical when it comes to data acquired from in-depth interviews. But the quantitative part of the research is not a rigorous study. There are too many problems associated with trying to obtain a random sample from revivalist groups and the survey only forms part of a multi-method approach to gaining information.

Having taken on board the fact that questionnaires are not generally counted as a feminist method I designed an open questionnaire which allowed respondents to answer questions in what ever way they

pleased, writing as much or as little as they wanted in their own time and only if they wished to do so. I also worked at offering respondents space to suggest changes and to criticise the questions which are the content of the questionnaire. Suggestions for changes to the questions were forthcoming. A Christian respondent, for example, commented that a question concerned with rights was a question more appropriate to Muslims than to Christians. Other Christians, especially Conservative Evangelicals from *Men Women and God* questioned the use of the term 'revivalist' as applied to themselves. Some Muslim respondents objected to the term 'obedience' in the question "Does your religion require that a woman should be obedient to her husband?", preferring 'submission'. A Muslim researcher who completed a questionnaire suggested I remove the boxes which I had placed for the answers because "respondents might write more". I have adapted the questionnaire as I have progressed and therefore changes have been taken into account in interpretation of data. At times I had to balance the fact that the feedback was data in itself with the desire to be open to make changes. For instance, the issue of the terms 'obedience' and 'submission' yields a rich vein for comparative study. Why did the majority of Christians *not* object to the term 'obedience'? To discover more I continued to use the term 'obedience'. This issue now forms a chapter of this thesis.

It has not been possible, in the situation of finding respondents from revivalist groups where I was obliged to gain access through leaders, to ensure I was obtaining a random sample. This was difficult because of the pressure there is on leaders to engage in 'impression management' for fear that researchers might misrepresent their case in some way. It took Eileen Barker two years of negotiation with the Unification Church to reach a position where she could do research on her own terms (i.e., being given access to a list of all members, so that she might draw a random sample to interview). Further, Barker was only allowed this freedom of access because she was actually sought out by the Unification Church in order to carry out the research for them. This put her "in a more powerful position to negotiate for a favourable research 'bargain' " (Ayella:111). I had neither the time nor the power to attempt such a negotiation. Further, I was approaching a number of groups, some of whom would view me with suspicion. As a non-Muslim approaching Muslims and as someone with, at best, liberal Christian and at worse, post-

Christian beliefs, I might be viewed as unsympathetic and something of a 'lost cause' by some Evangelical and Charismatic Christians. I knew that the groups would wish to show their 'better' side to the public.

Over the last two years I have distributed some two hundred questionnaires and have had a return of seventy two. The highest return has been from organisations from which I have had an overall fifty per cent return rate. The rest were completed by the snowball method, passed on by interviewees or respondents to the questionnaire. As the questionnaires were passed on by representatives I always enclosed stamped addressed envelopes to myself with each questionnaire to avoid the need for their collection and perusal by the distributor. The latter did in fact happen in one case when a leader of a Christian group collected the questionnaires which I never then received.

Twenty nine of the completed questionnaires are from Muslim respondents and forty three from Christians. I had distributed the questionnaires as follows: 20 went to Jesus Fellowship (two different groups, one group responded with eight out of ten returns and from the other I received none) , 10 to Pioneer People and 12 more to Pioneer Network churches, 8 to Men Women and God 20 to Ichthus, 10 to Young Muslims UK, 6 to the Islamic Society of the University of York, 13 to a Mosque in the South of England where young Muslim women meet to study GCSE in Islam and the rest to individuals, some of whom distributed them around a University Christian Union and a house church Group in York to distribute and complete. The highest rate of return came from the organizations, these included 8 from Jesus Fellowship, 6 from Pioneer People and 4 from Pioneer Network Churches, 13 from Ichthus in London, 4 from Men Women and God, 3 from Young Muslims UK, 4 from the student Islamic Society and 13 from the Mosque.

Respondents to the questionnaire

The profile of the interviewees is not a pattern replicated by the 72 respondents to the questionnaire. Eleven of 29 Muslim respondents described themselves as Pakistani, four as Arab, one as Asian and one

as Anglo-Asian. Only five described themselves as white British and one as Irish, for the rest their ethnicity is unknown. On the other hand, the Christian respondents were overwhelmingly white British although there was one white Canadian and a white South African, one black British and one Asian. The majority of Christians defined themselves as converts (29 of 43) whereas the majority of Muslims did not (5 of 29 described themselves as converts). As already discussed, this can be misleading in the Christian case because many of the Christians who define themselves as converts because they have been 'born again' were brought up in what they refer to as nominally Christian, C of E or Catholic homes. The Muslims on the other hand were mostly born into Muslim homes and record themselves as having been Muslims all their lives. There is a wider class profile amongst respondents to the questionnaire as well as a greater spread of educational attainment. Some were still at school: eight Muslim respondents (the youngest being thirteen) and one Christian who was 15. The age range of the Christians was from 15 through to 81 whilst the age range of the Muslims ran from 13 through to 44.

Of the respondents to the questionnaire, 18 Christians had first degree or above, 4 more had higher education and professional training, 3 had research degrees. A number of the Christians had vocational, helping qualifications. 13 of 29 Muslims were either studying for a degree or already had one. Two had research degrees. The qualification of one of the Muslims was unknown as was the case with seven of the Christians.

My interviewees were largely British born, mainly middle class and many had received higher education. This was no doubt influenced by the fact that in fifty per cent of cases I had to go through gatekeepers to obtain interviews. Gatekeepers selected articulate women who would represent the movement to which they belonged. All the Christian interviewees are white and come from lower to upper middle class backgrounds. Four of nine Christian interviewees had attended university and one had professional training as a social worker. The Muslim interviewees came from more ethnically and culturally varied backgrounds than the Christians. Unlike the sample who completed the questionnaire, the majority of the interviewees (five of nine) were white converts to Islam. Three of these were converts from Catholicism, two of whom

were Irish. The rest were born into Muslim families; one English Muslim was born in Egypt, another was Somali and two were born to British, South Asian-Muslim parents. Four of the nine interviewees were attending, or had attended university, two at postgraduate level. The age range of the Christian interviewees was between twenty one and seventy three, six of them being in their thirties and forties. The age of the Muslim interviewees ranged from twenty three through to forty six.

Interviews

During the fieldwork process I interviewed eighteen women: nine Muslims and nine Christians. The interviews took a degree of negotiation to set up and involved travel to the far north of England, South of England including London, the Midlands and South Wales. I also interviewed, or had ongoing dialogue with, eight interviewees women and men, who were not involved as subjects but on whom I was able to call for information or advice, one of these discussions was carried out entirely by E-mail. At times there was some overlap here because some of my informants were also experts. For instance, among my Islamic informants there were two women who are researchers and another who has obtained an M Phil for an Islam-based study.

Life histories and oral histories

Life histories are concerned with the whole span of a person's life. Like the oral history method (below) the researcher records a personal account of the narrator's life. Chilla Bulbeck (1997) makes a refreshing shift in her approach to life histories for her study of the impact of feminism on the lives of three generations of Australian women. She utilises the 'life history' method of collecting narratives but departs in her method from the life history approach and the postmodern relativisation and distancing of the account from its social background. Instead she takes the account and grounds the narrative in the social structure from which it emerges. Thus the narratives are not only the stories of individual women, accounts which become disembodied and dislocated 'texts', but they are viewed in the context of the

social and economic structures within which the individual lives and moves. This method is "described as 'socially theorised life history', (it) identifies a role for social theory in interpreting the interview material " (Bulbeck 1997:6-7). This methodological shift is appealing in that it unites abstract theorising with the lived reality of the body in society.

Recording Oral history

Oral history method may be used to recover specific parts of a narrator's life or might relate to specific memories. It is one method used to collect sensitive information, in a constructive way, in particular from women who are on the margins. And it is suggested by some writers on the subject that there may be a gain for the narrator as well as for the researcher of an oral history, "an opportunity to make sense of scattered events" (Yow 1994:17). In oral history methodology there is an emphasis on the building of trust and it has its base in psychodynamic theory especially in relation to the practice of therapeutic counselling. That is, offering the Rogerian 'unconditional regard' mentioned in Chapter 1 (Rogers 1967). This therapeutic emphasis has been demonstrated to be particularly useful in collecting the experiences of women who were diagnosed as suffering from depression (Jack 1990:101). To be able to listen, in a fresh way, and with regard for the integrity of the speaker, is important. But this kind of trust building and regard as a means of eliciting information is open to abuse in the terms described by Judith Stacey (1988), with the dumping of the respondent after the process.

Collecting oral histories is not necessarily more ethical than any other research method. The regard may not be so unconditional as some writers imply. To the Rogerian, humanistic model has been added the postmodern dismissal of a 'true version' as well as the poststructuralist notion that autobiography is a construction of discourses. This leads to the situation described by Yow who writes: "I listen and accept that your version of the story is true for you" (Yow:120). Yow sees this as "encouraging, non-critical listening based upon mutual respect between narrator and interviewer " which she sees as crucial to the narrator's esteem (Yow:120). I see it as an erosion of the unconditional regard which has now become

conditional. A value judgement has been placed upon the perception of the narrator of their own experience. It is like saying: "I shall listen to your account knowing that you believe it to be true but I know that there is a wider picture and that your account is only a distorted view of it". Further, such a value judgement made at the outset means that the interviewer/interviewee relationship is hierarchical. In this regard, I find myself in agreement with Judith Stacey's sense of the hypocrisy of the egalitarian stance in interviewing. So although I have drawn to some degree on oral histories methodology, because of the locations in which I have been obliged to meet informants and because of the necessity for trust building, I did not, in a number of cases, use a tape recorder. Anderson and Jack write about the spontaneity of the exchange of a taped interview (Anderson & Jack 1991: 11). But how spontaneous can it be? I am aware that some people find the presence of a tape recorder daunting. James Spradley has written how recording is not always advisable as not only does it not substitute for rapport but also it "may threaten and inhibit informants" (Spradley:74) On my initial visit to the Jesus Fellowship in Northampton a group of Sisters expressed relief that I had not brought a tape recorder. One of them remarked how when a visiting journalist had used one the group had stayed silent. Immediately the journalist turned the tape recorder off the group had started to talk.

During interviews, I took notes, making an effort to get down key terms which would act as triggers (Spradley:74) to the memory once I started writing up the interview as soon as possible after the event. I also found it necessary to follow this procedure whilst using a tape: once I lost the major part of an interview because my informant's telephone rang a few minutes into the interview and I switched the recorder off. Next time I switched it on I omitted to depress both the 'play' and 'record' buttons. On other occasions, my interviewees have been so quietly spoken that I have had great difficulty in transcribing the tapes. Not surprisingly, the best recording resulted from an interview with a woman who does some professional broadcasting. So I think a tape recorder can be something of a mixed blessing.

I found myself meeting respondents in places where it would not be practical to bring out a tape recorder, not just because it might look inappropriate but because the surrounding noise level would make recording

impossible. For instance, I met Linda, a white British convert to Islam, at Newcastle Station. She had suggested, during a telephone call, that now her children were both at school she wanted to meet away from the house. When she actually met me at the station she had brought her three year old daughter who had chicken pox. We spent the next few hours in a series of cafes where making a tape recording would have been impossible. I met another Sister, whom I had previously met at the YMUK meeting, at King's Cross Station and following her choice of venue (from what was available), I interviewed her in the Burger Bar (where the interviewee drank only water). I think that cafes do represent neutral spaces and this may lead to a relaxed conversation. There is plenty going on around and this helps to detract from what can at times be, the intimidating process of an interview. Later, after I had gained some rapport with Linda I was then invited into her home to meet two other sisters and I was able to carry out a group interview and to share lunch with them whilst their children zoomed around laughing and playing. The situation was relaxed and informal but again not suitable for a tape recording.

Conducting the Interview

Although the power relationship between interviewer and interviewee changes during and after the fieldwork process, there is an implicit power relation in the interviewer/interviewee relationship. For instance the interviewer knows the order of the questions whereas the interviewee does not. Further, the control that the interviewer holds over the interview process means that she can easily distort the flow of information. An obvious way in which this takes place is when the interviewer fails to listen carefully. Anderson and Jack suggest that the interviewer needs to learn to listen more to the narrator than to their own agendas (Anderson & Jack 1991: 12). Careful listening can help the researcher avoid the problem of scripting the narrator's account. This process of scripting takes place when the interviewer thinks she already knows what the narrator is saying: "This means I am already appropriating what she says to an existing schema, and therefore I am no longer really listening to her. Rather, I am listening to how what she says fits into what I think I already know. So I try to be very careful to ask each woman what she means by a certain word, or to make sure that I attend to what is missing, what literary critics call the

'presence of the absence' in women's texts." (Anderson & Jack:19).

There is also an issue of leading questions. If I ask a question such as "what led up to your conversion to Islam?" I am perhaps suggesting a linear process where everything fell into place. Its a bit like the way that writing a CV invites you to make out that all career choices were based upon deliberation and part of a rational career plan.

After carrying out my first two interviews, I realized that there is great value (with regard to rapport) in, where possible, having previously met my interviewees and having visited the organisations to which they belong. Apart from making for a relaxed feeling about the process, and providing a sense of being open to ongoing dialogue, it made it possible to see the interviewee as *part* of something, as well as an individual. Having started out with the expectation of carrying out forty interviews I shifted to a position of a smaller number of, mainly, longer term exchanges. These exchanges took various forms and included interviews, meeting for coffee or lunch, letter writing or E-mail, and telephone conversations.

I had loosely structured interviews for which I had an overall plan of five areas I wished to address. These were background and family, education, employment, circumstances surrounding conversion or reversion (if indeed either was the case), the benefits of the religious system to the interviewee as a woman. I would then ask specific questions regarding issues that have been raised. Life histories theory has influenced me into taking the lifespan into account. This proved useful, for instance, on my second interview with Amatulla, a white English, twenty four year old convert to Islam, where I asked her about her education, mainly as an indicator of class background. Amatulla informed me that she had been sent to a 'Free School' where the child centred education had left her with a sense of having missed out on real life. She said, "There were no black people, no Asians. I felt I was not getting a broad experience. I knew others from normal schools and I wanted experience of normal life. Everyone was so privileged. I felt I was missing something so rich". This did not fit the stereotypical view of the woman who wears *hijab*. Yet there are women from all manner of backgrounds who have come to wear *hijab*. For instance, Miriam pointed

out that she knew 'punks' who had converted to Islam. In the case of Amatulla I found myself wondering whether this rejection of the model of child centred education, which was fashionable in the 1970s, was perhaps a generational thing? A generation older than Amatulla, the rigid structures of my own childhood had me longing for the kind of education where you can call teachers by their first names, but for Amatulla it had clearly seemed to be a phoney experience. Had its lack of structures made the ideological structures of Islam and the regularity of the practices in her daily adult life, more appealing? Childhood experiences, as well as family background, must influence our later religious choices.

Power

Power is a theme which will resurface throughout this thesis. Although there is a sense in which I wish to challenge some outcomes of a blanket application of a Foucauldian analysis of power I find Foucault's (1977) theorisation of the situatedness of power irresistible. This is because it is a model which accommodates a recognition of the changing nature of power. In the case of feminist literature of the 1980s, the impression was given that interviewing is "a cosy enterprise" (Phoenix 1994:50) on the one hand and that there was a moral imperative on the interviewer to recognise her power position, and on the other to compensate accordingly (Oakley 1981). The notion of power being on the interviewer's side can be overestimated. As a student doing research for a doctoral thesis you are dependent upon the good will of your informants. As an interviewer your future is in jeopardy if you do not get results. In this sense the interviewer is vulnerable, and in my experience, the absence of this in the literature was disadvantageous. Anne Phoenix (1994) is a writer who does address the subject but in the main the issue remains unaddressed.

The power of the researcher is in the fact that she has a voice. The literature regarding the power of the interviewer and the potential she has for exploiting the interviewee is plentiful (Oakley 1981) (Stacey 1988) (Finch 1991) but considerably less when it looks at the reverse position. Ann Phoenix (1994) has pointed out that the balance shifts throughout the research process. At first, during the fieldwork stage, the power

is with the individuals who may admit or deny the researcher access to informants and then it is with the informant in that the researcher is dependent upon her provision of information. There have been times when I have solicited no response to my requests for interviews, admission or distribution of questionnaires which have left me wondering as to whether the problem was lack of interest or outright rejection of my project. A researcher at the fieldwork stage is not necessarily in a powerful position at all. For instance Anne Phoenix writes about her negative experiences as a black field worker. She writes of the neglected theme of how "most published material has discussed projects over which the researcher had some control rather than the more common experience where the feminist researcher has no control over the research process" (Phoenix:49). Nevertheless, once she has possession of the data, the balance of power rests with the researcher. This is because she has now become the author. But even this is not as unproblematic as it may appear. There are many considerations in the presentation of material which must be reflected upon, some of which will become evident in the next section, 'Caught in the Crossfire'. There are issues involved not only of understanding the views of those interviewed and (if one wishes to keep the door open to the possibility of further research) maintaining their goodwill but there is also the consideration of the ways in which the material will be received by others who will hear the results.

Phoenix gives an example of the difficulties at the field work stage from her study of mothers under twenty. An interviewee who lived at home with her parents was forthcoming. They sat in the kitchen while the parents, who were unemployed, sat in the sitting room, separated by a partition wall and serving hatch. She writes: "I had not got very far into the interview when her father came in, told me to turn off the tape recorder and enquired why I was asking questions about him and his wife. My explanations about getting background information fell on deaf ears" (Phoenix 1994:51).

Phoenix writes that "the dynamics of race, social class, the issue being researched, and the intersection of the agendas of interviewers and interviewees all have as much impact as gender on the interview situation" (Phoenix 1994:55). Sometimes it was obvious to Phoenix, a black researcher, that after appointments made by telephone, "a minority of white interviewees (were) visibly shocked to see me when

I turned up on the doorstep" (Phoenix 1994:55). I felt a little like that about my age. I tried to warn people on the telephone that I was not a young researcher in order to avoid the mutual embarrassment of their visible surprise.

There are also issues of power associated with interviewing members of proselytising groups. Gorden (1987) writes how proselytising groups may not understand how the researcher can appear to understand but at the same time not be forced by that understanding to believe. Three months into his study Gorden was asked if he "knew the Lord yet?". When Gorden replied 'no' he was warned that he's had plenty of time and that the Lord would deal particularly harshly with him. Gorden writes: "These are the kinds of pressures that lead field researchers to experience fear of expulsion, anxiety and guilt" (Gorden:272). This is an example of where honesty is used by the researcher in the face of proselytisation. I too was told at a group interview that God deals particularly harshly with those who hear the word of Islam and do not follow. The pre-Vatican II Catholic child in me is not impervious to the threat of hell so I understand Gorden's statement about guilt arousal.

Oakley (1981) (1993) has demonstrated the importance of allowing the researched to question the researcher as a means of balancing power. Interviewees who are believers may well ask the researcher questions about their own beliefs. For instance during my second interview with Amatulla, she asked my view on polygamy. Although I recognise that there are a number of perspectives from which polygamy may be viewed I felt I had to say that I was personally, not in favour of it. I felt I could not lie in order to ingratiate myself with the informant and yet I think my response led to a degree of mistrust and possible misreading of my intentions (below).

In attempting to create a dialogic process I decided that after each interview I should send informants a written transcript either of the tape or of the notes (applicable when a tape recorder had not been used), of what I understood them to have said. This was a means of double checking my information in the absence of a taped interview as well as an opportunity to ask subsidiary questions which may occur to me

after the event. Further it gave an opportunity to the interviewee to make comments and correct me if they thought I had misunderstood. Chilla Bulbeck (1997), who used this method in her interviews with three generations of Australian feminists, writes that this method allows "a space for reflection and editing" and "encouraged frankness at the point of narration". I found this generally to be the case as the interviewee knows that they are able to edit at a later date, for this reason and after the episode with Amatulla, described below, I shifted to a pattern where I requested permission to use the content of the interview *after* the transcript had been edited and commented upon by the interviewee.

But this method is not without its problems. Bulbeck found that a number of respondents, by editing made themselves appear less racist, less critical or less confused than their transcript might have suggested. I think this was a problem to a degree with interviewees who see themselves as ambassadors for their religious position. There is an example of this in the conversations I had with one interviewee who throughout, stood by the Islamic requirement for a wife to submit to her husband. Only when we were later parting company at the railway station, me clutching a bag of potatoes which she had grown in her garden and after a shared lunch and a two hour interview spread over an afternoon did I suddenly get the idea that she may have a different personal feeling on the issue but that she believed that her feelings did not come into it because of her loyalty to Islam.

Although the sending of transcripts and interview notes for comment worked very well in general and proved to be a way of continuing an interview in writing, it did backfire in its initial stages. My first Muslim interviewee had kindly invited me to her house. This had been my second visit to Amatulla's house and I felt that we had something of a rapport. She had been very open on the first occasion but she said she wished her husband to be present for the second interview, 'in case she got something wrong'. I explained that I wished for her view on things and that I was interested in her life and how she had come to Islam as a convert some three years before. But in retrospect I realize that Amatulla saw herself as a representative for Islam. After the interview I sent her my typed-up notes of the conversation which I left unembellished on purpose. In each case of Amatulla's words which I had noted down I was careful to

write: 'Amatulla said'. This is because I wanted to make clear which were her quoted words and which my impressions or compressed notes as I did not wish to put words into her mouth. This may have read rather strangely because I was devastated to receive a letter which told me that in my "first draft" I had a "mocking tone throughout" and that I was clearly biased on "the women's issue" and that what I was doing was a "complete waste of three years". Amatulla put no address on her letter and said she had moved. As far as I understood, I was just feeding back what she, herself, had said. I must have gone through a selective process in choosing what to write down and also, as shown by Linda's (another interviewee's) comments, there were times when I misheard things, but when this did happen, according to Linda's response, it was usually a matter of a single word. I found it hard to believe that what I wrote down could be *that* extremely different from what she had said.

So what went wrong? Katherine Borland (1991) has written about interpretative conflict for instance in her reading of her Grandmother's narrative as feminist, an idea with which her Grandmother strongly disagreed. But the notes I sent to Amatulla hadn't even reached the interpretation stage. I think the problem was that I imagined my informant would understand that my write-up of the interview was in note form and that it was not a 'first draft' of my thesis at all. Not all my interviewees had the opportunity of higher education and I needed to be aware of this and now realize that some may not be able to accept that in order to carry out a piece of research I had to ask the difficult questions as well as the easy ones. As can be seen elsewhere in this thesis, I pressed and pressed 'Miriam', an interviewee with a research degree, on the issue of 'obedience' to the stage where she was annoyed, but we retained a rapport to the point where I was able to send Miriam a paper on the issue of submission, which I subsequently wrote, for her comments. The incident with Amatulla may have resulted from lack of forethought on my part and was very unnerving in the initial stages when I knew I had so many interviews to go. I was left with the feeling that, with all my subsequent interviews, welcome could change to outright rejection at any moment. It showed me that there is a high level of emotional work involved in the research process, especially at the fieldwork stage.

A year after the second interview, Amatulla returned my notes with her amendments. She wrote:

The relationship between men and women in Islam is just and gentle in all situations, and the women are to be respected and treated honourably in all circumstances. It seems strange to me, that people are constantly picking holes in Islam which is fundamentally a just and gentle way of life, when the society they love and defend so much is full of adulterers, paedophiles, murderers, rapists, thieves etc. etc.

So when I look back on the interview, I realise that I was assumed to be on the attack, and in defence of secularised society.

Difficult issues - caught in the crossfire: reframing

The first angry letter from Amatulla had come just over a year into my research process, not long after a furore with colleagues who could not believe that I was not in some way coming from the same political standpoint they perceived my interviewees as having i.e., a religious 'fundamentalist' point of view, right wing and anti-feminist. As one colleague put it, I was interviewing people she "would not even speak to". It is actually far from the case that the politics of either Christian or Islamic revivalists are universally of this kind but one only finds this out through talking with people and not just assuming it is the way they are. As well as meeting one or two who might indeed fit the bill of the above stereotype, I have also met feminists who work from within the religious traditions and who also take a revivalist stance. Could it be that there are women who are anathema to feminist research in the 1990s? The implication of heresy brings me back to the religious theme. I was already aware that, just as there is amongst feminists, there is a whole spectrum of social/political views amongst revivalists. But I found the experience of having my morality and my politics questioned in this way a disturbing experience. I would be the first to agree that religion *can* be problematic in women's lives. That is the very reason why I was researching the issue. Coupled with the misunderstanding with Amatulla I felt like giving up but at the same time I was aware that this must surely be *data*, albeit of the kind I had neither expected nor wanted but the very stuff of ethnographic fieldwork. I was greatly relieved when I came upon, through the recommendation of two people who believed in my efforts, two particular accounts by writers who had similar experiences.

Firstly, Nilufer Gole , a sociologist writing about veiling in Turkey, has written how, in attempting to remain exempt from aligning herself with either group, "engaging nonengagement", she became caught in the crossfire between Islamists and Secularists, each group not liking what she had to say and how she was dislocated (Gole 1996:23). This helped to explain how, engaging in such a piece of research, one runs the risk of becoming caught in the crossfire between secularists and revivalists. In this case, neither group will be happy with what the researcher has to say. It was probably this kind of experience which led Gole to state in a television interview in 1994¹⁹ that there is such a thing as 'secular fundamentalism'. Religious revival is an issue which inflames not only believers but secularists as well. Both groups can be equally sure that the view of the other group is untenable and when this view takes over all possibility of dialogue ceases.

Then Faye Ginsburg (1997) wrote about how as a pro-choice researcher, who was carrying out research amongst 'pro-life' activists, she found herself being identified, by colleagues, with the beliefs of the subjects of her research, a case of "mistaken identity". In her anthropological research with right-to-life grassroots activists in the United States, she found that, when she presented her work and tried to "explain the way the world looked from the point of view of these 'natives', (she) was frequently asked if (she) had, indeed, become one of 'them' " (Ginsburg). Ginsburg writes: "Unlike the Nuer, Australian Aborigines, or a variety of American subcultures, the people I studied are considered by most of my colleagues to be their enemies. When I offered representations that rendered the right-to-life position sensible or even as powerful as it is to those who adhere to it (as any good ethnographer must), often my "objectivity" or results were called into question, framed by queries of whether I had 'gone native' "(Ginsburg:285).

Ginsburg points out how in socio-cultural anthropology "Malinowski's axiom - that the ethnographer's task is to represent the native's point of view - is still widely accepted" (Ginsburg:283). She suggests that rarely do audiences confuse the anthropologist with the natives and that "Malinowski's talent for grasping the

native's point of view... has not been mistaken for his becoming a Trobriand Islander" (Ginsburg:284). Ginsburg writes how she "shifted from a strategy of bridge building ("mediation") which sets up the researcher as "spokesperson" for "the native". She began to use her interviewees own words rather than her own voice and devices which: 1) "helped to recreate the counter-intuitive encounter" that she experienced with the informant, 2) "drew attention to the interpretations offered by informants" and 3) "resituated the ethnographic case in the context of historical material, thus drawing away from the immediacy of politics and toward broader cultural patterns that are often 'too close' to see in one's own society" (Ginsburg:285). I felt there were similarities here with my own difficulties and as a result I decided to write up and report on my research, as far as possible, using my respondents own words.

A great deal has been written about ethnographic writing and how representation may be a distortion because of the power relation between the authorial voice and the less powerful 'natives' yet Ginsburg suggests that little has been written about the reception of ethnographic texts. The issue becomes all the more complicated when one knows that the text will be read by some respondents, one or two of whom are researchers themselves, as well as other researchers coming from different perspectives.

Ginsburg's paper is helpful in that it gives the problem of "mistaken identity" a theoretical base and considers ways of approaching communication with a hostile audience. I felt that the article gave me new hope of finding ways I can find ways of 'reframing' my research process and product.

Conclusion: mixed methods

The largely unexplored problems of interviewer powerlessness at the field work stage and of representation of material have not been the least of the difficulties involved in the process of this study. In any feminist research project there is an underlying unresolvable epistemological conflict regarding the existence and non-existence of a feminist knowledge. In terms of praxis there is the dichotomy between the view that a feminist researcher should not objectify women and the view that a complete lack of

objectification is impossible in the research process. The feminist research project therefore is not without its conflictual moments. I came to the view that in all these issues it is firstly necessary to accept the impossibility of pleasing all feminists or of in some way 'getting it right'. In order to address the issue of objectivity I decided to be eclectic in my use of methods, employing them reflexively in relation to the particular interviewee, informants or religious group and came to the conclusion that 'best practice' will at best only be partial. By 'reflexive' I mean having the capacity to monitor and modify methods as the situation develops as well as observing and exposing my own impact on the research process. Qualitative methods lend themselves to reflexivity and for this reason, my study is largely qualitative and not because I imagine them to be less 'objectifying' than quantitative methods.

I am left with the sense that feminist research can indeed only be partially feminist (Stacey 1988) and that, in order to attempt to build as rounded a picture as possible, the use of eclectic methods is justifiable. I am not trying to produce a scientific study. It was not possible to find symmetrical samples from the different groups. For instance, the membership of Pioneer People tend to be white, toward middle-age and middle class. Jesus fellowship, it was explained to me by their communications officer, have an age gap, between a core who are at the centre of things, many of whom are around the age of forty and youth on the periphery. When, in a telephone conversation, I asked 'Jihan', who I understood to be a 'core worker' from Young Muslims UK, if it was possible for me to meet women who were core workers and women who were more peripheral in order to get some kind of balance between the Christian and Muslim groups she said "Oh, you mean women who don't give a damn". It turned out that anyone who is committed in Young Muslims UK is understood to be a core worker because together they form a kind of vanguard of youth in the cause of Islam.

The painter Henri Matisse is reported to have said that "exactitude is not truth". I believe this to be the case, the overall picture can get lost in the disproportionate concentration on one aspect of detail. I believe I create an overall picture by using multiple methods which give a sense of different angles from which the issues may be viewed. I am producing a 'collage' rather than a realist portrait. For instance,

some people may be able to say things in response to a questionnaire that would not be possible in a face to face interview, especially because of the dimension of anonymity. On the other hand, an in-depth interview would bring out the nuances of meaning. But some of the women I have interviewed twice, over the space of a year or more, have (as I have) visibly shifted in their beliefs and practices, which from an interactionist standpoint are constantly being negotiated. To have both accounts as well as a background of visits, adds to the texture of the account of religious affiliation. To visit someone in their home gives a sense of the person's immediate environment and relationships. To visit the group with whom they associate gives insight into their culture and the gender relations, dynamics and behaviour of the group of which they represent a part. Further, the reception of the presentation of data is another part of the whole, part of a picture where groups alienated from each other develop their discourses at first through polemic and then even through *perceived* polemic where each 'side' understands itself to know the nature of the other without listening to what individuals have to say.

Notes

1. Julia Kristeva (1974) might be regarded as a forerunner of what has come to be called postfeminism.
2. See Daphne Hampson (1990) for a detailed outline of this position.
3. See Clifford (1986:7) in Stacey (1988:25)
4. From an interview with Valerie Griffiths at her home 30/4/97
5. Fiona MacDonald 'Jesus Army Wants You' Independent Apr 29 1995, Features, pp 16-22
6. Issued by the Jesus Fellowship Central Offices, Nethor Heyford, Northampton NN7 3LB
7. Qur'an - The Final Testament Universal Unity, PO Box 15067, Fremont, CA 94539
8. International Community of Submitters, Masjid Tucson, PO Box 434776, Tucson, AZ 85733-3478
United Submitters International Society, Box 335-916 West Broadway, Vancouver, B.C. V5Z1K7
9. Based upon 24:31 and 33:59 of the Qur'an
10. Khalifa omitted 9: 128-9 of the Qur'an.
11. 'Yasmin', CompuServe Islamic Forum, subject: Islamic Revival, 27/12/95
12. CompuServe Islamic Forum
13. Mosque visit, 13 February 1998
14. Fiona MacDonald 'Jesus Army Wants You' Independent April 29 1995 Features pp16-22
15. Dingwall (1977:x) in Homan:119
16. Belson (1975:x) in Homan:119
17. This is the title of a book by D. Riesman (1950) The Lonely Crowd: a study of the changing American Character New Haven: Yale University Press. It is a title which expresses the postmodern condition of extreme individualism where a crowd consists of isolated individuals, together in body only.
18. Jorgensen discussing Hochschild (1983) who carried out a study of "the private and public face of human emotions, or simply emotion work" initially used a questionnaire among air cabin crew "like a fishing net to catch indications of ways people manage emotions" before getting into participant observation (Jorgensen:20)
19. 'First Sex', Channel 4 television, 26/7/94

Chapter Three

Marriage, Obedience and Feminine Submission

Introduction

This chapter explores the attitudes of respondents and interviewees to the concept of obedience in marriage, and, in the case of some Christian respondents, their attitude to the extension of their submission to include masculine authority within the church. Although I discovered that some of my respondents prefer the word 'submission' I am here using the expression 'obedience' because it is the term to which respondents have reacted in both questionnaire and interviews. Although the surveillance of women and the regulation of sexuality and gender is characteristic of many traditional forms of religion, what Christian and Islamic revivalisms have in common is a reputation, among many secularists and liberals, for the policing of gender boundaries and roles and the blanket subjugation of women.

Although the stereotype of women who choose a revivalist way is one of mute submission to male regulation I quickly discovered that on the issue of female submission in marriage my informants held a range of positions on the continuum of submission to masculine authority. Some do submit to male leadership while others engage in a form of feminist struggle within their religious traditions against patriarchal interpretations of their holy books. What they all hold in common is a sense that revelation is paramount (the Qur'an in the case of Muslims, the Bible for Conservative Evangelicals, and the Bible and the ongoing revelation of the Holy Spirit for Charismatics) and whatever their position might be regarding submission to masculine authority they take it in respect to their interpretation of that revelation.

Amongst those who embrace submission I found a complexity of interpretations of what submission or obedience might mean. Among my respondents and interviewees there were a number of ways in which women shaped their understanding of what they do and how they negotiate power relations

within marriage. The range of understanding is wide and includes notions of absolute obedience for some, though in my sample this was the exception rather than the rule, to ideas of pleasing God and maintaining spiritual harmony by accepting the judgement of men. At times this cleaving to the decision making of men was more tokenistic than actual. But submission to masculine authority for some, within marriage, in terms of the husband, or outside marriage (in the case of divorced, widowed or never-married women) to the direction of the masculine church leadership, conveyed a sense of spiritual freedom. Others saw self-denial or self-emptying, expressed through submission, as a way of paving the path to a blessed hereafter. This was particularly the case for some Pentecostal/Charismatic Christians where there is an emphasis upon submission as a means of self-emptying (*kenosis*) which is perceived to be a route to empowerment through becoming a vehicle of the holy spirit. Although one Muslim interviewee appeared to follow a path of self-denial as a spiritual discipline, the phenomenon of Christian self-emptying as a road to enrichment is a spiritual strategy for which I found no real parallel among my Muslim revivalist respondents and interviewees. This leads, in the context of this chapter, to an emphasis on the Christian case of self-emptying as a route to fulfilment. It will be counterbalanced in the next chapter where there is an emphasis among the Muslims upon an empowerment which they seek through claiming their Islamic Rights, a strategy for which I found no parallel amongst my Christian informants.

The concept of submission

The words 'submission' or 'obedience' may be found in various English translations of the Bible and the Qur'an, and both holy texts lead some interpreters to believe that it is the duty of a wife to 'submit to' or 'obey' her husband. St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians Chapter 5: verses 22-25 of the New Testament reads:

Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Saviour. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands¹.

and in Surah 4:34 of the Qur'an the Marmaduke Pickthall translation reads :

Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property (for the support of women). So good women are the obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah hath guarded.

Yet some modern writers have argued that the idea of feminine obedience in marriage has neither Qur'anic² nor Biblical basis. Others suggest that the requirement for feminine submission has been taken selectively from the Bible.³ However, the focus of this chapter is on the current use of this idea.

I am not here concerned with what might be the 'true' interpretation, only that there are Muslim and Christian women who believe the necessity for submission in marriage to be the case and who act accordingly.

'Obedience' is a word which may still be used in the Church of England wedding ceremony (by the bride only) if the bride and groom elect that she should do so. It is also a word connected with monasticism, associated with vows of poverty and chastity. Perhaps the Christian connotations are one of the reasons why some of the Muslims were unhappy with the term. 'Islam' of course means 'submission' in terms of submission to God. A number of Muslims called my attention to the Islamic principle of *shura* or mutual consultation. They claimed it was not so much a situation of 'obedience' but, because the husband has the casting vote, it was more a position of the woman stepping aside, should mutual consultation fail to bring about agreement. This 'tie-breaker' view of the situation is shared by a number of Christian respondents and interviewees. There may have been another reason for the general dislike of the term 'obedience' amongst the Muslim respondents and this connects with the deep suspicion with which Muslims regard anything which for them borders on idolatry (*shirk*). This concern also has its basis in the Qur'an and is mentioned repeatedly throughout. Surah 3:64 for instance reads:

Say: O People of the Scripture! Come to an agreement between us and you: that we shall worship none but Allah, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside Allah. ⁴

One part of the Qur'an may be used to provide insight into the interpretation of another. If the Qur'an tells women they should be obedient to their husbands, the fact that the command that none should stand between a believer and God is paramount may be taken into account in understanding the power relations within marriage: all submission is to Allah alone. Thus, marriage and obedience are contextualised within this primary relationship with Allah and the desire to submit to Allah's wishes and commandments as expressed in the Qur'anic teaching.

My aim is to consider reasons why some women believers might accept submission in marriage to be a requirement and the strategies they use in order to negotiate their freedom without causing religious offence. To this end, in the questionnaire, I posed the question "Does your religious belief require that a woman should be obedient to her husband?" Below I shall discuss the responses, comments and conversations which resulted from this question, both in terms of the questionnaire and in relation to the interviews.

The question

Asking a question is not always as straightforward as it might seem. In attempting to understand the reasons why some women would accept so apparently retrograde a position in terms of gender power relations I shall first examine what I meant by the question and how it may have been understood by respondents. Some respondents may have taken the question under discussion to mean, "Does Christianity /Islam require that a woman should be obedient to her husband?" rather than "Do *you* personally believe that a woman should be obedient to her husband?" From the completed questionnaires I have found evidence in replies to questions other than this that sometimes an inquiry is not read as I intended it. For instance, in responses to the question: "Have you had to give anything up in order to practice your faith?", two replies suggest that the question was read with the emphasis on 'had' in terms of "Have you been compelled?" I did not mean it in so forceful a way. This may be an interesting reflection of "mistaken identity" working from a different perspective, the respondent assumes I am viewing them in terms of a stereotype. In this case, the answer is shaped, to some degree, by reaction against an imagined stereotype⁵ which the respondent believes the questioner to be perceiving in the respondent.

The majority of both groups (twenty six of the twenty nine Muslim respondents and thirty of forty three Christian respondents) answered the question: "Does your religious belief require that a woman should be obedient to her husband?" in the affirmative. I shall deal with the Muslim responses first.

Muslim responses

With regard to the degree of obedience a woman should offer her husband the respondent was asked to choose from three qualifying statements ranging from unconditional obedience to a flexibility in approach⁶. Fifteen of the twenty six Muslims who replied to the obedience question in the affirmative chose qualifying statement number two, "A woman should only be obedient to her husband when he is right in his judgement" (two of these also ticked statement three), some adding comments such as, "If it is according to Islam and in the Qur'an. If not she can disobey him," or "Only if he doesn't go against the Prophet's teaching". Four Muslims who answered the obedience question with 'yes' chose statement number three, "A woman should use some degree of flexibility in deciding when to be obedient". Six chose number four, "other" and made similar comments about how a husband need only be obeyed in righteousness. Two of the twenty six answered with "yes and no". One of these explained: "The Qur'an tells us that the male and female were created, amongst other reasons, to find peace and tranquillity with each other. The wife should 'obey' her husband in all matters of righteousness. However, if the husband is encouraging the wife to be unrighteous, then he should not be obeyed". Three other Muslims, all of whom were married converts to Islam made a similar point and indicated *Shura*, (mutual consultation) as the Islamic way. A theme of 'mutual submission' is also one which was picked up by Biblical feminists (i.e members of Men Women and God). Significantly, none of the Muslim respondents chose statement one: "A woman should be obedient to her husband in all things".

I interpret this result as meaning that the respondents hold the Qur'an to be the highest authority. This helps to keep the husband in order in that the wife will only obey him if he is being Islamic according to her understanding of the faith. It also makes the wife's obedience in any particular matter dependent upon *tafsir* (interpretation of the Qur'an). This means that each issue is approached afresh and is assessed in the light of the Qur'an.

Some respondents and interviewees took exception to the word 'obedience'. One respondent, a convert, was forthright. She wrote, "I don't like the word 'obedient'. Women and men are a mercy and blessing for each other and are advised to consult each other about everything and consult the children when they can understand. So "obedience" smacks of subservience to me not acceptable".

A Muslim interviewee who is not a convert also made her dislike of the word evident. I found myself brought to task by 'Miriam', a woman in her early forties with a research degree and a longstanding marriage to a doctor of medicine. I felt she kept avoiding the issue of obedience when I tried to question her about it. So I kept bringing up the subject and eventually Miriam became quite annoyed:

Me: So maybe the problem is that there's a secular idea of obedience that I'm bringing in.

Miriam: I think so. There's a very negative connotation which I picked up as well from what you say. I don't like the word 'obedience'. It really bugs me.

Me: I asked that question because I mean I'm interested in finding out how the stereotypes are in reality. And I think the obedience thing is part of the stereotype. For instance, like you were saying how the stereotype is of Muslim women being non-assertive.

Miriam: I don't think a really good Muslim woman is (non-assertive). I think the non-assertive woman is somebody who has taken on the role of obedience and feels she has to wear certain clothes to please a man and to do certain things. She is not her own person.

This problem of particular words being understood differently in secular and religious contexts has been addressed by Mary Anne Wichroski (1996) who speaks of 'meaning inversions' in her recent research field work amongst members of a cloistered order of nuns. The mismatch in meaning between herself and her informants was caused not only by "unshared cultural assumptions, but... (by) the actual use of common words themselves". It was pointed out by the Mother Superior that Wichroski's interpretation of the interviewees words "were culturally biased" (Wichroski 1996:273-4). I think this kind of differing interpretation of a common language took place in my interview with 'Miriam'.

Wichroski writes:

I also came to realize that their vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience are not self-explanatory terms; that is, poverty means "having just enough" and chastity may not be so much a separate vow but another form of poverty... that is, separation from friends, family and social relations on the outside create an inner void to make room for spiritual fulfilment. Similarly, the vow of obedience conjures up visions of blind adherence to formal rules. Yet

their definitions of hierarchy and authority were not consistent with this: for the cloistered nuns, hierarchy means in order of closeness to God, what comes first - not deference to the power of a punitive authority; nor did it mean that those who were more highly educated and could hold office were held in higher esteem than those performing physical or domestic labour. All forms of labour were considered done in the service of God (Wichroski:274).

Although it is dangerous to make cross-faith assumptions regarding 'meaning' I think this term 'obedience' is problematic, because viewed from a secular frame, it has implications of an unthinking, 'knee-jerk' or robotic kind of following of authority. Submission is perhaps a gentler word which implies that one is giving up one's authority and submitting to another for a reason. It may also be regarded as a voluntary act.

Christian Responses

Thirty one out of the forty three Christian respondents to the Questionnaire answered the obedience question in the affirmative. These responses came from members from across all Christian groups except, predictably, from Men Women and God, the Biblical Feminists with an 'equalitarian' agenda. One respondent answered "yes and no" and an eighty one year old respondent, an Ichthus member, gave her position on submission in marriage to be "under discussion!⁷". Although I felt the respondent probably wrote this comment with a twinkle of humour in her eye I felt this reply demonstrated how in a living faith community, people of all ages can be challenged to change. Of the thirty one who answered in the affirmative, ten who were from the range of Christian groups (other than Men Women and God), chose statement number one: "A woman should be obedient to her husband in all things". This is the statement to which none of the Muslims have agreed. Six of the ten contextualised the obedience in terms of Ephesians Chapter 5: verses 21-33, in that the husband must love and respect his wife, "as Christ loved His Church", one respondent representing obedience as being the easier option in this context. Six chose statement number two: "A woman should only be obedient to her husband when he is right in his judgement", two chose statement number three, "A woman should use some degree of flexibility in deciding when to be obedient" and thirteen chose option number four: 'other'. Of these, six mentioned the necessary context as being one where the husband loves and cherishes the wife, three represented it as a 'tie breaker' where the couple are unable to reach agreement, two, although they had answered 'yes' to the obedience question

represented it as mutual consultation, and one declared the husband the head of the house and another said that she thought that a woman may not have to obey if the husband's request was "unbiblical".

Where the Muslims tended to recommend an evaluation of the degree of the husband's conformity to Islam through *tafsir* some of the Christians recommended a similar approach with regard to the New Testament, while some other Christian respondents unconditionally accepted the headship of the husband.

Submission in Evangelical Christian marriage

Feminine submission in marriage is not limited to some fringe element of the Evangelical church. In May 1998, the Southern Baptist Convention in the United States made a proposed addition to the 1963 Baptist Faith and Mission Statement which was accepted in the next month. The amendment reads as follows "A wife is to submit graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ"⁸. Even today, in Evangelical Protestantism and the New Churches unmarried, widowed and divorced women are (generally speaking) dislocated. As in Islam, the marriage to a believing man is regarded as the holy state (Brasher: 131). Protestantism, following Luther, has largely enforced this view. Luther by putting women under the authority of men, disallowing women-only households and prescribing universal marriage, took away from women, the convent the means through which some women were able to have some control over their fertility and their lives (Weisner 1990).

Yet in Peter 1: 3. 7 we find "Wives, in the same way, accept the authority of your husbands, so that, even if some of them do not obey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives' conduct, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives." This New Testament directive goes a long way to explaining why some evangelical women might consider unconditional submission as a means of winning their husband over and points to a kind of hidden leadership through example. But this kind of unconditional submission can have frightening repercussions. The Biblical feminist

and writer Catherine Kroeger, in an interview in London ⁹, told me that on this account some women from fundamentalist churches in the USA are even told by their pastors they should not cover their faces if they are beaten by their husbands.

Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen (1990) quotes Genesis 3:16 a passage of the Old Testament which reads:

I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing
with pain you will give birth to children
Your desire will be for your husband
and he will rule over you

Van Leeuwen sees the possibilities of abuse amongst those who take the Old Testament as a literal guideline as coming from two directions,

...there are two opposite ways we can abuse our God-given exercise of accountable dominion. The first (the man's sin) is to try to exercise dominion without regard for God's original plan for male/female relationships. But the second, the peculiarly female sin, is to use the preservation of those relationships as an excuse not to exercise accountable dominion in the first place (Van Leeuwen 1990 :46).

In other words, these words from Genesis are used to justify the oppression of women, and some Christian women, according to the writer, may hide behind the words in order to avoid decision making and leadership. But isn't that a bit like blaming the victim?

Do women who agree to obey their husbands in all things, as the biblical feminist writer Van Leeuwen suggests, merely wish to be 'off the hook' in terms of decision making? Certainly there is a period in the lives of many women when they need support and assistance in the tasks of child rearing, and it maybe in finding themselves with a lack of alternatives they give up their independence as part of a trade-off.

Although a number of Christian respondents to the questionnaire wrote how they believed in total submission to their husbands, these, as Brenda Brasher suggests, were mainly unmarried or newly married women. Brasher cites Lynn Davidman's (1991)¹⁰ research amongst unmarried women converting to Orthodox Judaism as articulating a stronger pro-male line than married women (Brasher:156). Brasher finds this situation echoed among the women of the two evangelical congregations in her research and points out how single women tend to join in on the rhetoric

regarding feminine submission in marriage. She sees this as a form of expression used in courtship language which softens after the reality of the lived experience of marriage. Their view might mellow with time. Among my interviewees (as opposed to respondents to the questionnaire), where some Christian women appeared happy to embrace submission to male leadership in the church, they did not suggest that unconditional obedience to a husband was a necessary concomitant. Two of my nine Christian interviewees, Jill of Jesus Fellowship and Sue of Pioneer, had deliberately chosen singleness. Jill, who accepted the 'necessity' of masculine leadership by the elder of the church, had a specific celebration of her commitment to celibacy which was "like a wedding"; and Sue, (see page 148) who takes a Biblical feminist position, said she would not marry unless she could find an egalitarian relationship.

I wanted to find an interviewee who was in church leadership in one of the New Churches but who accepted the idea of feminine submission in marriage, to see how this worked out in 'real life'. How could anyone live out the apparent contradiction between being a woman in church leadership who submits to masculine authority in marriage? I was fortunate to be led to 'Sally', the leader of a thriving fellowship in a post-industrial town in South Wales. I specifically wanted to ask her how she, as church leader, dealt with the apparently conflicting issues of leadership and submission. Sally said there were problems: "Mike still has to cope with people's reaction. Because I'm in church leadership they think he must be a wimp. But because he's secure he copes very well".

Whilst talking with Sally I realised she was describing a different concept of leadership from the usual, top-down model, associated with church structures. She described it as "very much a giving away of power". Sally even described her work as fitting in with her role as a mother:

As a mother with four children leadership suits me because I can work my hours so that I can pick the children up from school and not go out until they are in bed in the evenings. There are also occasions when I can do certain things with them there. I think it is also healthy for the church for there isn't the expectation, as a senior leader, that I should do everything. Rather that I should release others.

I asked Sally how she handled the situation in the home regarding submission in marriage. Sally wrote in a follow up letter:

In the home Mike has the casting vote in our relationship although, because of the element of mutual submission, it rarely comes to that. In fact the only major decision in which he has had to take that role was about which house we should buy seven years ago. We couldn't agree so he took the decision and in fact circumstances have proved him right.

This is the 'tie-breaker' idea of submission. From this point of view, God simply chose the male to take this role, which simplifies things considerably. The bad news for wives is that the husband gets to have the final say, but the good news for wives is that their husbands bear the ultimate responsibility to God for their decision. A Christian respondent who states that she had promised in her wedding vows "to love, honour and obey" explains that, in her view, her husband's role is the most "difficult" because he has to "love, honour and worship". The respondent sees his role as demanding because, like the women among the congregations studied by Brenda Brasher, she believes that if the man makes a selfish decision and causes his wife unhappiness, he will be answerable to God for his wife's response (Brasher:148). Interestingly I found this also to be a Muslim qualification of the power invested in the husband. Regarding the 'tie-breaker' where the husband has the final decision the aforementioned Christian respondent wrote: "If you are stuck on a decision, the husband makes the final choice. But this is not easy for him, it carries a lot of responsibility, e.g. if it turns out to be the wrong decision, he would be to blame". She explained the 'tie-breaker' in terms of, "God says you can't have a democracy of two". I was intrigued because these actual words could not possibly be in the Bible. The respondent had given me her name and address in case I wanted to follow up. I wrote and asked her where in the Bible it says this. I received no reply and I can only think that my question was taken to be oppositional. But I found it interesting that she was putting, what appeared to me to be, words into the mouth of God.

These different kinds of responses represent two ends of the spectrum of shades of opinion of women who choose to submit. The almost token, in-the-home-only and only when there is a deadlock kind of submission of Sally is far from the kind of submission which always bends to male leadership. Yet the interviewees who accept this kind of full-blown submission clearly are not without a dynamism of their own.

Leadership and submission

As mentioned above, for some Christians, the requirement to submit to the authority of the husband is extended to church elders who, in the house church movement, are almost invariably male (Percy:1996). This requirement centres round the issue of headship and authority, for instance, in Paul: 1 Cor 11, and is a selective interpretation which has been hotly contested by biblical feminists who claim that 'head' does not mean 'boss' but 'source'(Kroeger in Hull 1989:267) (Kroeger, Evans & Storkey 1995:343) and relates to the view of reproduction held at the time of Paul, that a woman was a kind of incubator who did not contribute genetically to the makeup of the offspring (Gundry 1980). Translations of the passage differ. The St. James translation of I Cor 11: 3-45 makes it seem plain that the requirement for feminine submission is general: "But I would have you know that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God". The later NRSV differentiates between 'woman and wife': "But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife and God is the head of Christ". In interviews both 'Ann' from Christians in York and 'Freda' from Jesus Fellowship mentioned and accepted the requirement for submission to the authority of the church elder.

A way in which the agreement to be obedient "in all things" as well as submission to masculine authority in the church fellowship may be perceived is as a strategy to attract men to the group. This has an historical basis. Put in a historical perspective, female submission was used by Protestant Fundamentalists in the USA earlier this century as a means of shoring up masculinity against erosion. They attempted to enforce a selective interpretation of past conditions in order to re-instate the rights of men. Preachers such as Donald Grey Barnhouse and Billy Sunday, in a reaction against the 'feminisation' of religion, i.e. the majority of church attenders were women, took a theological approach and emphasised the masculinity of God. Billy Sunday told his congregation that Christianity was not "a pale effeminate proposition" but the "robust, red blooded" faith of Jesus (Bendroth 1992:22). This was known as "muscular Christianity".

This kind of 'reclaiming' of Christianity for men (as if they ever lost control of it) continues in terms of Promise Keepers in the USA and more recently in Britain, and in literature which echoes the ideas of muscular Christianity, for example in the book Recovering Biblical Manhood now on line¹¹ and David Pawson's Leadership is Male.¹²

I have noted that Jesus Fellowship, who as mentioned above have a ministry with disadvantaged young people, appear to reach out in particular to young men. In order to do this they hold men's events. At time of writing, the next one "Men Alive for God" was to be held in October 1997. This was advertised in Jesus Life, the Jesus Army's quarterly magazine, on a leaflet which suggests "Join over 600 'uncaged lions' for a 'wild' day of friendship, 'roar' power and vision".¹³ This boosting of masculine self-confidence is a means of building young men up into leadership positions.

Claire North suggests that women who join such male oriented groups often have a history of having been sexually abused.¹⁴ None of my interviewees said anything that would support this view although two of the respondents to the questionnaire did. In the questionnaire I asked the question: "Did stressful experience play any part in your making your religious choice?" Only ten Christians, and none of the Muslims, answered 'yes'. Of the Christians, six related the stress to the breakdown of relationships and separation whilst two mentioned abusive relationships. Two others described how they were fearful of rejection or failure. Claire North suggests that the attraction of male-dominated Christian groups which offer "cleansing, healing and escape from the shame and hurt of the old life" whilst still dovetailing with the "wider patriarchal culture" are attractive to "vulnerable" people (North 1996: 19-20). I can see that the safety of a predictable and more benign hierarchical relationship to men in power might represent a refuge after the unpredictability of an abuser. Further, the presence of masculine authority, regulated by Scripture and by a fellowship, might feel like a protection from the threat of the return of the abuser. North, in her critique of such groups, does give that, "The other draw was the huge amount of love and commitment to others in the fellowship. There was a sense of real community and the knowledge that you could drop in on someone at any time" (North:19). The Jesus Army literature can give the impression that a number of their converts have been abused but I think this may be because they have a particular ministry with marginalised young people, some of

whom will have been abused. I do not think this pattern is transferrable across all house church or independent church fellowships or even across a particular fellowship. My actual interviewees from Jesus Fellowship (Jesus Army), three in all were middle class women, were all apparently untraumatised.

As "Freda", a Jesus Fellowship member (quoted below) has described, some of these men who come to Jesus Fellowship with severe difficulties are built up into leaders. Islam does not seem to have the 'problem' that Christianity has of a 'feminised' image. If anything, in this respect, the stereotype of Islam is rather the opposite.

In October 1996 I interviewed Freda, who is in her seventies and who lives in a Jesus Fellowship Community house. Freda spoke of how she saw the advantages of male leadership in the community in which she lives. Freda is awaiting surgery for an arthritic condition and has a problem with mobility. I was struck how by living in community Freda gets all the help she needs. Other members assured me it is help that is freely given, a return for help given to them by Freda in the past. I asked Freda to describe her attitude to the male leadership:

Freda: Being in submission to the male set-up gives a sense of security. It is very biblical.

It is important because the whole present trend is for women to have a more authoritative status. I don't agree with it at all. I wouldn't like it if 'Paul' wasn't head of this house and a woman was, its a security. The leaders have a meeting. To see young men coming up to a leadership position, to see them growing into maturity....If you met some of our elders they have been drug addicts. You know its only God who has been doing the work.

Freda's reference to submission to masculine authority being "very biblical" as well as a respondent's comment that a woman might not have to submit if her husband's request was "unbiblical" caused me to ponder upon what it might be that "biblical" means in this context. Historically, marriage in the Bible has been understood to mean very different forms of relationship, as the Biblical feminist Patricia Gundry (1980) has shown. In the Old Testament there are marriages which are polygamous and/or temporary, as well as slavery. So Gundry traces the perceived Christian "divine order" for marriage

in the present day to the influence of the medieval order of things (Gundry 1980:49). This exposes a different kind of 'biblical' marriage than the one which has generally been considered as fitting the Western Christian paradigm of respectability. Further, considering some of the things to be found in the Bible, the idea that a woman should only submit to a 'biblical' demand leaves the man a great deal of scope for abuse.

'Jill', a team-leader social worker and a celibate Sister in her early thirties, from a different Jesus Fellowship community house, described the male and female roles within their church and how she did not perceive it as oppressive:

Celibate brothers have certain roles. We need each other for the body (of the Church community) to be united. The world puts value on what we *do* but Jesus was prepared to give his life. He didn't want to be a big shot. I prefer to take my example from Jesus and the women who inspire me. But the public image of sisters is that our brains rot to vegetable.

So Jill draws a line between the way 'the world' perceives women and women's role, and the way in which her church does. Within the church she has a sense of status but she sees that this is not understood by 'the world'.

Freda, like 'Jill', was no mouse. Freda had been born into a well-to-do family and had been married to a diplomat. Now divorced, she showed no trace of bitterness over her husband leaving her for another woman. Both interviewees were strong, intelligent and accomplished women. I cannot help thinking these sisters are engaged in a kind of hidden leadership.

There is a way in which submission and self-abnegation may be seen as a means through which Pentecostal and Charismatic women are able to claim authority in this respect. Mary McClintock Fulkerson (1996) has written about the pioneer Pentecostal women preachers of the Church of God, Cleveland, Tennessee, who earlier this century, were "experts in the rhetoric of self-denigration and submission to men (where) 'I am nothing, nothing, nothing...' is a favourite refrain" (McClintock Fulkerson 131-141). The writer is trying to find ways to extend the boundaries of feminist theology "to interpret the working of Christian traditions in the lives of non-feminist women" (McClintock Fulkerson:131). In selecting these Pentecostal preachers, who are white, working class women, she

uses a poststructuralist frame to show that there are subversive elements to their self-abnegation. This is a very interesting view and I think applicable to some of my interviewees and respondents. Fulkerson suggests that, through an attitude of : 'I'm so nothing it's pitiful', the Pentecostal preacher women become vessels to be spirit filled and to speak for God (McClintock Fulkerson:140-1). It is only by being empty they can become a channel for God: by becoming the least they become the most. Further, it is a kind of protection against accusations of witchcraft and spiritualism because the very 'nothingness' of the woman proves it *must* be God working. Rather like the contrast in 'before and after' advertisements, the *less* a person is perceived to be before their upliftment, the *more* they are perceived to be used by God afterwards and the more they glorify God. This is very like Freda's emphasis on young men, who have been "drug addicts", coming up to a leadership position, which is intended to communicate the fact that the previous degradation of the men in question gives testimony that their elevation to leadership can only be the work of God. So the worse the condition of the potential leader before God took charge, the better the actual leader afterwards displays the 'wonderful works of God'.

There is an interesting parallel here: the fact that Muhammad is reputed to have been unable to read is seen by Muslims as a proof that the Qur'an is the direct revelation of God. The fact that he was illiterate means that he could not have produced such a work of poetry and wisdom by himself.

In the submission/ passivity stakes, because of our acculturation, many Western women will win hands down if it came to a competition between women and men on who can be the most self-emptying¹⁵. Here is a way in which this psychological hobbling, which has been inflicted upon women, may be used to advantage because it is the criterion of receiving the Holy Spirit, a power with which no believer can argue. In this respect and context self-abnegation, self-denial, submission and self-emptying (*kenosis*)¹⁶ can be seen as a means of empowerment.

Responses that disrupt the stereotypical image:

Muslims

'Miriam', the Muslim interviewee who is married to a doctor of medicine and who is mentioned above, did say later in the interview that the man "had the last say". In order to get her to discuss the issue further I showed her a table I had made out of the comments of respondents to the questionnaire on the issue of obedience and I pointed to one in particular which read:

The Qur'an and the example of the Prophet (peace be upon him) refer to 'mutual consultation', kindness, wisdom and consideration. In other words, teamwork. If ultimately when a proper, genuine compromise cannot be reached and if the man involved is a good, practising, thoughtful man, ultimately he has the final say. But if, for example, he is demanding three cooked meals a day, and using this as an excuse for his wife not to go out to see her friends, this is an unIslamic demand, not kind, not reasonable and not backed by Qur'an or Hadith. In a situation like this, the woman has the right to refuse but must of course, balance other aspects of their relationship in her decision.

Miriam: Well she says ultimately if he is a good thoughtful practising man he has the final say. Well that's not right really. Because even if he's not a good, practising , thoughtful man he still has the final say.

Me: He still does?

Miriam: Oh Yes (laughs).

Me: So that is obedience isn't it? What is it if it isn't obedience? What would you call it?

Miriam: Well I'll just say that if a woman is putting as her higher aim her rights and is not putting as a higher aim to keep away divorce from her household... because the devil said there is nothing he celebrates better than splitting a man and wife ... because it is such a basic foundation of society. It may not be perfect but its what we've got and to stick with it if you can, unless its an absolutely abusive relationship is very important to Islam and I don't think any, any Muslim would argue with that.

Miriam defies the stereotype with her humour and with her quiet dedication. Being with Miriam was to be in the company of someone who puts herself under a spiritual discipline. She gives the impression of being someone set upon a way from which she will not be diverted. There is no sense

of an easy option here, no opting out of responsibility. At the time for prayer the interview stopped and Miriam allowed me to stay in the room and read. I felt honoured to be allowed to stay.

'Linda' another interviewee, is a convert to Islam and the mother of three children, who teaches a group of teenage girls at a weekend Islamic school. Linda put the Muslim refusal of unconditional submission in context when she spoke of "a problem for young English girls of a lack of self esteem".

She said that when they get married they think they should give themselves wholly to a man: "This is giving men (other human beings) power they don't deserve".

'Zainab', a single postgraduate student of law in her early twenties and born into a Muslim home to Indian parents, was clearly not keen to give herself wholly to a man either. I asked Zainab if she intends to marry. She said that if she is to marry she wants "someone who knows that Islamic marriage doesn't imply rigid role play." She said "I couldn't marry someone who wants me to stay at home and produce babies". She spoke of the "psychological benefits" of work and felt that confined to the home she would "go crazy". I asked how would she meet such a man. She said it could happen through university. Zainab told me she had a friend who had an offer of marriage from someone who would be away for half the week and she saw the non-suffocating possibilities of this as ideal. She said she may never have children but she couldn't talk to her parents about this. It struck me that young Muslims in Britain who know the Western way, the ways of their parents and the Islamic way are able to make positive choices regarding the best these systems have to offer.

I was left by these interviews with the impression that the obedience question was more complicated than it had at first seemed. Certainly, Zainab, although an Islamic revivalist, who, quite possibly, would answer the obedience question on the questionnaire (on paper) in the affirmative (like most of the Muslim respondents did), was not interested in being submissive to a man in the way her parents might interpret the idea or in terms of the stereotypical view. In fact, Zainab described the relationships of her parent's community as "based on inequality of the sexes". Further, Linda clearly saw the idea of giving herself to a man as unIslamic whilst Miriam appeared to take submission on board on the grounds (of her understanding) that it was a requirement of the faith which was the

means by which she traversed the difficulties which life threw up at her and which led ultimately to Paradise. I believe this spiritual goal was more important to Miriam than any merely human relationship. Even if the majority of the Muslim respondents to the questionnaire answered 'yes' to the obedience question not all the Muslims are in harmony over how that should be worked out in everyday existence. Further there is something deeply pragmatic about Miriam's statement. I do not know whether she was saying that she agrees with the dynamic within marriage, of which she speaks, or whether she was simply stating that it exists. I believe it is the case that many secular marriages and partnerships will also take this form. Miriam's is the voice of longsuffering which puts the spiritual goal before all else. This is surely the submission of which the Muslims and Christians speak when they say that the submission is to God and not to man. Obedience to God helps to make sense of suffering, and suffering that is unavoidable is accommodated as a spiritual exercise. Theodicy, the means of making sense of the phenomenon of suffering, is perhaps the whole point of religion¹⁷. But this submission and self emptying of personal desire, does it not come so much more easily to women who have been trained to put others first?

Christians

Claire North writes as a former member of a house church which she describes as having been comprised of three quarters women and a quarter men. She suggests that the only qualification for being an elder was being male even though there were so few men to choose from.¹⁸ What North does not mention is the fact that there are women who are active members of the house church movement today who would agree with her statement and that some of these are trying to change things from within. For instance, Sue Rinaldi¹⁹, a single woman in her thirties and a well known speaker and musician on the international Evangelical/ Charismatic circuit is an example of someone working within the House Church movement alongside others who want change. She is no 'victim'. I asked Sue if she wanted to get married. Her response was not unlike that of Zainab:

Sue: It would take a really 'magical' man, if I can use that word, for me to marry. I'm not interested. I think, as you get older, what you feel about marriage changes. I could only cope with being married with

a man who together we'd look at the house, who'd look at the radical family, who'd actually say jobs aren't gender based. If we had children (I would like to be able to say) "Will you stay home John or Eric and look after the children? Don't just expect looking after the children to be the woman's role." So I think we would need to be two people in a very similar belief system or even just prepared to talk about it. But there aren't many men like that...yet. So I'm very happy being single. I find it more positive than negative.

Me: And that sounds like its fairly comfortable within Pioneer church. Is that right?

Sue: I think so. As I travel, which I do quite a lot, within denominations, I think at Pioneer we have looked at a lot of issues of women, of singleness, of family and we are changing mind sets. Because it has to happen in the mind first before it can change in practice and we are asking a lot of difficult questions. Maybe that's why its called 'Pioneer'. How it actually gets outworked in practice, as you know, takes a lot longer. For example, the women: I cry when I look at a whole platform of men. I think "Where are the women? Where are they?". And so therefore we do need to look at fast tracking women, taking affirmative action, not just to recruit tokenistic women...but I know they're out there.

The night before I interviewed Sue I had attended a Pioneer Meeting where the speakers were mainly male. Further, the wife of a writer on women's issues in the ministry stood up and said how she saw her role as looking after the children to release her husband for ministry.

My other interviewees from Pioneer held a variety of views on the position of women within the church and I should say that Sue was the most radical. But it was interesting to meet 'Carol', also a member of Pioneer Fellowship, who had for some years taken a secondary role to her husband but was now feeling challenged by the church to review her role:

Carol: There's no church policy on women. You're free to be who you are and what you feel is right for you and your family. So there's no kind of... In fact, if anything, it is a challenging thing, you know "Come on women...take your place". I think I'm prone probably to passivity and find it easier to hide behind the front door and let my husband get on with it. I feel very challenged by this at the minute. Especially with the new phase the church is going through. I'll have to stop just being this woman at home. No one has made me do that. I think I have become that through all sorts of things. Lack of confidence maybe. I

find the church very encouraging, very challenging. I think again... it probably hasn't always been that way. I think when we first joined the church it was more male oriented. I think its been a developing thing.

It is plainly wrong to assume that all the house church movement or all members of any given church hold the same position on the continuum of the submission of women to male authority. It is clear from the questionnaires that there are differences within and between house churches and to claim that they are all inevitably 'fundamentalist' in their attitudes to women is to accept a caricature of them. The interviews throw light on the ways in which women involved in revivalisms see their role in relation to men in connection with the reality of their lived relationships.

Conclusion

The interviews and completed questionnaires demonstrate that the cultural and practical meanings of submission and obedience within marriage are complex and differ not only inter-faith but also intra-faith. They also differ across age, socio-economic standing and marital status. It is a subject which does not lend itself to simple generalisations. Not all Muslims or Christians agree to the meaning of these terms, nor how they should be understood in terms of their practical lived experiences. There are, in fact, considerable similarities between the views of educated, articulate Muslim and Christian single women who are wary of marriage and what it means to them in terms of personal relationships.

What was unexpected was that although the majority of the Muslim and Christian respondents to the questionnaire thought a woman should submit to her husband in marriage, none of the Muslims and only ten of the Christians thought that this submission should be unconditional. Six of these ten put the unconditionality within the bounds of the context of the husband loving and cherishing the wife. Linda put this Muslim refusal of unconditional submission in context when she spoke of what she described as "English girls' lack of self esteem, in that they think they should give themselves wholly to a man. When no man deserves or warrants that". For Linda the implication of giving oneself wholly to another human being is no less than idolatry; that is, putting a human being before God. Thus, my respondents and interviewees who choose submission in marriage are not necessarily

abasing themselves before the altar of men. In this case the caricature of women who submit out of victimhood is not correct.

There are some interesting parallels in the responses to the obedience question between the manner in which a variety of Christians and Muslims deal with the issues. Miriam, the Muslim interviewee, and a number of respondents drew my attention to the fact that I had chosen the word 'obedience' even though this is frequently not used within the religious contexts. Both groups seem happier with the word "submission" and would readily agree that their first concern is submission to God. Amongst both the Muslims and the Christians there are those who accept and those who reject submission. Many comments by those who accept pointed to the view that submission should be located in a religious rather than a secular context, as a means to a reward or end which is regarded as ultimately better, either for the self or society in general.

A number of respondents, both Christian and Islamic, made comments which indicated that a wife should only obey if her husband was in accordance with their holy texts. This gives plenty of room for negotiation. But proportionately more Muslims than Christian took this position.

The Epistle of St. Paul, to which the Christian respondents refer, does, at least superficially, appear to demand submission in all things. This understanding of the text, selected for compliance as it may be, is being reemphasised in the present. Nevertheless, this interpretation is also currently being questioned by some members of the Christian groups, a reevaluation which is taking place from within. This means that present activity in some of the house church fellowships is far more dynamic in terms of gender relations than the stereotypical view of them would allow. Yet, as Sue Rinaldi pointed out, at present, even where there is a will for change, the greater proportion of men in leadership roles remains in evidence.

Both Muslim and Christian responses show that there is no one particular way of being a Muslim or Christian revivalist and that disagreement and struggle take place within the movements.

At times it is hard to untangle leadership and submission. At times there appears to be a hidden leadership role which takes the form of submission. For me, submission and leadership are inextricably linked. The one who directs or has authority in this context depends for their authority upon the submitters for their own leadership position be it in marriage or as church leader. In this way the submitters are the leaders through their voluntary submission. I am reminded of the words of Lao Tse from his Simple Way: "The great river and the sea, because they hold a lower place are lords of a thousand streams".

Notes

1. New Standard Revised Version

2. Wadud-Muhsin has suggested that the common belief that women should obey their husbands has no Qur'anic basis. She writes that Qur'an 66:5 does not say a woman should obey her husband. She sees this as a left-over from "marriages of subjugation and therefore unIslamic. Amina Wadud-Muhsin (1993):71.

3. Randall Balmer has made the point that female submission, in the Christian case, has been drawn selectively from the teachings of St. Paul and he illustrates this by comparing this with the fact that St. Paul's insistence that women should keep their heads covered has not necessarily been taken up. Randall Balmer (1994):77-62.

4. Pickthall translation

5. See Chapter Two regarding the case of mistaken identity and reference to Faye Ginsburg.

6. The qualifying statements were: 1) A woman should be obedient to her husband in all things; 2) A woman should be obedient to her husband when he is right in his judgement; 3) A woman should use some degree of flexibility in deciding when to be obedient; 4) Other. Please specify.

7. Respondent's own exclamation mark

8. 'Baptist proposal asks husbands to lead families' Jeffrey Weiss the Dallas Morning News 12/5/98
Later acceptance of the proposal was reported on BBC News 10/6/98. Link for the story on CNN's website: <http://www.cnn.com/US/9806/10/southern.baptists.ap> 11/6/98

9. Interview with Catherine Clark Kroeger, London 4/7/98

10. Davidman, Lynn (1991) Tradition in a Rootless World: Women Turn to Orthodox Judaism Berkeley: University of California Press

11. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (1991) Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood Crossways Books see URL: <http://www.cbm.org> 1/7/98

12. David Pawson (1988) Leadership is Male UK: Highland Books

13. Jesus Life No 41 (1997)

14. Claire North (1996): 19-20

15. See Lorber, J.& Farrell,S (1991) The Social Construction of Gender California: Sage and Miller, J.B (1976) Toward a New Psychology of Women Boston: Beacon Press

16. Sarah Coakley (1996): 82-111

17. Peter L. Berger (1967): 53-80

18. Claire North (1996) 19-20

19. Sue Rinaldi kindly gave her permission that I might use her name as her views on gender relations are well known within Evangelical/Charismatic circles.

Chapter four

Rights and Responsibilities

Introduction

In attempting to discover why some women align themselves with revivalist forms of Christianity and Islam I felt it was necessary to explore the issue of 'rights'. Although the term 'rights' is frequently used in relation to the duties and privileges conferred upon women by Islam its origin is in enlightenment discourse. Nevertheless the idea that there should be regulation of the responsibilities, entitlements and protection of women in terms of marriage, inheritance and the tasks of motherhood is as old as Islam. The notion that this might be an encouragement for affiliation to a faith community which offers such entitlements is in keeping with the ideas of rational choice theory and the proposition that persons base their religious choices upon a process whereby they weigh the benefits against the disadvantages of a given religious system to themselves (see Survey of Literature chapter). I wanted to know if there was any kind of similar incentive within the New Christian churches and to establish if there was some way in which Christian respondents felt their rights as women to be enhanced through their religious affiliation. Further, I wished to discover if and to what degree, interviewees and respondents felt their rights as women in a Western democracy to be improved by Islam. To this end I asked in the questionnaire, firstly, whether respondents felt women's rights were adequately covered by current British law and, secondly, if they thought their rights had been improved by their religious choices.

I use the term 'rights' loosely as in Britain we do not have an explicit Bill of Rights laid out in the constitution, as in the USA, with regard to freedom, justice and equality guaranteed to citizens by the state. Nevertheless, in Britain we do have many 'rights' in terms of privileges and protections which are underpinned by English (and Welsh) and Scottish law respectively and also by EU law in provisions such as the Social Chapter. The freedoms we have largely depend upon these protections. I also use the term 'British law', in the case of the questionnaire, loosely, to mean the law of the land in which a British person lives. At least one respondent lives in Scotland and therefore the term, 'the law of England and Wales' would not be appropriate.

In this section I discuss the answers given by respondents and interviewees with regard to their perception of their rights in law as well as the privileges which they feel accrue from their religious affiliation. This chapter contains the following: 1) an examination of how the Muslim respondents use the language of rights and how, in general, the Christian respondents do not. There follows a discussion of how self-emptying (*kenosis*), in the Christian case, may be construed as a form of enrichment; 2) a section on pre-Islamic and pre-Christian conditions and how both Islam and Christianity may in some circumstances *continue* to represent an improvement on custom; 3) a section on responses regarding specific areas of women's lives and whether they felt that they were adequately covered by the law; 4) a discussion of the responses regarding the enhancement of rights through religious affiliation; 5) an exploration of how Muslim respondents and interviewees go about claiming their rights. Is this strategy feminist? How do Biblical feminists go about claiming their 'equality to serve'¹ and in what terms do they articulate this struggle? 5) in conclusion I explore areas of overlap and differences between the groups.

1) Rights and responsibilities

In Islam there are certain inalienable rights set out for women in the Qur'an. These rights include: a woman's right to be housed, clothed and fed by her husband, the right to payment for suckling a child, particularly in the case of divorce 2:233 and 65:6, the right to an Islamic education, the right to retain her own money without contributing towards the upkeep of the family, the right to own her own property, the right to be paid (*mahr*) upon the consummation of marriage. Marriage not necessarily being a permanent state means there is the possibility of guilt free divorce. Further, as explained above in Chapter One, the woman has a right, which may sound dubious to some Western ears, to inherit half the amount of the man, but as some of my interviewees have pointed out, they cannot be disinherited and they may leave their own money to whom ever they please.

As asserted at the outset of the previous chapter, when it comes to the issue of 'rights' there is a major difference between the two groups of respondents. Where the Muslim respondents generally answered that they had gained rights through their affiliation to Islam and while there is a place for

rights and responsibilities within Islam, Evangelical and Charismatic Christians do not generally use the language of rights within the religious context. This may be because Christianity, historically, reacted against the prescriptions and proscriptions of Judaic law embodied for Jesus in the Scribes and Pharisees who lived according to the letter of the law and whom he branded as hypocrites: clean on the outside and unclean within². St. Paul addressing Judaizers among the early Christians wrote how the Law equates with the 'flesh' and faith with the spirit (Galatians 3). He suggested that the Law was a curse in that no one, how ever much they tried, could keep it. He claimed that through the death of Jesus Christians were now justified by faith.³ So in early Christianity there is a sense of being 'above the law'. This emphasis on faith above the law may be one of the reasons why some Christian respondents consider the idea of 'rights' to be somewhat alien or irrelevant to their belief. But the root of this lack of a language of rights may also stem from Christian self-negation, already mentioned above, the origin of which may be in the dying/rising God of Christianity where death leads to renewal and the symbolic death of Baptism leads the believer to a fuller life. The figurative death of the self is productive of regeneration and life eternal. This difference is also reflected in the previous chapter regarding submission to masculine authority in marriage, conditional amongst Muslims and unconditional for some Christians which results from an emphasis on self-abnegation (*kenosis*), in order to become an empty vessel for God's work. This giving over of the self and the negation of autonomy is the 'fishbone' which Daphne Hampson (1996), as a feminist, finds it hard to swallow and which leads her into a post-Christian feminist position. Although there is an implicit reward for Christians, i.e eternal life, sainthood, heaven, God's Kingdom on Earth and even the suggestion that prosperity follows a right orientation of faith in some house church fellowships, there is no overt talk of reward among my respondents and interviewees. Reward might come for the Christians but they should not set out with the explicit intention of gain. Yet I found some of my Muslim interviewees were quite happy to talk of reward as a motivation for action.

Even though Christianity does not use the language of rights, seventeen of forty three Christian respondents wrote in response to my questions that their rights had improved through their religious affiliation. Although the language of self-abnegation is frequently used amongst Evangelicals, Pentecostals and Charismatics, there is a stream of evangelical feminist thinking which sees the

promise of equality within the gospels. This is a concept which is more on a par with rights. These Biblical feminists constitute a minority and their message, coming as it does, from *within* conservative Protestant evangelical circles, is all the more powerful. Biblical feminists identify this promise of equality as being present in the letter of St. Paul, to the Galatians 3:28: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus".⁴ This idea is presented by evangelical feminists not so much as an equality in terms of rights but in terms of 'equality to serve' (Gretchen Gaebelein Hull 1989). Nevertheless it presents a picture of a gender equality which is based upon an egalitarian rather than a complimentary model.

The egalitarian view of cross-gender equality contrasts starkly with the selective way in which the requirement for submission is frequently read in evangelical circles. As discussed in the previous chapter, St. Paul's injunction for women to submit to their husbands has been selectively re-enforced.⁵

It may be argued that the language of self abnegation doubly oppresses women because they are already expected to live out such a role of self-giving as mothers, carers and nurturers and that this is a treble oppression in the case of Black women. Jacquelyn Grant has described, as a Black American woman, her discomfort with "the ease with which Christians speak of such notions of service and servant" (Grant 1995:204). Referring to inequalities in society based upon racial discrimination and oppression as well as slavery, Grant points out that "some people are more servant than others". So Grant finds herself asking questions about the source of feminist theology being "women's experiences" and she asks "Which women's experience is the source of (feminist) theology?" (Grant 1995: 208) The language of servanthood can be construed to be a language of whiteness (Grant 1995:200). Interestingly it is the language used in the (historically white) Southern Baptists of the United States of America addition to their statement of Baptist Faith and Message which requires: "A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband"⁶. The Pentecostalist preachers, who self-abnegate as a means of empowerment, of whom McClintock Fulkerson (1996) writes (previous chapter), are white and working class.

Grant's connection of servanthood with the language of whiteness has relevance to the discussions

of Biblical feminists who tend to be white and middle class and who claim the right to be 'equal to serve'. Yet there is also a way in which this validates the Biblical feminist approach which starts from the text of the Bible rather than a spurious notion of a global kind of 'women's experience' or an idea of a universal kind of woman's life. Grant's essay is entitled 'The Sin of Servanthood' and the sin is that of a white dominated society that turned Black people into a servant class. Grant resolves the issue by suggesting that "The church does not need servants, as oppressively conceived of and experienced by many; the church needs followers of Christ - disciples" (Grant 1995:216).

For many modern Christians, especially those associated with charismatic renewal, the emphasis is on individual salvation and a personal saviour. This contrasts with Islam where the emphasis is on a godly society and the Islamic state. For some Christians, God's Kingdom may be considered as something to be established in the 'here and now' but for many it is projected into the hereafter. For the latter who may hold the millennialist view, history is projected as an inevitable downward spiral and the worse conditions become, the more they may be perceived to be the fulfilment of prophecy that heralds the Second Coming. This kind of world view does not necessarily encourage an interest in rights, human or civil. Yet some house church and independent church groups *do* feed the hungry and house the homeless and it is difficult to tell whether they are motivated by the need to evangelise or by the desire to build a just society. There are of course many within the mainstream and other churches who fight for social justice and some respondents have voiced such views.

Liberation theologians find a message of 'levelling' in the New Testament which is achieved through the raising up of the poor and dispossessed. This is expressed in the Magnificat, the prayer given to Mary (Luke 46-53) (Solle 1991) as a response to the angelic visitation through which she was informed she was to be mother of the awaited Messiah. Placed at the beginning of the most socially minded Gospel, the Gospel according to St. Luke, this prayer contains revolutionary ideas concerning the redistribution of power and wealth. But the approach believers take to its implementation in the everyday world depends upon whether they believe God will take care of the redistribution or that we humans are supposed to help the redistribution along. Dualists, who shun the world, may assume that redistribution takes place in the spiritual realm only and that the issue is of no earthly concern. Those

Christian respondents who showed a lack of interest in 'rights' appeared to be convinced that if they have Jesus in their lives everything else will be taken care of.

Because Christianity does not make a comparable provision, within Christianity rights are granted by the constitution of the individual nation or group of nations as in EU law. Sometimes, as in Britain, these rights have, in their formation, been subject to Christian influences. Muslims in a Western democracy are subject to the law of the land but they may also draw upon the laws of Islam in order to clarify their religious, civil and familial duties and rights within a Muslim community.

2) PreIslamic and PreChristian conditions

When one hears of preIslamic and preChristian traditions one tends to think of antiquity. But there are preIslamic and preChristian conditions in our present society, especially from the viewpoint of the apologist which stresses the division between religion and culture. For the Islamic revivalist, *jahiliyya* (pagan ignorant society) and likewise, for the Christian revivalist, 'the world' (the domain of the enemy), are ever present. Although it is not possible to define the authentic state of early Christian or Islamic communities, nor the exact condition of the first century and seventh century (CE) worlds respectively into which they came, there is a strong indication that both Christianity and Islam brought improvements to the conditions for women over the previous customs. This is not to imply that Judaism does not make provision for women. I speak only of the specific historical and cultural context. Here are some examples:

In the Muslim case, for instance, with regard to inheritance among the preIslamic pagan Arabs it seems that "Under the laws of inheritance, succession was confined only to able-bodied male relations who could take up arms to defend the tribe against foreign aggression. Wives, mothers, sisters, daughters, minors, incapable, and infirm male heirs had no right in the estate of the deceased" (Chaudhry 1991:193). Surah 4:11-12 of the Qur'an gives women half as much inheritance as men, but gives a variety of proportional distribution between males and females. Amina Wadud Muhsin sees this as an improvement on preIslamic conditions because females, as well as distant

relatives, are not to be disinherited. She comments that this is true for the pre-Islamic customs still prevailing today where the inheritance of female offspring may be given to some male relative, however distant (Wadud-Muhsin 1992:87). Some of my informants see Islamic inheritance rights as an improvement over the customs of today in terms of the communities in which they have grown up. An Irish convert to Islam, for instance, wrote that "being Irish and Catholic everything went to the boys, or at least, the eldest boy" and she therefore saw her right to inherit under Islam as an improvement.

Historically Christianity can also be viewed as improving conditions for women over pre-Christian conditions if one considers, for instance, the account of John Chap 8 verses 3-11, when Jesus condemns the practice of stoning. A woman, accused of adultery, is brought to Jesus by the Scribes and Pharisees who ask: "Moses has ordered us in the Law to condemn women like this to death by stoning. What have you to say?" The Scribes and Pharisees are portrayed as looking for a way to catch Jesus out, hoping he will transgress the law. After some time Jesus responds by replying "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her"⁷.

Even when not written as a commandment within the New Testament, Biblical feminists are able to read metaphorical meanings within the New Testament stories which affirm the full personhood of women and improve the status of women over the pre-Christian conditions. Patricia Gundry uses this method when she points out how women were not permitted to act as witnesses in the culture into which Jesus was born and yet "Jesus chose women as the first witnesses to His resurrection" (Gundry:46). This drawing on the example of the life of Christ is not unlike the manner in which Muslims draw upon the example of the Prophet (*Sunnah*). For instance Zainab, the interviewee (below) exemplifies this method when, in order to demonstrate that in her view, Islam was not originally a patriarchal religion, she describes the Prophet as mending his own sandals and his own clothes. In the Qur'an there is actual provision made concerning women acting as witnesses. The most conservative view, based upon 2:282-3 is that a woman *alone* should never act as a witness⁸ yet even if this *were* the Qur'anic intention (which I do not believe it is) it would still be an improvement over not being able to be a witness at all. A more progressive reading is that the Qur'an actually

makes an improvement in women's status in requiring that they do not act *alone* as a witness in the case of financial transactions only,⁹ either because it may have been that the woman (at the time) may not be sufficiently versed in financial matters (Rahman 1979) or because she may be coerced (Wadud-Muhsin 1992). Thus the second woman in the requirement for two women witnesses is there as a support. Wadud Muhsin writes:

...considering that women could be coerced in that society, if one witness was female, she would be easy prey for some male who wanted to force her to disclaim her testimony. When there are two women, they can support each other - especially in view of the term chosen: if she (*tudilla*) 'goes astray', the other can (*tudhakkira*) 'remind' her, or 'recall her attention' to the terms of agreement. The single unit which comprises two women with distinct functions not only gives each woman significant individual worth, but also forms a united front against the other witness (Wadud-Muhsin 1992:86)

Nevertheless, in practice, the ruling is applied by analogy to marriage witnesses and is reflected elsewhere by the wider faith community. The more liberal reading is not generally accepted in practice. Perhaps this is an example of one of the reasons why many revivalist women have chosen a path with more consistent and predictable outcomes by taking a more literal view of Qur'anic legislation which they use to claim their *stated rights*. This is because if it can be proven to be a declared right in the Qur'an, the believer who wishes to please Allah cannot refrain from granting it.

PreIslamic and PreChristian conditions can also be perceived by apologists to be *within* Muslim or Christian cultural interpretations of specific groups within the present day. For instance, in a more extreme example of this position, Yasmin, a Submitter and therefore a believer in Qur'an alone, scornfully refers to Muslims who follow the Sunnah and the Hadith as members of "the sect of Mohammedans"¹⁰ regarding them as followers of Muhammad rather than of Allah. She sees them following the word of Muhammad rather than the word of God in the Qur'an. In this way also, a Protestant Evangelical contributor to the same Islamic forum as Yasmin¹¹ constantly referred to Roman Catholicism as "Apostate Christianity", believing his own brand of Protestantism to be representative of a return to an authentic New Testament Christianity which predates Catholicism. Both Islamic and Christian revivalists are of course looking to an 'ideal' and 'pristine' form of their respective faiths which they believed can be stripped of all cultural baggage. It is of course highly debatable whether this is possible as revivalisms carry the cultural associations of their time and place. In a poignant example which affects the everyday lives of Muslim women, 'Miriam', an interviewee,

related how a lot of (Muslim) men choose to ignore the precepts of Islam and follow their own cultures. She gave the example of a Sheikh, a holy man and teacher of Islam who does not play by the rules and whom she thought should have known better. She related how the Sheikh was talking to a group about Muslim inheritance laws. He told them how a woman's money, according to Islam, is her own and how she doesn't have to pay for maintenance of the home. Someone asked "Does your wife know this?" The Sheikh answered "No, No way!".

Improvement may be made in the twentieth century where pre-Islamic and Islamic conditions co-exist side-by-side in modern societies. An example of Shariah offering superior justice over custom is given in the case of 'Aziza bint Hassan b. Fadl, a Bedouin woman, who, in 1906, prosecuted her husband, demanding an annulment of their marriage into which she had been given as an adult by her brother, according to Bedouin custom, without her consent, on the grounds that this is against Shariah law. A Bedouin woman, according to custom, has no legal standing yet she presented her own case in court without representation by an agnatic relative (Shaham 1993:193). 'Aziza's husband told the Shariah court that he had married her according to the custom of Allah. Shaham points out that at this time, although Bedouins identified with Islam, their knowledge of its teachings was frequently limited. 'Aziza, who was taken by force and the marriage "consummated", had escaped the next morning. 'Aziza's representation of herself in court was valid according to Shariah but was not in accordance with Bedouin custom. By turning to the Shariah court, this woman was able to claim her Islamic right which offered her superior status to customary law. In this case the *qadi* did not dissolve the marriage on the grounds of the woman's complaint, that she had not consented, because this would be hard to prove, but he tackled the issue through relying on the husband's evidence that the marriage offer had not used the expressions considered valid for this purpose by the Shariah. The expressions "marriage" and "giving in marriage" were not used. 'Aziza gained her annulment. The above is a clear example of the enhancement of a woman's rights through Qur'anic legislation, in the twentieth century.

Rights to marry freely (i.e. not to be forced into marriage) as exemplified in the account of Aziza is an important right conferred by Islam. 'Dr. Hadi', a speaker from Egypt who had left her six children in

the care of the extended family (an institution of which she extolled the virtues) spoke at the Young Muslims UK meeting I attended in March 1996.¹² She said that extended families (which freed women to work for Islam) already exist in the British South Asian communities and that it was therefore important not to offend such families by marrying against their wishes. She suggested it was necessary to bring them round, to wait if necessary. But she spoke strongly against the practice of enforced marriages, describing them as “a waste of many good sisters” and she asked if there was no authority people could turn to in such a situation. The answer came from the floor that there was no one because the families of South Asian origin had become selfish living in Britain and that they think it is no one else’s business. Dr.Hadi suggested that YMUK should work on the problem. She said they should work out amongst themselves how to deal with the issue and that they should visit families where this is going on.

Whether or not a provision in a Holy Book is seen to be an improvement depends largely upon hermeneutics and who has control of interpretation and whose view it is that comes to be seen as the legitimate one. In the case of both Islam and Christianity the orthodoxy has historically been defined by men.

3) Respondents and their rights under British law today

The majority of respondents to the questionnaire answered question 16 which asked “Do you think that women are adequately protected under British Law with regard to: a) marriage; b) divorce; c) motherhood; d) employment and; e) control of personal finance?” Four of twenty nine Muslims abstained from answering, a further one said she didn’t know enough about the law to answer and one was unable to affirm that women were adequately covered in any of these respects. She wrote, “I’m sorry- I’m not just being stubborn but I would find difficulty with all these in terms of adequate protection”. In all, twenty three of twenty nine affirmed that there was at least one of these areas in which they felt women were adequately protected by the law. Of forty three Christian respondents, seven made no entry and four said they did not know. Three respondents, all from Jesus Fellowship, wrote that they were not interested, one writing “I’m not interested in feminism so I cannot comment”.

I found it interesting that everyday legal protection for women was regarded by this respondent as "feminism". For all their other-worldliness, their view of feminism is similar to that projected in the tabloids, the most 'worldly' of publications. Jesus Fellowship literature tends to equate feminism with extremism: a recent account of a testimony by Jay Mansfield in Jesus Life recounts how, prior to her conversion "Jay had developed a hatred of men and this led her into feminism".¹³ Why does man-hatred have to be a prerequisite of feminism? What about respect for humanity as a prerequisite? In response to the question, a member of Men Women and God, the Biblical feminists, wrote "I'm not sure what you mean" but then went on to write that her own experience in each of these areas had not been difficult in terms of "protection under the law". She added "The law is not particularly just in many ways, because it is more concerned with property than with people, but this affects men too".

Seventeen of twenty nine Muslim respondents thought marriage law adequately protected women and this compared to eighteen of forty three Christians. Thirteen of twenty nine Muslims thought women adequately protected in terms of divorce as did fourteen of forty three Christian respondents. One Christian put a question mark here. Being a newly-wed she perhaps did not yet see the necessity some women have for divorce. Eleven of the Muslim respondents and thirteen of the Christians thought that women were adequately protected in motherhood. A Muslim and two Christian respondents mentioned how they felt that the importance of motherhood was not recognised whilst another wrote about the need for flexible working hours and the problem of women who work outside the home effectively doing two jobs. In terms of responsibilities, one Christian respondent thought that "we need to encourage women's responsibility to children in education especially" and a Muslim respondent thought that women in divorce tend to get custody of children "to the detriment of men". This questions the assumed 'right' women have of custody of children in British society. This could, however, change as it has in the United States where poor women are penalised in this respect and often lose custody to the richer father (Chesler 1990). But there is also an assumption that the woman invariably *wants* custody of the child. This of course may not always be the case.

In terms of employment protection nine Muslims and fourteen Christians thought that women were adequately protected under the law. This shows a fairly low level of satisfaction with the degree of

statutory employment protection across the board. A Muslim respondent also pointed out that “those married and available for work but unable to find work are discriminated against by social security”. This is in terms of being unable to claim benefit. Two Christian respondents actively criticised employment protection in terms of the fact that many women, because of family commitments, are part-time workers who lack sick pay, holidays and pension rights. With regard to control of personal finance, twelve Muslims and fourteen Christians thought women were adequately protected. A member of Men Women and God added the proviso, “If a married woman has personal finance”. A Muslim respondent who is a Submitter wrote “Surely this depends upon personal circumstances and not the law”. This latter remark illustrates the individualistic leaning of the Submitters and the emphasis on liberal interpretations.

The majority of respondents answered the question. Issues which emerged as showing a general dissatisfaction with the law as it stands were related to marriage and divorce, motherhood, employment rights and protections and financial matters. In other words, there was generally less than fifty percent satisfaction across the board. The answers which I found the most unnerving were those of a minority who seemed oblivious of any need for legislation in order to protect women’s rights.

4. Rights and religious affiliation

Christian Responses

As mentioned above, some Christian respondents did not see the relevance of the question about rights. I can see there is a way in which this is the case if Christianity is viewed as a religion which is about self-emptying. But there are many ways in which Christianity can be interpreted and one of these is as a faith which stands for social justice. There were a range of views on this score and Jesus Fellowship, which goes out to feed and minister to the homeless and whose leader recently stated that the Jesus Fellowship were interested in “economic equality”,¹⁴ registered low interest amongst sisters regarding ‘rights’. Some Ichthus members and members of Men Women and God were at the other end of the spectrum with a knowledge of the law as it stands and a concern for the welfare

of women. Apart from the core differences described above, one of the reasons for the lack of interest on the part of Jesus Fellowship members may well be the fact that whilst not all members live in community, the majority of my particular respondents do. This is an enclosed situation which means that a person may be out of touch with some issues like employment conditions, personal finance and so on. This is especially the case if they work from a common purse. Also, from the questionnaires, I gauge that the situation of a number of respondents from the Jesus Fellowship has been drastically improved by living in community and that if they felt they were desperately unhappy before they entered community they may not currently be too concerned about issues of 'rights'.

Overall, the impression of the Christians was that they did not gain in rights through their religious affiliation with twenty five of forty three answering that they did not gain or that the question was not applicable in the Christian case. Nevertheless, seventeen answered 'yes' and one answered 'yes and no' but in doing so expressed the kind of feeling expressed by the other seventeen who answered in the affirmative. She wrote, "Christianity does not confer rights on people in this sense... I know who I am and am confident to live that out". This sense of gain in respect and confidence comes through connectedness with others. A sense of enhanced status and opportunity was reported by a number of the Christian respondents who answered in the affirmative. Two wrote of 'knowing what to expect' in Christian marriage as a gain, but these were young unmarried or shortly to be married women. Five respondents mentioned equality with men before God or in the church whilst another six wrote of the importance to them of being valued as a woman or having their role as mother and homemaker taken seriously and supported. One of the latter was also working as a GP.

One respondent, who was a church leader, wrote how "Historically (the answer to question 16) ... was 'no' but now it is 'yes'. She said she was given "positive affirmation in the church leadership role, acceptance as a person in my own right, increased self-awareness and security (and) given the right to express my views and influence systems where appropriate". This sense of personhood was also shared by some others, e.g "I feel I am valued as a person" and was perhaps even echoed in the sentiment "If I am a child of God I don't have to worry about rights". This latter was from a member of Men Women and God. Yet I was surprised that a Biblical feminist should be unaware of the interplay

of legal rights and protections and life within the church. For instance, if 'rights' are unimportant why should women have the vote, indeed why not go back to a system of slavery? But another respondent, the oldest, pointed out the contingency of it all in terms of "Christianity teaches a high standard of love/care/ consideration (in and out of marriage) and *in as far as this is practiced*¹ women's 'rights' are more readily recognised".

Like one Muslim, a Christian respondent pointed out that the fact that abortion was regarded as a sin might appear to be a loss of women's rights. Both thought that it was rightly regarded as anathema. The twenty year old Christian wrote "You could say because I now don't believe in abortion, my rights as a woman have been decreased, but as that is a heartfelt belief, not a religious rule, I don't see that it diminishes my rights as a woman".

Muslim Responses

Unlike the Christians in relation to their adoption of Christianity, the Muslim respondents were almost unanimous in their agreement that their rights had been increased by Islam. Twenty seven of twenty nine Muslim respondents to the questionnaire answered the question in the affirmative. One who did not wrote "not so much increased as clarified" and the other, the youngest Muslim respondent made no entry. Sixteen respondents gave issues connected to finance and work and finance in marriage as the ways in which they saw their rights enhanced, including three who stated categorically that they found the right *not* to work as an enhancement to their rights within marriage.

Four respondents suggested the superiority of rights which are God given, according to their belief, over any merely human law. This unreliability of mere human laws was also mentioned by a Christian respondent. Qur'anic inheritance rights were considered by Muslim respondents to be an improvement over British secular ones by five respondents who answered in the affirmative, divorce rights by seven. Three of the Muslims mentioned the right to keep their own family name in marriage.

¹My emphasis

The right to education was mentioned by four respondents but hugely the affirmative answer was given by Muslim respondents in relation to marriage, motherhood and divorce and financial interests within these contexts as well as security. Marriage, motherhood and Divorce are discussed separately below.

Marriage, motherhood and divorce

Walker mentions that unlike many evangelical circles, in some house church fellowships, divorcees are welcomed and able to remarry (Walker 1987:207). This point was echoed by Sarah, a Muslim interviewee who related how she was able to get a guilt free divorce and remarry a 'good husband'. A Jesus Fellowship respondent, a single parent of two sons, wrote how she has also found protection for her family. Walker suggested that such a communal structure will only appeal to a limited number in the Western culture of autonomy. However, since he wrote this, the movements have grown and seem to have an appeal to many, maybe **because** of the myth of autonomy which forces women with child care needs into an intolerable situation of being breadwinner, carer and supporter without any kind of support themselves. The importance of this as a factor should not be underestimated. Rights within marriage and divorce conferred by Islam figured large in terms of Muslim responses.

Where there was reference made among the Christian respondents with regard to 'knowing what to expect in marriage', there was also a similar response from two Muslim respondents who stated that they had the right to be treated kindly in marriage. This puts boundaries and an element of surveillance into marriage as an institution, a sense of a silent witness within marriage to whom the partners are accountable.

Two Muslim respondents mentioned their freedom to marry whom they wished regardless of nationality as an important improvement over custom. One respondent mentioned respect for motherhood as important. The right not to work as a mother, mentioned above, is an important factor at a time when the feminisation of the work force has taken place and the pressure is on for mothers

to work outside the home. This has led to the double and treble burden of which Islamists complain (Afshar 1991:316). Further, thirteen Muslim respondents alluded to their financial rights within marriage, that is to the right to be provided for by the husband, to keep their own finances separate and not to have to contribute towards the household bills. Three Muslims referred to their financial rights in divorce, i.e to the right to maintenance and a further five respondents referred to their right to divorce itself if the husband does not fulfil his responsibility and as mentioned above, another wrote positively of the possibility of "guilt free divorce". This right to divorce and remarriage within a religious framework is indeed liberating when seen from, say, a Roman Catholic viewpoint where divorce and remarriage are not allowed. This can mean being forced to choose between one's religion and one's emotional, physical and financial well-being. This has produced a diaspora of women who are scarred by domestic violence and rendered homeless in terms of their religion¹⁵.

5) Claiming Islamic Rights and the Biblical Feminist Equality to Serve.

There are interesting parallels between the struggles of Biblical Feminists and Islamic Feminists. Both groups aim to obtain the equality which they believe God to have given them through a revealed text and which has been denied them by patriarchal interpretations of their religions. Both groups, because they work *within* religions are regarded as 'suspect' by many secular feminists. One big difference is that Islamic feminists are complementarian and Biblical feminists are 'equalitarian'. The complementarians in the Christian evangelical and charismatic traditions could not be described as feminists. This is because of their emphasis upon female submission and their dismissal of the need for rights. If they have a 'feminist' motivation it is a covert one but some of them are anti-feminist in the tradition of Beverly LaHaye of Concerned Women for America who, in 1978, decided to "rally other 'submissive' women around her who would believe that 'the women's liberation movement is destroying the family and threatening the survival of our nation'" (Faludi:280). The Christians (above), who equate man-hating as a step on the road to feminism, are complementarians but perhaps the term 'hierarchicalists', used by Biblical feminists is more appropriate.

There is certainly overlap in the methodologies Islamic feminists and Biblical feminists use but, as

mentioned above, one of the main differences is that based on Gal 3:28: Biblical feminists understand St. Paul's words to mean that gender based barriers are disappearing and consequently tend to be egalitarian de-emphasising gender difference in their approach whilst Islamic feminists are complementarians. Like the hierarchicalists, the Biblical feminists are conservative, being Evangelicals, not liberals in their theology. Another similarity between the Biblical feminists and the Islamic feminists is their desire to build a better world alongside men. This is in the spirit of Act 2 where Peter quotes Joel: "your son's and daughters shall prophesy". In believing in cooperation with men in building an improved society both Biblical and Islamic feminists bear some similarity to the former liberal and socialist feminists.

Biblical feminists are at one end of a spectrum of Christian feminists in terms of hermeneutical strategies in that, as evangelicals, they require themselves to follow "the plain sense of the text on all points. Feminists in this tradition focus their efforts on seeking out an alternative, nonsubordinationist meaning for each text that seems to subordinate women" (Katherine Doob Sakenfeld in Russell and Clarkson (Eds) (1996):29). This they do with enormous creativity. An example of this cropped up during my interview with Valerie Griffiths, one of the founder members of Men Women and God. Valerie spoke of St. Paul's 1 Cor. 11 injunction that when a woman prophesies she has to have her head covered. It was the first time I had ever heard this explained with the emphasis on the fact that *the woman has permission to prophesy*. I had always previously looked at it as a command that women should wear head covering at worship. Valerie pointed out that prophesying was "not just foretelling, but discerning the message of God to give his people"¹⁶ and that prophecy linked up with encouragement and exhortation (1 Cor 12 and 1 Cor 14. 3) to build up others. In other words St. Paul was giving recognition to the prophetic ministry of women, a significant role within the church, which allowed them to discern the word of God.

Islamic feminist approaches to claiming Islamic rights

The difference between Muslim and Islamic feminisms, an example of the development of colonial feminism in terms of the Middle East and how feminism became associated for many Muslims with

imperialism have been outlined in the survey of literature chapter. I have already described how Islamic feminists differ from Biblical feminists in terms of taking a complementarian rather than an egalitarian approach.

Riffat Hassan, who, like the Submitters, leans to the position of 'Qur'an alone' has concluded that despite patriarchal attitudes, which she sees as evident in Muslim culture, the Qur'an, 'which to Muslims in general is the most authoritative source of Islam, does not discriminate against women' (Hassan 1991:59). From my point of view, 'Submitters' are most notable for the implications of their rejection of Hadith in terms of their interpretation of the Qur'an regarding women. The 'Submitters', in accepting *only* the word of the Qur'an, are able to bypass the religious establishment and make their own interpretations of the rulings concerning women. My initial impression was that 'Submitter' women are very liberated women in the 'all American' way. For instance Yasmin wrote, "Islam is the only religion that propagates equality between men and women.... Unlike any other religion Islam has specific laws benefitting the women. *Islam therefore appears to be fitting into the emancipated status of today's women.* To understand this one needs to understand the Quranic view of women."¹⁷ This portrayal of Islam as a modern religion which has been waiting for the rest of the world to catch up is an apologetic stance which can be traced to the nineteenth century¹⁸, and is in keeping with the suggestion that feminism was in fact invented by Islam (see below next page and note 19).

One of my interviewees, Zainab from YMUK, shared this view of an Islam which was at the outset a progressive religion for women. She explained, 'Islam as a religion for them (women), before God, is the same as for men... I don't think Islam embodies a concept of patriarchy'. She gave historical reasons, as those described above, but backed this up by turning to the *Sunnah*. She said 'Tradition has it that Muhammad used to mend his own sandals and wash his own clothes. It is a tradition in the *Sunnah*. This is an example of how Islam is not patriarchal'. Zainab also suggested that an examination of the lives of 'early Muslim women' who were 'very bold women' can only lead to the same conclusion. Zainab attributed the frequent distortion of the teachings of Islam regarding women not only to 'elements of patriarchy from the previous culture' but also to the fact that 'the vast majority

of illiterates are women, and the learned men, the *mawlanas*, often make reactionary interpretations and this is taught to women'. One of the great achievements of sisters who are Islamic activists is the success they have had in claiming their right to an Islamic education and the means to interpret the Qur'an for themselves.

My interview with Zainab helped me to understand how one of the sisters I had met at the Islamic Foundation (in March 1996) was able to live in what she described as a 'role exchange' with her husband who looks after the children while she goes out to work to earn the income.

The fact that, over the centuries, men have mainly had control of interpretation of the primary sources of Islam - the Qur'an, the *Hadith* (the sayings of the Prophet), as well as the *Sunnah* (the example of the Prophet) which is known through the *Hadith*, and the *Fiqh* (jurisprudence) which aims to interpret the *Shariah* (the divine law) - means that Islam has stayed in a patriarchal mould. Yet, within Islam in present day Britain there are intimations of a changed view of a feminism, based upon women's rights - at least from some Muslims. For instance, there are currently some assertions that the revelation of the Qur'an in the seventh century was the source of feminism. Muslim Parliament has made one such claim on the World Wide Web.¹⁹ There may be some justification for this idea. I have already mentioned (above) how Rana Kabbani has pointed out that Muhammad's teaching gave women economic independence in the seventh century whereas in Britain it was not until the passing of the Married Woman's Property Act in 1925 that married women were able to control their money (Kabbani:36). Today, there are women who through their own religious scholarship, are reclaiming Islam. They do this by taking the Islamic sources, especially the Qur'an, and making their own interpretations. When women have an Islamic education they are able to claim the rights for women which are enshrined in their holy book.

Muslim women, as are many feminists, are divided as to how to combine liberty and domesticity. As mentioned above (Survey of Literature, Progressive readings of Islam) two of the ways which Ghazal Anwar suggests in which the sources of Islam may be read in order to make progressive readings for women, and which I find to be the most appropriate to my interviewees are the apologetic and the

reformist ways (Anwar 1996:57). Apologists for Islam take the route of complementarity as do Islamic activists for women's rights. They claim that the needs of women and men are basically different but they maintain that the Qur'an has given women specific rights. This makes for a problematic relationship between feminists who follow a Western egalitarian model and Islamic feminists whom they regard as 'essentialist'.

Apologists explain the reason why these Qur'anic rights need to be fought for by making the distinction between Islam and culture, for instance between Pakistani culture and Islam, so they might say that it is Pakistani culture which oppresses them, not Islam (Lyon 1995:51-52). Reformists claim that the sources of Islam have previously been misread and that the distinction between the revealed text and its interpretation is of primary importance (Anwar:57). For instance, Yasmin, the Submitter, wrote, 'We must be careful not to confuse the words and deeds of Muslims with Islam. Islam is not determined by what Muslims may think, say, do or believe. Islam is defined for Muslims, by God, in the Qur'an'.²⁰ The reformist approach is to suggest that the Qur'an offers liberation to women but that its liberating message has been distorted by male domination of the interpretative process. Members of all the Muslim groups involved in this study use both these reformist and apologetic strategies.

In that they combine the approach of apologists with that of reformists, women's rights activists in the context of Islam draw on both modernist and Islamist schools. In applying Islam to the problems in Western societies women find that they are turning colonialism on its head. They are using modern Islamic discourse to address very modern problems in the West; as in for instance, the pressure to be liberated and autonomous at the same time as being a provider as well as nurturer in the case of child care. These solutions are illustrated by some of the responses to the questionnaire regarding the right not to work and the financial arrangements within marriage whereby it is the husband's duty to support the family. It seems to me that while the Christians who submit in marriage get all the Christian responsibilities they get no such benefits as these. Islamic revivalist discourse allows a woman to concentrate on child rearing without feeling obliged to go out and earn money. If she does earn money she is allowed to keep it as her own. To some Western feminists this may seem like a retrograde step, but five of my interviewees, all of whom were mothers, also described it as a

relief.

In terms of revivalist groups, apologists and reformists alike, as complementarians, tend to hold the view that to deem the needs of women and men to be the same is oppressive to women, placing them under a double and treble burden of nurturing inside the home, working outside the home, at the same time as consumerist society requires them to stay glamorous and young. As an alternative the 'equal but different' scenario is problematic because it has been cynically used, for instance in the USA in terms of race (Dworkin 1988:191-2), to oppress groups. I would argue that, although an overemphasis on difference leads to a loss of political cohesion among feminists, a recognition of difference, per se, does not necessarily militate against equality. The recognition of differences, in order to compensate for, or disregard them in relation to specific situations, is important to the political notion of equality. The needs of women are different at different times of life. In Britain women are expected to be equal in the work place at the same time as the Welfare State is shrinking. This means that there is more pressure on women to be carers and nurturers as well. Women who choose 'complementarity' represent one solution to this dilemma.

Women's *Tafsir*

Both apologists and reformers turn to the Qur'an as a means of establishing and claiming their Islamic rights and *tafsir* (interpretation of the Qur'an) by women is the most powerful strategy for making headway in this respect. This is because "unlike many Christians in relation to the Bible, Muslims (not just revivalists) generally believe that the Qur'an is the 'direct verbatim word of God' "(Shepard 1987: 359). As Khadija C, a Submitter, put it "Islam is defined for Muslims, by God, in the Qur'an"²¹. So if a woman can prove the authenticity of her claim for her Islamic Rights it would be a foolhardy believer who would prevent her from obtaining them. Attainment of these Qur'anic rights relies not only on proving their legitimacy, but also on being part of a community of believers who are campaigners and who, in the spirit of *da'wa* (mission), want to show that Islam is the better way.

In an interview in Q News, Anisa Abd El Fatah, Chairwoman of the National Association of Muslim

Women in North America, described a programme which enables women to utilize this strategy, a programme 'designed specifically for women coming from a woman's perspective and encouraging women towards Islamic scholarship'(Nahdi 1994:5). It takes the form of a newsletter which 'goes to women in the privacy of their own homes' and includes '*Hadith* methodology and literature' and an Arabic tutorial. Conservative Muslims, like the Sheikh mentioned by Miriam, are unlikely to object to this, yet it provides women with a means of obtaining their Islamic Rights.

'Linda', from the North of England, used both *tafsir* and the division between culture and Islam in the following example. Linda, who converted to Islam more than ten years ago, has three children. She became a Muslim during a previous less happy marriage to a husband who was a non-practising Muslim. Linda's present husband is from Lebanon. She explained that when a couple get married in Lebanese culture, the woman pools her income. But in Islam, 'A woman's money is totally her own and she doesn't have to disclose her income. It is the husband's job to support the family'. Interestingly, this requirement on the husband to provide protection and sustenance for his wife in the tasks of reproduction and child care depends, at least in part, upon Qur'an 4:34 which is the verse which arguably gives permission to a man to beat his wife. No wonder it is necessary to value the verse and to find ways in which to dilute the husband's apparent right to physically chastise his wife, either by questioning the translation of the verb 'daraba' as 'to beat'²² or by selectively using Hadith to neutralise or modify the meaning²³. Linda said she was 'hard on this (requirement)', that she should be allowed to keep her own money, when they first married. She said this was because her first husband took her Child Benefit. Her present husband was prepared to listen and looked at the references in the Qur'an. Linda described her husband as 'A man who gave me my rights... he doesn't infringe my rights'. She commented 'For a good marriage you have to find someone who wants to please Allah'. Clearly such a husband is pivotal to gaining Islamic rights within marriage.

Conclusion

Although the responses of the Christians have been variable, some regarding 'rights' as being of no interest to them whilst others could see the impact of legislation upon themselves and/or others, the

majority of the Muslims did not take issue with the idea that 'rights' might be of some significance to themselves. Even though there are Christian influences behind many of the rights we have in the systems of British Law, there are no 'rights' for women set out in Christianity in the same way as there are in Islam and generally speaking, Christianity does not use the language of rights. The Qur'an gives guidance in terms of duties and entitlements and it may be that the concept of 'rights' is an imposition of enlightenment discourse. Nevertheless specific and overt verifiable claims may be made by women in Islam in contrast with a Christian culture where enrichment is often thought to come through self-denial and self-emptying. The apparent disinterest in rights may also be explained in terms of the questionnaires and interviews having taken place in a modern democratic Western State based upon Christian influences. For the Christians the need to establish particular kinds of rights does not feel so pressing. Islamic respondents coming from a different tradition have examples of struggles to establish an Islamic State elsewhere.

These Western women, who are not interested in rights, and who seem willing to give up their new rights only a few generations on from winning the vote, the right to their own property, money and custody of their children do not perhaps consider how their lives would be affected if these rights, which are underpinned by law, were removed overnight. Ruth Page begins her account of the work of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's impact on women's lives with an account which illustrates the position of Western women only a century ago:

In 1869, Hester Vaughan was a twenty-year old woman, deserted by her husband, who had become a servant in a Philadelphia household. She had been seduced, became pregnant, and was dismissed. Destitute, she delivered the baby alone in an unheated garret and collapsed. Twenty-four hours later mother and child were discovered. The baby was dead and Vaughan was charged with infanticide. Tried without counsel, forbidden to testify, she was found guilty and sentenced to hang (Page 1990:17).²⁴

Here is an account of a woman with no right to make testimony in court, no right to life or liberty. There are chilling signs of a backlash in the USA against the new rights of women, for instance, as mentioned above, in June 1998 when the Southern Baptist Convention voted an addition to their 1963 Baptist Faith and Message statement, that: "A wife is to submit graciously to the servant leadership of her husband"²⁵.

Some of the Christians who are Millennialists see the present day as end times and therefore 'rights'

are of little consequence in the face of the predictions of the Book of Revelation. Yet some of the house church fellowships have a programme of social responsibility as do the main stream churches. In Islam, society is important. Submitters, like some of the more extreme Christians, make a private and American-influenced interpretation of their faith. It therefore comes as no shock when an informant who is a Submitter suggests that personal finances are surely a matter for the individual and nothing to do with the law. At times there is an anti-feminist agenda among the Christian hierarchicalists but this is not general. Some Christian respondents and interviewees actively call themselves feminist .

There were areas of overlap. One such area was concern about marriage and the sense of 'knowing what to expect in marriage' which results in a kind of regulation of the married state. The holy text enters the marriage as a third party which facilitates scrutiny of the behaviour of the partner and recourse to the religious teaching. This is especially a safeguard in terms of the behaviour of the husband. In a secular situation there is no regulation except through private agreement and no accountability. There was also overlap in terms of the desire for respect for motherhood and particularly in terms of financial provision which allows women to concentrate on the tasks of mothering without financial insecurity and anxiety. The areas of difference here were being allowed to marry who one wants (this is important against custom), the right to divorce and financial rights within that situation, and inheritance. None of the Christians mentioned divorce or inheritance.

My Muslim interviewees were generally reluctant to have the term 'feminist' applied to themselves. This does not surprise me when I consider the historically difficult relationship between feminism and Islam. Rana Kabbani has suggested the term 'gender jihad' as one that roots itself in Islam (Kabbani:36). Zainab, from YMUK, said she preferred to be described as a 'Woman's Rights Activist within Islam' as 'feminist' has connotations she does not want. Khadija C, a Submitter, in an E-mail, said she was happy to be called an Islamic feminist 'if you define it (feminism) as being concerned with the rights and status of women'.

Some of my interviewees are mothers who are taking advantage of their Islamic Rights to raise their

children without feeling obliged to go out to work as well. These rights may seem a little inverted to middle class women of my age (middle age) and above, women who fought for the right to get out of the home. Yet for feminists there has been a conflict between freedom and domesticity. These women have found one particular way of solving the dilemma, for the child raising years.

Notes

1. A term drawn from the title of Evangelical feminist, Gretchen Gaebelein Hull's (1989) book Equal to Serve

2. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may be clean.

Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth. So you also look righteous to others, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness". New Testament, Matthew 23:25-29 NRSV

3. "Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith". St. Paul's Epistle to Galatians, 4:9 NRSV

4. NRSV

5. This is in a context where for most Christians some regulations, e.g the food laws in Acts 15:20, have been de-emphasised.

6. CNN Website: 'The text of the new section of the Southern Baptist Convention's Statement of Baptist Faith and Message' XURL: <http://www.sbcnet.org/bfm0.htm> 11/6/98

7. NRSV translation

8. See Shamsad M. Khan (1993)

9. This is deduced from the fact that the verse opens with mention of loans: "O ye who believe! When ye contract a debt for a fixed term, record it in writing..." Surah 2:282 Pickthall translation.

10. 'Yasmin' CompuServe Islamic Forum, subject: Islamic Revival 21/12/95

11. The contributor was there to evangelise.

12. Visit to Young Muslims UK Coreworkers Meeting, Islamic Foundation, Markham, Leics on 9/3/96

13. Jesus Life No 44 Second Quarter 1998 p.24

14. Noel Stanton talking to Roger Forster in 'Men of Vision and Action' Jesus Life No 44 2nd Quarter 1998 p.12

15. Sue Geophilous gave a paper entitled 'A Theology of Survival: Women and Domestic Violence' in which she drew attention to this situation at the First AUDTERS National Postgraduate Conference held at SOAS 16-18 April 1998.

16. Interview with Valerie Griffiths at her home 1/5/97

17. 'Yasmin', CompuServe Islamic Forum, subject: Islamic Revival 18/12/95

18. For instance to the Qur'anic interpretations of Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida, the latter founding the journal called *Manar*

19. Mary Ali and Anjum Ali, quoted in Muslim Parliament Home Page URL: <http://www.ummah.org.uk/mp/17/96>

20. 'Yasmin', CompuServe Islamic Forum, subject Women and Islamic Revival 17/12/95
21. 'Khadija C', CompuServe Islamic Forum, subject: Women and Islamic Revival 17/12/95
22. Khadija C, CompuServe Islamic Forum, subject: Women and Islamic Revival 17/12/95 referred to the Ahmed Ali translation: *Al-Qur'an. A Contemporary Translation*, NJ, USA: Princeton University Press
'As for women you feel averse
talk to them suasively;
then leave them alone in bed (without molesting them)
and go to bed with them (when they are willing).*
If they open up to you, do not seek and excuse
for blaming them. Surely God is sublime and great.'
* the translation of 'daraba'.
23. At the YMUK meeting, a *Hadith* was used to modify the impression that it is permissible for a man to beat his wife. A sister explained how the verse was meant ironically, that there was a Hadith which relates how Muhammad picked up a twig (a *Miswak*) (wood used as tooth sticks in Arab countries and North Africa) and indicated that it was only with such a stick as this that a man should beat his wife. In other words, he should not physically chastise her at all.
24. From E. Griffith (1984) In Her Own Right: The Life of Elizabeth Cady Stanton Oxford: OUP: 159
25. Reported on BBC News 10/6/98. Link for the story on CNN's Website:
<http://www.cnn.com/US/9806/10/southern.baptists.ap> 11/6/98

Chapter Five

Modesty

This chapter deals in particular with the modesty practices within Islamic and Christian revivalisms and asks, in the case of women who join these movements in Britain today whether these practices are liberating or oppressive and why some women adopt them. Even though there are moments of overlap modesty and head covering are treated differently in Christianity and Islam as well as within the diverse faith communities which make up these two major religions. The first part of this chapter concentrates upon Islamic revivalist practices and the second upon Christian revivalist practices. A comparison will be made in the conclusion.

1. Modesty and head covering in Islam and Islamic revival

Some recent work is reframing the veil in terms of Islam in the Middle East and is reading the *hijab* as a sign of resistance¹. Veiling has been interpreted not only in terms of clothing, but also as practices of architectural separation (Mernissi 1994). There are ways in which the separation from men can be construed as liberating (Oakley 1982) but this segregation may also be problematic if women are excluded from decision making. Like the nature/nurture debate which defies an ultimate solution, the definition of what it is that constitutes resistance is equally difficult to define for all time. This is because resistance is contextual and what comprises resistance in one situation is collaboration in another. The significance of the power of the veil, where it is not mandatory, is frequently missed: in the UK, far from being a sign of conformity and fulfilling the function of making the wearer invisible, the converse is the case. In this context, the more a woman covers herself the greater is the degree to which she becomes a spectacle. In averting the masculine gaze she becomes the focus of non-Muslim scrutiny and speculation. Not only does this have the opposite effect from the original agenda of modesty of *hijab* but it also offers a commentary on a society which demands sight of women's bodies as a matter of conformity and decency. Instead of living out the stereotypical view of being timid, silent and passively obedient to Muslim men, Muslim women, who adopt Islamic dress in the

revivalist cause in Britain today, have to be conspicuously articulate and assertive.

Hajib and Hijab

Separation *hajib* and veiling *hijab* are not synonymous in Islam. The Qur'an requires both male and female modesty in terms of women and men lowering their gaze (Qur'an 24:30-32) but according to Fatima Mernissi (1994) there are two kinds of separation through veiling which take place in Islam. The first type pertains to the division of spaces. In this context Mernissi describes the *Hajib*, a man who, historically, acted as a filter between the caliph and the *'umma* (the Muslim community). She writes how after Muhammad:

The caliphs rapidly cut themselves off from the community and deserted the mosque-residence of Muhammad, where the leader lives and works next to the mosque. Between themselves and those they governed they raised the *hijab*, literally the veil. The institution of the *hijab*, that is, a curtain in the sense of a barrier that separates the sovereign from the people and impedes their access to him - which was considered by the Prophet and the first four caliphs as a grave failure in duty by the leader - was very quickly adopted in political practice (Mernissi 1994: 79).

Mernissi notes that there are also two kinds of this first type of architectural veiling or separation of spaces: the one the sovereign installs between himself and his subjects in public life and the one the sovereign installs between himself and his courtiers in private life (Mernissi 1994:201)². This kind of architectural division came about in the Qur'an when the curtain descended between the public and private domain (Mernissi 1991), between the Prophet together with his wives and the companions in the Qur'an 33:53:

O ye who believe! Enter not the dwellings of the Prophet for a meal without waiting for a proper time, unless permission be granted you. But if ye are invited, enter, and, when your meal is ended, then disperse. Linger not for conversation. Lo! That would cause annoyance to the Prophet, and he would be shy of (asking) you (to go); but Allah is not shy of the truth. And when ye ask of them (the wives of the Prophet) anything, ask it of them from behind a curtain. That is purer for your hearts and for their hearts.³

The second kind of veiling, *hijab*, is referred to in Qur'an 24:31 and relates to dress and decorum:

"And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and be modest, and to display of their adornments only that which is apparent, and to draw their veils over their bosoms..."⁴

Interestingly, this command follows verse 30 which reads : "Tell believing men to lower their gaze and

be modest". Although both women and men are required to be modest the emphasis in practice tends to be on the modesty of women. An amusing photograph in Q-News illustrates this to be case: two veiled women, only their faces and hands showing, sit on a beach accompanied by two men in swimming shorts. The caption reads: "What about the men's hijab?"⁵ Nevertheless, there is overlap between these two kinds of veiling because the *hijab* in terms of dress, whilst marking her out as separate, also allows a woman to move between spheres. For instance, in relation to Islamist women in Egypt today, Karam writes how "the veil is seen as a means by which to bridge the gap between the otherwise separate male and female domains. The veil becomes therefore, not only a symbol of their identity, but a holy, sanctioned and acceptable means by which to broaden and further their political, social and cultural space" (Karam 1998:12). This reading of the veil as a means of entering the public domain rather than as an exclusion from it is unpopular in some secular and Western feminist circles. The pro- and anti-hijab debate is discussed in the following section.

Hijab: criticisms and counterarguments

Many secular feminists, Muslim feminists and feminists from within other religious traditions make a critical reading of *hijab*. According to some Muslim and interested Western feminists veiling has no justification in the Qur'an (Wadud-Muhsin 1993:10) (Karam 1998:134). Some suggest that the *hijab* applied historically to the Prophet's wives only, the 'Mothers of the Believers', and not to other women (Surah 33:28-32) (Afkhani:13)(Stowasser:32). Another suggestion is that it was connected to aristocratic practices among ancient Persians, Romans, and Jews (Afkhani:13). Fatima Mernissi suggests that it was a mode of dress adopted by privileged women in order to signal that they were neither prostitutes nor slaves who had been forced into prostitution and who's heads were habitually uncovered (Mernissi 1991a: 182-8). Amina Wadud-Muhsin (1993) describes how at the time of the revelation of the Qur'an, women who belonged to wealthy and powerful tribes were veiled "and secluded as an indication of protection". Wadud-Muhsin makes a cultural interpretation of *hijab* as affording women who are not economically advantaged the right to modesty as well "however it is observed in various societies" (Wadud- Muhsin 1993:10). To back up this position she quotes the Yusuf Ali translation of the Qur'an Surah 24:31 concerning the parts of the body which may be

exposed as “what (must ordinarily) appear”. This allows for a more flexible interpretation from culture to culture. The Qur’an acknowledges the virtue of modesty and demonstrates it through the prevailing practices. In Wadud-Muhsin’s view, the principle of modesty is important - not the veiling and seclusion which were manifestations particular to that context. According to all these writers *hijab* is based either on cultural practices which they see as separate from Islam or upon historic detail relating to the Prophet’s wives.

Stowasser (1984) and Mernissi (1995) both write about the spacial meaning of *hijab* as “the sum total of practices connected with the seclusion of women” (Stowasser 1984:32) which “identifies the woman trespassing beyond her assigned private space as someone who does not belong” (Mernissi 1995:42). According to Mernissi, veiling women is “veiling resistance” (Mernissi 1994:85). Denise Kandiyoti (1997) expresses a similar view by suggesting that in Iran the veil and segregation are a means of social control. All these writers see *hijab* as retrogressive and a means through which men oppress women.

Yet even if *hijab* were/is a masculine imposition it may not be necessary to decide for all time that *hijab* is either ultimately liberating or oppressive, justified or not justified by the Qur’an, but to recognise that women can and do make subversive and feminist readings of patriarchal discourses. Oppressive readings can be turned on their heads. What is collusion in one context may be viewed as resistance in another. Karam quotes Michel Foucault who wrote : “I’m not positing a substance of power. I’m simply saying: as soon as there’s a relation of power there’s a possibility of resistance. We’re never trapped by power: it’s always possible to modify its hold, in determined conditions and following a precise strategy”⁶. Karam sees Islamist’s defiance (in Egypt) to state laws not only as resistance but as a form of power. Karam is not alone in this view of women and Islamism in the Middle East as a form of resistance (see Afshar 1998, Ask and Tjomsland 1998). Karam writes how Foucault has provided a means of seeing the female body “as a site of disciplinary power....To ground this in Egyptian praxis, Islamists both male and female, are also using the body as a site of power; whence their views on the necessity of veiling” (Karam:29). So rather than being read as a sign of oppression *hijab* is also a symbol of defiance and of rejection of the Westernised way. A

poststructuralist analysis then has been used, not only to define *hijab* as “an inscription of power relations on women’s bodies” (Brenner 1996:670) but equally the same theoretical base may be used to suggest that the veil is a sign of resistance which has potential for “destabilizing and refiguring those relations of power” (Brenner: 670). Some feminists see *hijab* in this light. Islamist women as well as Islamist activists for Women's Rights see the *hijab* in a positive light.

The interpretation of *hijab* as something which is thrust upon women by men and as something women would not choose for themselves is read as an exclusion of women from the world of men. Yet this architectural separation of women from men, frequently perceived negatively, can be restated from the female point of view as the exclusion of men from the world of women (Oakley 1982: 332). Oakley quotes a heartwarming account of this separation from Makhoulf (1979: 28-9) as an illustration. She describes the exclusion ritual of *tafrita*, a social gathering in the Yemen for women where no men are allowed. Makhoulf describes how the women arrive all veiled in black and remove their cloaks at the door:

The women wear their best clothes and display their jewellery.... Upon entering a women's *majlis* (sitting room) one is taken by the glimmer of all the colours and brocades, by the chatter and music, the pungent smell of tobacco, the heady smell of incense, the sweet fragrance of perfume Women enjoy smoking the mada (water pipe) and about one third chew qat (a stimulant shrub) which, they say, cools the body and relaxes it after the fatigues of the day. There may be some riddle guessing, story-telling and joking at a *tafrita*. Always there is music... (Makhoulf 1979: 22-23 in Oakley: 332).

Oakley writes how an ‘early warning’ system operates with regard to the intrusion of men into the gathering “Any man entering a house where a *tafrita* is in progress “is required to say “Allah! Allah!” loudly a number of times while climbing the stairs of his house, so that the women hearing him, are able to change their compartment and cover their faces before he sees them’ (Makhoulf: 28-29 in Oakley 333). Oakley writes “This exclusion ritual contrasts with the simpler and more common entry of a veiled female into an all-male social group. While serving meals, for instance, women are able to learn a great deal about male society, whereas men are not allowed silently to witness female society in the same way” (Oakley:333). This surely is the whole point of interest here. The feminist enterprise is not to establish for all time whether *hijab* is or is not oppressive but to look at ways in which Muslim women may and do use it to their own advantage.

Why is *hijab* such a potent symbol of Islam?

The discourse which relates to the position of women in Islam is a minefield, loaded with political, economic and religious agendas, both inside and outside Islam. This state of affairs has its roots, largely, in colonial history and Christian expansionism. For instance, under the British occupation, which began in 1882, it was in the interests of Britain that Egypt should continue to supply raw materials, particularly cotton, to British manufacturers. The presence of the colonials accentuated class divisions. The beneficiaries of British reform and involvement in European capitalism were the European residents and the Egyptian upper and the new middle classes; the lower classes were the losers. Therefore attitudes towards Western ways were class linked (Ahmed 1992:147). Islamic practices in relation to women were viewed through Western eyes as inferior to Western customs (Ahmed:149). Ahmed points to how the colonial establishment in Egypt, while opposing British feminism, appropriated the politics and language of feminism "and redirected it, in the service of colonialism, towards Other men and the cultures of Other men" (Ahmed:151). Cromer who was the British Consul General and champion of the unveiling of Egyptian women was, in England, founding member and sometime President of the Men's League for Opposing Women's Suffrage" (Ahmed:152). The outcome of colonial interest in liberating oppressed Muslim women produced in the minds of many Muslims, a close association between feminism and cultural imperialism and neo-imperialism (Kandiyoti 1991:7).

Attempts to remove *hijab* by legislation or by force have only served to reinforce the potency of the veil as a symbol of Islamic revival. Lama Abu Odeh has written how young women in Jordan, Algeria and Egypt who adopt Islamic dress signify their affiliation to revivalist movements by wearing the veil in a way which is different from the more liberal style of their mothers. Many women of the previous generation showed some of their hair. The 'scarf', of what, Odeh describes as 'fundamentalist' dress, typically shows no hair at all (Odeh 1993:27). As identifying a Muslim man by his dress is frequently impossible, women through their visibility act as the emblems of Islamic Revival; by their attire and decorum they confirm the degree of Islamification of the group (Odeh :26). This visibility means that, especially in a non-Muslim society, the conspicuously Muslim woman becomes an ambassador for

Islam⁷. The veil has become signifier of so much more than modesty; for whatever reasons women wear the veil, it is seen as a political statement. This in turn means that the 'scarf' becomes a target of those who would wish to disrupt Islam, even in the present day and ultimately serves only further to reinforce the power of *hijab*.

In the twentieth century, as described in Chapter One, secularisers like Ataturk in Turkey and Reza Shah in Iran brought in dress reforms as part of their programmes for modernisation. The greater the attempts to remove *hijab*, for instance when the Shah's soldiers used bayonets to remove women's veils (Armstrong 1998: 1113), the more women adopted Islamic dress and the *hijab* became even more strongly linked with an anti-secularist agenda and more deeply embedded as a symbol of Islam.

The *hijab*, in the Muslim world, although not exclusive to revivalist movements, has become a signifier of initiation for young women into Islamist movements. It also fends off male intrusions and gives a sense of 'untouchability'. Odeh points out how, in the Middle East, public sympathy is frequently with the veiled woman and that the knock-on effect is for the non-veiled woman to feel powerless in the face of sexual harassment. This increases the pressure on non-revivalist women to conform. Feminists in the Arab world are usually middle class and able to avoid such harassment through having their own cars (Odeh:29). The veil gives an immediate solution for women who have to travel by public transport and walk in the streets (Odeh:32). In Egypt, some poor students have not only adopted the veil as a means of avoiding sexual harassment but also because they cannot afford expensive Western clothes bought by the upper classes (Turner 1994:92). Bryan Turner writes that an upper middle class form of the veil has even become fashionable in some parts of Cairo (Turner 1994:92). The gain is an instant solution for women seeking work or education but the loss is the implication that women should minimize their contact with men, which, professionally, puts women in a liminal position.

Symbolic meanings are, however, complex and subject to change. Turner gives the example of the veil during the Iranian revolution, the wearing of which -

"signified opposition to the (Shah's) regime, adherence to Islam and political commitment to Shi'ism. The veil however also had a practical function, since it was difficult to identify women

individually on the part of the secret service while they were veiled. In the aftermath of the revolution, on a global scale, the veil has come to signify a general commitment to Islamic fundamentalism" (Turner:91).

Further, In her study of exiled Iranian women, one of Poya's interviewees suggested that women from the deprived sector gained status and were enabled to become visible in public work through the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 (Poya 1992:158). These examples indicate some of the different meanings which are taken on by the veil. They are different not only according to geographical context but also in terms of time. Symbolic meaning varies with the specificities of location and socio-economic status and in relation to the constructions placed upon it by the observer.

Lama Abu Odeh has written how in Jordan, Algeria and Egypt in the 1970s, Western women's clothes carried a "capitalist" construction of the female body: one that is sexualized, objectified, thingified", by being identified with consumerism. Because capitalism co-existed with pre-capitalist social formations in post-colonial societies "women's bodies were simultaneously constructed 'traditionally': 'chattelized' ..., terrorized as trustees of family (sexual) honour" (Odeh:27). This led to a conflictual situation between 'seductive' and 'asexual' formulations of the body which resulted in the impossible balancing act of being the "attractive prude" (Odeh:28)

Not only is Islamic dress a solution to the above dilemma but young women in Jordan, Algeria and Egypt who adopt Islamic dress signify their affiliation to revivalist movements by wearing the veil in a way which is different from the style in which it was worn by their mothers. Suzanne Brenner writes that Islamic activists in Java can read the beliefs of a woman who wears *jilbab* (Women's Islamic clothing) by the way she wears it. For instance, they can tell what activist group she belongs to (Brenner 1996: 691 note 1).

The emblematic status of *hijab* cannot be avoided. Karam writes with regard to Egypt today: "There are no unveiled Islamist women" and she goes on to describe the various degrees of veiling. These range from *hijab* where the scarf covers the head and neck and any 'body wear' covers the arms and legs, to *khimar*, a wider round scarf of various lengths with the front of the scarf pulled down to conceal the forehead, the "rest of the clothing for the khimar centres on a shapeless one-piece, one

colour garment, usually a dull grey, blue, brown or black", (sometimes gloves are worn) through to *niqab* "which consists mainly of a complete face cover with a narrow opening (the opening may be simply two slits for the eyes).... The scarf in this case may fall just short of the dress worn underneath, which is long, shapeless and black, worn to the ground. The *munaqaba* usually wears black gloves as well. Needless to say, the *niqab* is the most advanced stage of commitment to a version of 'Islam'" (Karam 1998:135). Supposedly there is an equation between the degree and kind of veiling and the woman's commitment to revivalist Islam and how far she is prepared to go in terms of her commitment.

In 'First Sex' (1994), a documentary on Channel 4⁸, women in Turkey who wear *hijab* were interviewed. Wearing the scarf in a situation where it is banned for public sector employees was not a means of furthering ones career. An out of work teacher was interviewed. She was not allowed to wear the scarf to work in a school and the *hijab* was banned in universities. Yet in 1996 Nilufer Gole⁹, who must have been researching her book at the same time as the above documentary was made, writes how wearing *hijab* in Turkey helped students gain status. She writes:

Paradoxically, the veiled students, who owe their newly acquired class status and social recognition to their access to secular education, also empower themselves through their claim on Islamic knowledge and politics. Veiled students, as new female actors of Islamism, acquire and aspire for "symbolic capital"¹⁰ of two different sources: religious and secular. Their recently acquired visibility, both on university campuses and within Islamist movements, indicates women's appropriation of this new symbolic capital and the emergence of a new figure, the female Islamist intellectual (Gole:5).

So these two different things, in terms of divergent responses to their dress, seem to have been happening at the same time in Turkey for Islamist women. On the one hand they were being marginalised and on the other they were perceived as being icons of resistance. Yesim Arat has also suggested that the promotion of the 'individual right' of a woman to wear *hijab* in a society which discriminates against it might be a kind of Trojan horse which imports a strand of liberalism into Islamic discourse in Turkey (Arat 1990:21). She sees this agenda implied in *Kadin ve Aile* (Woman and Family) which "might well be initiating its clientele into ideologies which in the long run can be used to challenge the confines of Islam" (Arat:15). Here is an example of the influence of liberal and feminist discourses which render the call for a return to 'tradition' a changed, and ever-changing discourse. The *hijab* has a chequered career and is a focus of political forces. At times it bestows

status in relation to the conventions of the society in which it is worn and at times it puts women in a peripheral position. It may do both simultaneously within the same society but in different contexts. Further Islamic dress has for many become the badge of resistance against Western consumerist culture. The fact that it is read as a sign of politico-religious allegiance in the revivalist context is unavoidable.

Hijab in Britain

In present day Britain, there are many different ways of wearing the headscarf; some ways are traditional and associated with the diverse Muslim cultures from which women come. It is the women who deliberately *choose* to wear *hijab* in the cause of Islamic revival who are the subject of this section of my thesis and not those who cover themselves through unquestioned tradition. In Britain, Islamic revivalist dress tends to take the form of wearing the *hijab* so that it covers the forehead and is pinned beneath the chin, below which loose body covering leaves only the hands exposed. But there are other ways or degrees of wearing *hijab* and some women cover themselves completely. There is a difference in say, adopting *hijab* in a present day liberal democracy and an Islamic State where it is mandatory or in a situation where wearing the *hijab* officially prevents employment in state institutions as has been the case in Turkey. In Britain, the wearing of Islamic dress is a sign of difference and non-conformity. Contrary to the view that Islamic revivalist women who wear *hijab* are passive victims, in order to wear Islamic dress in Britain today, they have to be bold and intrepid.

Like Brenner, who is writing about Islamic activists who adopt Islamic dress in Java, I have found my Muslim interviewees to be strong and assertive women. In Java, as in Britain, Islamic dress is neither legitimated by the State, nor is it "traditional" (Brenner :690). As identifying a Muslim man by his dress is frequently impossible the women, through their visibility, act as the emblems of Islamic Revival. By their attire and decorum they verify the strength of the Islamification of the group. Typically in Britain today, revivalist Muslim sisters wear *hijab* (in terms of the scarf) but there are those who cover themselves further. The diversity of ways of wearing *hijab* in Britain was evident at an Islamic Awareness Exhibition talk given at the University of Leeds on the evening of 14th November 1996.

The women had their own entrance and sat on one side of the auditorium according to the requirement for spacial separation and they wore the *hijab* in a diversity of ways. A few sisters who were completely covered in black, others were wearing the scarf in what I have come to see as the 'revivalist' manner, that is, fastened under the chin and covering the chest so that the whole face is visible but no hair and no neck can be seen. Then there were women who fastened the scarf, turban like, so it covers all the hair but exposes the neck. A few women were completely covered in black veiling, from top to toe, with no opening for their eyes. I discovered later, that one of my interviewees who had suggested she would meet me at the talk was dressed in this way. I was unable to recognise her until she approached me. I had previously met her at her house where she had been wearing the scarf. Interestingly, she said rather indignantly "I waved to you" as though I should have responded but the fact was I neither recognised her nor, had I seen her waving, would I have been aware that she was waving to me. This made me realise that a woman who wears such a veil is able to claim the gaze, to see out and identify people. Perhaps there is a feeling that the recognition should be mutual.

Experiences of women who wear *hijab* in Britain today

Where a woman in an Islamic country could be criticised for wearing too little, Muslim women in Britain may get criticised for wearing too much. In order to try to understand further how it is to wear *hijab* in Britain today, the particular questions in the snowball questionnaire which are the main focus of this chapter were: "Have you had any problems, in secularised society, following the modesty codes of your religion? If 'yes' specify difficulties"; "How does following the modesty codes of your religion help in your everyday life?" and a further question which asked "Have you experienced any problems in relation to your religious choice and your ethnicity?"¹¹

Out of twenty nine Muslim respondents who completed questionnaires, thirteen answered the first question in the affirmative but a further six respondents mentioned Islamic dress in answers to the third question. In all there were sixteen answers regarding the difficulties encountered through choosing to wear Islamic dress and thirteen of these specifically mentioned the *hijab*.

The issues were as follows: five wrote that wearing *hijab* was a problem but didn't specify in what way, two said they met with hostility through their dress, two had met discrimination in school and employment - for instance one respondent said she had experienced difficulty in getting a job because of it. But she ended on a more optimistic note: "Once I found a job, they (colleagues) had no problems. In fact (they) realized I was human like them" - four wrote that they had met with overt racial harassment and/or abuse. This included two white (one English and one Irish) converts to Islam. One of these mentioned abuse where she lives but wrote that in more middle class areas "I get seriously avoided as if I might do something terribly embarrassing".

Another respondent, the daughter of an Indian father and an English mother, wrote how the inability to 'locate' an English Muslim worked in two ways, some members of the white community hurled racial abuse whilst the "Many Muslims, more influenced by their cultures than faith find it hard to comprehend an 'English Muslim'". An Irish Muslim who described racial abuse wrote: "Since I became a Muslim and adopted Islamic dress including the scarf (I hate the term veil) I have been called many things some of which I don't care to mention here... 'white Paki' being the cleanest so far. I have been spoken to as though I neither speak nor understand English". The experience of this respondent is not unlike that of Naima Radouane a 41 year old woman who felt convinced that she should wear the *chador* and to whom Q-News devoted an article. Naima reports how she has been called names, lunged at with a knife, thrown off a bus and old acquaintances have turned their backs on her¹². In the next issue of Q-News a contributor writes:

Naima Radouane 'turns heads wherever she goes'. Where is the modesty in that? Although due to her choice of clothes no one would be 'lusting after her body', it is quite clear she is facing hostility because of what she wears. However if she was interested in being modest she could wear normal loose fitting western clothes. If she did this she would not be bullied¹³.

Indeed, the way to become less visible (if that is the aim) is probably to wear something beige from Marks and Spencers. But there is an interesting issue in here, how a Muslim woman can be confronted on the streets of Britain for wearing too many clothes and for not revealing enough of her body. This is modesty in reverse.

I imagine there are not many women who dress like Naima Radouane in the locality, but to local people who are used to communicating with a face which bears many of the signs of communication

and many clues to the nuances of what is being said, including cues for speech and on how one's own words are being accepted, the blank wall of the chador might be unnerving. No doubt the responses to the chador are fuelled by media reports which represent it as being inevitably forced upon women and as part of a scheme to control women as in the case of the Taliban in Afghanistan. But Naima Radouane herself is quoted as saying "The years of my life I spent not dressed like this I used to walk in the street like anyone else without any problems whatsoever. People would stop to have a chat and would often compliment my baby daughter".¹⁴ The reader is not informed how Naima used to dress but presumably she was still a Muslim at the time when she was not ostracised. This kind of statement was also made by my interviewees, especially two Irish and one English converts to Islam, in a group interview at the home of Linda. They spoke of situations ranging from abusive to comical relating to their experiences of how they are perceived. Like two respondents to the questionnaire, 'Elaine' said she hated the stereotype of "head scarfed, subdued and repressed". Elaine a woman in her mid-thirties, previously a practising Catholic and a former 'trainee blue button' at the stock exchange said that at that point in her life she had been "able to drink any one under the table". She is a strong and expressive woman and it would be difficult to imagine how anyone who had the opportunity to talk with her could imagine her to be "subdued and repressed". 'Sarah', an Irish convert to Islam, suggested that people in Ireland think that women who wear headscarves are nuns. She recounted how a Sister who is Irish gets mistaken for a nun when she goes back to Ireland and often gets offered a seat on the train. Miriam another interviewee also commented on similar kinds of confusion. She said:

"Some people cross the road. They don't all know I'm Muslim. Some people come up to me and say 'Oh I thought you were Mormon'. And other people think I'm a nun and wonder why I have a child... when my little boy says 'Mummy'.... If you are foreign it is probably easier be taken for a Muslim and its probably easier because people who are foreign are expected to wear funny clothes. For instance, a Hindu woman with a sari is not seen as particularly strange. But for an English woman to wear English clothes but to put a little square metre of scarf on her head is considered just not done".

Linda said that when she makes a telephone appointment to see someone who does not know her "you try to find language to warn people that you are a Muslim". She said "You turn up at the office and their mouth drops. You are different from what they expected and they go 'Just a minute' while they regain their equilibrium". A respondent wrote how she thought that due to her dress and her ethnicity "I am stereotyped and therefore am having to constantly justify and explain my

actions/beliefs". Another respondent described how she was, as a student, cut off from interaction with other students: "The main problems are not due to my interaction with society, but rather the way society sees me. I want to be able to feel safe, without verbal/physical abuse from people. Also a lot of people don't seem to understand how Muslim women may interact with other people and student life revolves around the bar".

Although British society defines itself as liberal it clearly expects women to have particular experiences and to define themselves in specific ways. Most of all it requires that women should be object of the gaze. As the ancient Greek myth of Medusa, a Gorgon who could turn a beholder to stone with a glance testifies, men should beware of the feminine gaze. Traditionally in Western culture women are the object of the gaze and not the subject, a view that has been reflected and transmitted through a long history of Western art where women are displayed in the fully nude, reclining, passive position. This pattern of "male looking/female 'being looked-at-ness' " has been reinforced by the cinematic images of Hollywood (Mulvey 1975). The disruption of this pattern of the masculine gaze is not taken lightly by many women or men. This is because "the panoptical male connoisseur" has been internalised by most women who "stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgement. Woman lives in her body as seen by... an anonymous patriarchal other" (Bartky 1988:72). This disruption of the established hierarchy of the gaze happens especially when a woman is entirely covered because, unsurveilled, she is able to claim the right of scrutiny. Haleh Afshar has pointed out the 'gaze reversal' implied in the practice of veiling: the woman, in covering herself, avoids being 'object of the gaze' and instead looks out, becoming the spectator with free access to gaze upon men.¹⁶ This is only the case if the veiling is complete. If she frees herself from the masculine gaze the Muslim sister becomes the object of the non-Muslim gaze instead. The *hijab*, as generally worn by my respondents and interviewees, still arouses a degree of antipathy from the 'host' community.

The problem, however, does not come from the non-Muslim community alone. The teacher of the GCSE in Islam group from the Mosque in the South of England suggested that the girls who were from Pakistani and Moroccan families who wear *hijab* to school find themselves being treated with hostility by some of the Pakistani boys. For this reason she thought that the Islamophobia Report¹⁶ did not go

far enough in that it treated aggression as coming only from the non-Muslim community.

Ameena Mohammed appears on the front page of Q-News, high-kicking and wearing a tracksuit and *hijab*. She is Britain's first female Muslim Thai boxer¹⁷. In the same issue, Dr Zaki Badawi, described as a 'liberal' of the Muslim College London, advises that Ameena "will make the hijab look ridiculous". Ameena comments "Personally, I think a large extent of the objection to my doing Thai boxing has its roots in the restrictive attitude of many cultured Muslims who have a more narrow and restricted stereotype of a Muslim woman than even many non-Muslims. If mixed training sessions were not a problem they still would come up with something else".¹⁸

Perhaps Dr. Badawi's response was fuelled by concern about a different kind of reaction to *hijab* from non-Muslims. This different response was voiced by Zainab, a member of Young Muslims UK who was born into a Muslim home to British parents of South Asian origin. She suggested that wearing the scarf is seen by non-Muslims as "very unBritish" and women who wear it are even seen as "fanatics" or "terrorists". This perception is also expressed in a contribution to the University of Essex Islamic Society Website, which quotes Naheed Mustafa, a Canadian-born Muslim woman who explains "In the Western world, the hijab has come to symbolize either forced silence or radical, unconscionable militancy. Actually, it's neither. It is simply a woman's assertion that judgement of her physical person is to play no role whatever in social interaction"¹⁹. The idea that women in Islamic dress may be viewed as terrorists was echoed by two respondents who completed questionnaires. This perception which is the opposite extreme to the "subdued and repressed" model no doubt owes something to the linking of Islam, fundamentalism and fanaticism and "un-reason" by the media.²⁰ Perhaps if a woman does not fit into the 'subdued' stereotype she can then be construed as exemplifying the aggressive opposite. There may also be a kind of racism here, because white Muslim respondents and interviewees did not suggest that they were regarded in this way. Many non-Muslims appear to believe that a white Muslim woman cannot have made a dynamic choice for Islam and that they therefore clearly match the 'subdued and oppressed' model. The veil hides their femininity and they are regarded as a traitor to the race because it is deemed that they have denied their 'superiority'. Mary Maynard has pointed out that "It should not be forgotten, for instance, that it

is not necessary to be black to experience racism, as the experiences of the Jews and the Irish and current events in Europe testify" (Maynard 1994a:21).

The comments of the respondents and interviewees show some of the difficulties of interaction within a society which is largely nervous of Islam. Given that there are problems associated with wearing the scarf, why do some women choose to wear it? Answers to the questionnaire revealed that eleven of twenty nine respondents felt that following the modesty codes of their religion meant that they gained respect. Three of these said they gained respect for wearing the *hijab*. Obviously this respect must come from a different sector than the hurlers of abuse. The younger women and those who were at school also said they gained in respect. Eight said that they were protected from sexual harassment or from being seen as a sexual object, one of these also commented that it helped her not to act in a flirtatious manner and that men "either ignore me completely or if they have to engage, they can only do so with my face/brain". Four more respondents wrote how because of Islamic dress they were not judged by how they looked. As one respondent put it: "(It) liberates me from the bondage of being a commodity". Two respondents wrote how wearing Islamic dress reminded them of their religious duties.

'Miriam', who is 44, the daughter of an Egyptian father and an English mother, has been a Muslim all her life. She explained in an interview why she had chosen to wear the scarf. Miriam had commented that she wore *hijab* to avoid *fitna* (strife) and on the surface this sounds like an unassertive kind of position to take. She suggested that the identifiableness of Muslim women meant that "You have to behave" and that by being immediately recognizable women have to be more courageous. Miriam had not always worn *hijab*. She used to find it difficult and showed me old photographs of herself wearing hats and polo neck sweaters. Miriam, who in an earlier chapter is quoted as describing submission to her husband in marriage as an Islamic requirement went on to describe how she had chosen the wear the *hijab* against the wishes of her husband:

my husband was a bit, to be honest... was a bit worried and nervous when four years ago I said that I would like to wear it properly. And he said 'you are going to attract attention to yourself' and it is unfair if you attract attention to yourself because I, being a foreigner, get a lot of attention anyway and if we sit

in a hotel, people will stare at us doubly.' And I said well 'I'm sorry about that', but I felt I had to be true to myself.

So Miriam confounds the stereotype by wearing the scarf against her husband's wishes. When I asked Miriam what made her start wearing the scarf four years ago she replied:

It was mainly the Bosnian War. It was also, I had met Muslims at the University Mosque, who were determined that there was a correct way to wear the scarf and what I was wearing was a stage towards it but it wasn't really correct. That was one factor. But what gave me the courage to do it was when I realised that just around the corner from us in Europe there were these people being killed because they were Muslims. (I met Bosnian Muslims here in England), most of them were not aware of much of their religion, they used to go round to the pub with the Croats, they didn't wear scarves, they didn't identify themselves much, the majority, (as Muslims) and they were being killed for it. And I thought 'my gosh' if this sort of thing can happen then it doesn't matter really to blend in ... there's no point. I would like to stand up and be counted. Here I am, there's no sort of beating around the bush and hiding it and in that case I think I will wear the scarf because if you're going to die for it you're going to die. I mean, I'm not suggesting that the British, hopefully, would ever turn like that. It just seemed such an incredible thing so close to home and it changed my psychology and it gave me that extra courage to stand up for my convictions.

Miriam explodes a number of myths. Firstly, she is a white, English Muslim who is not a convert. She is not a member of the British South Asian communities. Secondly, her husband did not force her to wear *hijab*, it was not the result of meek co-operation with a demand on the part of her husband, in fact he was reluctant for her to do so. Miriam, an educated woman with an M Phil in Religious Studies, decided upon it herself in response to witnessing the plight of other Muslims in the Bosnian War, who were being persecuted for their Muslim identity even though they had not adopted what she would regard as an Islamic way of life, and she had to assert herself against her husband in order to "stand up and be counted". The treatment she receives, as a middle class English Muslim (above, where Miriam describes people crossing the road to avoid meeting her) is most interesting from the point of view of the observer. Miriam's comments are in keeping with those of the respondent who wrote how more middle class people tend to studiously ignore her as if she is going to do something "terribly

embarrassing”.

As Miriam pointed out in the interview, she knew punks who had converted to Islam who used to have shaved heads who were able to adopt the headscarf with ease. This is because the veil, in the context of British society, rather than hiding a woman works in reverse and turns her into a spectacle. This is where the veil “destabilizes and refigures power relations”,²¹ not only by producing anxiety in some non-Muslims who, for instance, cannot understand how a white woman could choose to wear *hijab* but also in disrupting power relations within Islam through this assertive act. Miriam shows herself to be either braver or more 'Islamic' than her husband or both.

For me, the comments of converts to Islam are revealing in that they know how it is to be on both sides of the fence. For instance a respondent experienced discrimination by non-Muslims because of her ethnicity, on the grounds that she is a white Muslim. Some non-Muslims found themselves unable to accept the idea of a white woman wearing *hijab*. The white Muslims find themselves crossing a boundary and thrust in situations which, to some degree, parallel the realities which British Muslims, who's parents originated from South Asia, Africa or the Middle East, may have experienced all their lives. As the youngest respondent, a thirteen year old Moroccan girl at a school in Surrey put it, “I experience racism everyday, especially at school because some people think that because of my religion I am very different”. Yet at the same time she writes how her religion helps her in everyday living and the problems that she might face during the day. Wearing the scarf in the UK clearly takes courage yet the benefits outlined by respondents and interviewees, for them, outweigh the drawbacks.

The issue of the division of spaces was apparent at the talk of the Islamic Society of the University of Leeds mentioned above. I have to say it felt comfortable to sit amongst women and the system worked whereby everyone could ask questions of the speakers because questions in writing were collected up and taken to the panel. But there are positive and negative things to be said about women's space. There is a problem if it puts women in a liminal position and excludes them from policy making. However, my interviewee Linda thought that non-Muslim perceptions of the division

of spaces were laughable. She related how she and her husband had gone to speak to some social workers as consultants on Arab culture. A member of the audience asked a question about women not being allowed to sit in rooms with men. Linda explained that if the plumber was coming to her house, she would arrange for her husband to be there. The social worker asked: "Don't you feel you've lost your autonomy as a woman?" Linda laughed at this idea which she found absurd and pointed out that she would stay at home if a female visitor were coming to see her husband. Some then see the concept of the veil as protected space and contest the notion of an architecture of oppression. Oakley (1982) following Makhoul (1979) makes a good and unusual, for a Western feminist of that time, case in this respect.

In the context of the UK the woman who wears *hijab*, in averting the masculine gaze, becomes the focus of non-Muslim scrutiny and speculation. Yet although on the one hand the veil makes the wearer stand out as different, at the same time she avoids the scrutiny given to a sexual object and being judged by her appearance. My interviewees and respondents to the questionnaire indicated that although there are many ways in which they gain benefits through wearing the *hijab* even though they also have to deal with antipathy from non-Muslims and some Muslims.

2. Modesty and head covering in Christianity and the New Christian Churches

Modesty codes are not the same thing in Christianity as they are in Islam and, further, there are differences *within* the religions. In Christianity there is a teaching on head covering in the Epistle of St. Paul 1 Cor 11 v 4-11:

Any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head disgraces his head, but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled disgraces her head - it is one and the same thing as having her head shaved. For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or to be shaved, she should wear a veil. For a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man. Indeed man was not made for the sake of woman but woman for the sake of man. For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels (NRSV).

Although currently some restorationist churches take this directive on as universal and therefore as applicable to themselves, in general in the Christian churches this is not the case. It is interesting to speculate why this might be. It is after all, a modern change in interpretation. Pre- Vatican II Catholic

women could not enter a church if their heads were not covered and, living in Wales as I currently do, I still see women going to Welsh chapel on Sundays wearing their hats.

At face it is difficult to see how anyone could make a feminist reading of such a text yet Biblical feminists and others attempt to do so by a number of means. The first of these means is to regard the directive as contingent to that particular time and situation in Corinth which Paul is addressing, that is, the particular problems associated with the new church community many of whom would have been pagan converts from a multiplicity of mystery religions. Other means include contesting the translation of particular words or by making a subversive reading, in this case, choosing to read the passage as giving women a voice.

A New Testament text which deals not so much with head covering as with feminine submission, hairdressing and modesty is 1 Peter 3:7:

Wives, in the same way, accept the authority of your husbands, so that, even if some of them do not obey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives' conduct, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair, and by wearing gold ornaments or fine clothing, rather, let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God's sight. It was in this way long ago that the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves by accepting the authority of their husbands. Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham and called him lord. You have become her daughters as long as you do what is good and never let fears alarm you.

The first part of this passage has been discussed in the previous chapter on feminine submission. The Biblical feminist Catherine Kroeger has drawn attention to the fact that this proscription on braiding may be connected to the practice of braided hair being seductive in the cult of Isis and she cites Apuleius Golden Ass 111.8-9; Xenophon, *Anthia and Habrocomes* 1.11.5-6 as evidence (Kroeger forthcoming)²². The references to Sarah might be differently read by Womanist theologians. What Sarah did in making her slave Hagar have a child by Abraham seems to the modern mind dreadful (Genesis 16: 1-6). Womanist theologian Delores S. Williams (1993) has linked this example of the oppression of a black woman with the possibility that black women today in the USA might be forced into being the surrogate mothers of white babies. So how can Sarah be seen as admirable or as a model for the behaviour of modern women? But Catherine Kroeger makes a Biblical feminist reading of the passage. She writes, "Even the best of biblical ancestors had their flaws, and Sarah

should be claimed by Christian women although she may not always have been admirable. The injunction is remarkable, however, in naming a spiritual ancestor who is female rather than male” (Kroeger forthcoming see note 23).

Modesty

Head covering in the Christian case is not necessarily associated with modesty and can be interpreted as having a dual function. In the same way as *hijab* may be read as being either oppressive or liberating, head covering in Christianity may be interpreted either as a means of placing women under masculine authority or may be understood, in the Evangelical feminist context, as giving a woman a voice. The latter interpretation will be discussed below. Nevertheless head covering is not generally an issue in Christianity in Britain today in the way that it is in Islam and Christian respondents and interviewees do not commonly dress in a way that is obviously emblematic of their religious commitment in the way that Islamic revivalist Sisters do. Nevertheless, on my two visits to a Jesus Fellowship community in Sheffield, all the residents, male and female and one friendly dog, were wearing bright red crosses around their necks. This is not related to modesty but certainly carves them out as members of Jesus Fellowship when they are in public places. The extent to which there is or is not a modesty code associated with dress varies from group to group. My respondents and interviewees from Jesus Fellowship are the ones with a most recognisable dress code. That is the women wear long skirts, no make-up and “sensible shoes”²³. But a number of respondents took my question on modesty to mean ‘propriety’ which is probably more appropriate in the Christian case in Britain today. Although some of the Christian respondents mentioned coming up against discrimination on the part of secularised society, they do not represent an obvious counter-culture.

Head covering

The shift away from head covering for worship amongst Christian women appears to be largely a modern one. Further, in Catholicism, because of nuns’ use of veiling, head covering has been popularly associated with celibacy. Therefore there is an association of the veil in Christian discourse

with complete and continuing sexual restraint. Head covering remains an issue in some house church groups and independent churches. As in the Muslim case, texts which are given a patriarchal interpretation and which even lend themselves to such interpretations can be framed differently and a feminist reading made.

Valerie Griffiths, a founder member of the Biblical feminist organisation Men Women and God, in an interview²⁴ made a radical reading of the Pauline passage. She pointed out, as described above in Chapter Four, that Paul in 1 Cor 11, clearly thought it permissible for women to prophesy which she described as “not just foretelling, but discerning the message of God to give his people”. Gilbert Bilezikian (1997) an Evangelical writer who supports Biblical feminism gives a useful definition of prayer and prophesy (from a believers viewpoint) which supports this view:

Because they involve direct communication with God and from God, prayer and prophecy constitute the essence of worship. By prayer, the worshipper, along with the congregation, gains an entrance into the very presence of God - who then responds by giving His word to the congregation through the person prophesying (Bilezikian:139)

Historically prophecy can be read as a means of self-empowerment for some women (Bynum 1991) (Mack 1992). No believer can argue with the voice of God and this can be used to counter oppressive readings of St. Paul and according to Valerie’s reading, a woman is able to speak God’s word. Previously I had been blinded by my indignation against St. Paul, focusing only on head covering in the Christian context as a means of making women invisible and expressing subjugation to the authority of men and I had not seen that there is a way in which the head covering in the Christian groups could be read as permitting women to speak with a prophetic voice.

Christian responses: modesty

Because the Christian respondents do not generally stand out as being different in terms of their dress there was less Christian response to the question “Have you had any problems, in secularised society, following the modesty codes of your religion? If yes please specify difficulties” In fact, four of forty three Christian respondents thought the modesty code questions did not apply to Christians. For instance, a member of Men Women and God wrote: “Presumably this question is for Muslim women”. Yet the extracts from the New Testament above are not dissimilar from the requirements for modesty

in the Qur'an. It is interesting that the one leads to an elaborate dress code and division of spaces while the biblical requirement regarding dress is mainly ignored yet other requirements such as submission to masculine authority are largely followed within the revivalist and evangelical setting.

Only six Christian respondents to the questionnaire answered that they did experience difficulties in relation to modesty codes and four of these were from Jesus Fellowship. The 'sensible shoes', from my own observations after a number of visits to Jesus Fellowship houses as well as to a meeting of worship, are frequently Doc Martins. Worn with long skirts, this results in a mode of dress which although 'modest' and gendered, could only have emerged out of the styles of the 1980s and 1990s. Two Jesus Fellowship members wrote that they were ridiculed by non-Jesus Fellowship people for not wearing trousers. One of these extended the problem into a misunderstanding of her moral behaviour:

In my faith, I dress modestly, don't drink, don't go to discos, don't go to movies, in that, my friends who are not Christians do not understand, think I'm stuffy and we don't have much in common as all I want to do is please God. All they want to do is please themselves. Even though I made it a point to keep in contact and see them, they didn't understand my faith.

A member of Pioneer Network, a woman in her early fifties who is in a church leadership role, wrote that in her previous work as a hospital manager: "in relationship to behaviour at management conferences etc., I have sometimes felt ostracised by not joining in at every level socially and have had to work harder at finding positive areas to relate and retain rapport". A twenty year old member of Christians in York wrote that she too found herself mocked on account of her behaviour and her refusal to engage in "drinking, drugs, (and) sexuality".

All of these women are perceived to be different through their behaviour and this creates boundaries between themselves and secular friends or colleagues. These divisions are almost like the architectural separations in Islam but these are invisible and interpersonal. There is a similarity here to the comment made by a Muslim respondent who found herself cut off from student life. In this case the code is a kind of invisible *hijab*.

In the Christian setting, the areas of modesty and morality seem to overlap. Although dress does not

mark out the Christians as different their behaviour may do so. The majority of Christian respondents, however, reported no sense of a problem in relation to their 'modesty codes'.

Covering in Christianity

As suggested in a previous chapter, the requirement by some Christian groups that women submit to male authority is also drawn selectively from the teachings of St.Paul. The principle that women through their submission should enhance the masculinity of the men by contrast is, although not initially apparent from a reading of Jesus Army/Jesus Fellowship literature, evident in an article in Jesus Lifestyle. Julie, a convert, describes her previous life - "I wasn't just a feminist, I was sexist against males! " Julie relates how at a small meeting for new converts to Jesus Fellowship -

A woman gave a talk on authority and submission. Her manner was gentle, womanly, peaceful-she carried a joy in just being herself. She talked about God's authority and the authority of the church 'submitting to one another in reverence for Christ'... God had given her a 'wisdom picture' in which she saw the women in the church as a picture of pressed flowers that were 'set in array' or beautifully displayed on card. The brothers in the church were the sturdy frame to protect the lovely picture and also make it more lovely by 'framing it'. The covering of the church was the glass on the top that protected the flowers from damage and dust. Covering and authority were not there to squash the flowers but to display and enhance their beauty²⁵ .

It is interesting that here women are envisaged as being displayed whilst in Islamic revival they are covered by the veil. But the authority of the men becomes like a veil. They are said to 'cover' the women with their authority. The term 'covering' in the restorationist context means 'watching over', or 'protecting'. The term is taken from the story of Japheth who covered Noah's nakedness (shame): Genesis 9:20- 27. Walker writes that 'covering' is not to be understood in purely traditional religious terms. To be covered means that you submit your whole life - religious, social and economic - to your elders and apostles (Walker 1987:209). This kind of covering then, like Islamic segregation in terms of spaces, relates to the social order. But because, in this case, the elders are always male, it is a hierarchical kind of 'covering', with the male 'covering' the female. Maria, a woman of about sixty, who features in the Everyman documentary on the Jesus Fellowship was shown engaged in processing

a mountain of laundry for the brothers and sisters. She refers to this 'covering' when she suggests 'Freedom is knowing I'm looked after and cared for²⁶.'

Walker and Davies see the house church as being unmitigatedly male led (Walker 1985) (Davies 1986). William Davies wrote "Of course, the teaching may vary slightly according to the particular strand of the house church movement, but in general women do not figure in its authority structures, not significantly at any rate. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers and elders are offices for men only" (Davies 1986:66). They were, however, both writing in the 1980s and in more than a decade things can change. For instance I have interviewed a woman who is in church leadership in a Pioneer Network fellowship and there is also a respondent to the questionnaire, a woman who is, likewise, in leadership within the same network. But this is far from typical.

Domestic arrangements frequently follow the pattern where the husband is head of the household: where wives should submit to their husbands and children to their parents (but especially the father) (Ephesians 5:22-6:4) (Davies:61). Davies mentions that some house church meetings require a woman to wear a veil at worship. By doing so, the wife "acknowledges by wearing the veil, even while worshipping, her submission to her husband" (Davies:68). This is in accord with Paul's recommendation in 1 Corinthians 11:5. Here the woman is believed to be dishonouring her head by not wearing a veil when praying or prophesying. According to Davies, in the context of the passage "her head" refers to her husband, and the husband's head is Christ (Davies:68).

This Pauline passage has of course been the root of much debate amongst Biblical feminists who have argued, for instance, that the Greek word *kephale* has been misinterpreted to mean 'head' where the classical meaning is 'source'²⁷ or 'fountainhead' (Bilezikian 1997:137). This argument is made in terms of the understanding of the day regarding reproduction, where the man was considered to be the source of the woman but "seldom did 'head' imply 'chief' or 'boss'" (Kroeger, Evans and Storkey 1995:343) (Kroeger in Gretchen Gaebelein Hull, Appendix III: 267ff). Counter-arguments have been made by Evangelicals who believe their 'hierarchicalist' (masculist) position to be under threat (Piper & Grudem 1991).

Karen, an interviewee and a member of Christians in York, was the only Christian interviewee who had adopted head-covering. She linked the issue of head covering from 1 Cor 11, not with modesty but with "propriety in worship" and said that this is in relation to the issue of "headship". Headship interpreted from the viewpoint, described above, carries the hierarchical view of the relationship between Christ and the church which is reflected in the relationship between men and women in marriage. Those hierarchicalists who wish to campaign for "Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood" argue that "in the fall a major issue is that of role-reversal. It is not simply that Adam sinned: it is that he listened to his wife" (Scott 1994:4)²⁸. From this perspective, that a woman is submissive to masculine leadership and covers her head for worship has implications regarding the redemption of men as well as women. This is because, according to this fundamentalist perspective, creation must be restored to its pre-fall order. This issue has implications not only for marriage but also for the role of women (within such a church as the one of which Karen is a member) in terms of the prioritisation of masculine leadership as well as head covering for women.

According to this interpretation, the woman's 'head' is understood to be the husband whom she will 'shame' if she does not cover her head. Karen said that a lot of the women from her fellowship wear a scarf or a hat on their heads when they are praying or prophesying (which in terms of house church fellowships is unusual). Karen recounted how she had started to do this through praying with two student friends who covered their heads for prayer. She prayed on her own about whether she should cover her head too. Karen related the terms in which she spoke to God. She said she felt a desire to cover her head when she prayed and told God that intellectually she thought she should not because she had understood, according to Martin Scott's (1992) book, that head covering in the New Testament was "a cultural thing", i.e. "that the passage simply deals with the rightness of head-covering for the women of Corinth" (Scott 1994:4). Karen said she asked God to show her clearly if she should cover her head for prayer. So when, two days later, on a train returning home for the summer vacation, she met a recent graduate who was engaged to one of her friends and who brought up the subject of head-covering, Karen must have felt this was surely the answer to prayer. She asked him to explain the passage about head covering to her. He said, "In Corinth there were a lot of prostitutes

who apparently had shaved heads. In 1 Cor II Paul is comparing a women who prays with her head uncovered to a prostitute. The word for 'covered' is best translated as 'veiled'. The way Paul is arguing he isn't saying women should cover because of culture". Karen saw this meeting as providential and, because of the teaching in her particular fellowship concerning submission to male leadership, she accepted the argument and adopted head-covering for prayer.

The question "Have you experienced any problems in relation to your religious choice and your ethnicity?" which elicited a number of answers concerning *hijab* from the Muslim respondents was answered in the affirmative by seven of the Christians. The vast majority of the Christian respondents were white (forty of forty three to my knowledge) but five of the respondents used the question as an opportunity to write about their experiences of prejudice and the opposition of friends and family to their religious choices. I felt that these respondents had misunderstood my question and that this was connected to the problem of whiteness not being seen as a 'racial' identity (Ware 1992). Mary Maynard writes, "It is important to look at the taken-for-granted everydayness of white privilege" (Maynard 1994a:21) which prevents the comfortable from perceiving their European whiteness as an ethnicity. But as Maynard has pointed out, this 'whiteness' is not a homogeneous category and "those labelled one way under certain socio-cultural conditions may find the label changes under others" (Maynard 1994a:21).

But not all Christian respondents were blind to their whiteness. One respondent who described herself as 'Caucasian' wrote how she was ashamed of "Western conceit and intolerance" and as a witness to this sees this as a problem of ethnicity and faith. Another respondent had experienced being "the foreigner" with an "alien religion" whilst a missionary in Japan and like the first five Christians who answered the ethnicity question, added her comment about the intolerance of society in the UK today against committed Christians. Another respondent also wrote in response to the modesty codes question that she had received "a little persecution because of being a Christian" and another remarked how she had lost a job when her boss found out she was a member of Jesus Fellowship. These answers did show a degree of marginalisation of some of the Christians within the work or home situation or socially in terms of rejection by their contemporaries. The social problem seems

to arise particularly from their behaviour in terms of abstinence from alcohol and their restraint regarding sexual activity outside marriage.

Modesty and everyday life

The question "How does following the modesty codes of your religion help you in every day life?" elicited more answers from the Christian respondents than the previous 'modesty' question - seventeen out of forty three Christian respondents in all. Of these, ten answers related either directly or loosely with dress and the other seven, either directly or indirectly with behaviour.

The answers concerned with dress came from a variety of sources, four comments were from Jesus Fellowship members, three from Ichthus, two from Pioneer Network and one from Christians in York. Two of the answers from Jesus Fellowship members concerned with dress were related to an emphasis on gender difference in apparel. One respondent wrote, "God says that men should look like men and women should look like women". This becomes more explicable in relation to a belief in the need for a clarification of gender roles as a prerequisite for redemption. As described above, this relates to the idea that the 'creation order', which 'complementarian' or 'hierarchicalist' Conservative Evangelicals believe was distorted by the fall must, according to their belief, be reestablished by clear gender boundaries and the subjugation of women. 'Margaret', an interviewee from the Jesus Fellowship, explained to me how she had stopped wearing jeans when, one day, she had been mistaken from behind for an elder. As already indicated, in the Jesus Fellowship the elders are men. She had found this mortifying and has worn a skirt ever since. She described this in order to explain that there was not an explicit dress code in the Jesus Fellowship. No one had actually told her to dress the way she does. Eight respondents wrote how they preferred to dress in a modest way which did not attract unwanted attention. One of these, a convert from Hinduism, gave a number of reasons. The first was the desire to avoid unwanted attention from men but the second reason echoes a statement made by Turner (1994) regarding the economic and practical attraction of Islamic dress related to the inexpensive nature of Islamic dress compared to keeping up with fashion as well as a sense of finding an identity. She wrote: "It avoids needing to keep the latest trends and fashions"

(therefore less expensive) and “enables me to find my identity”.

All the other respondents who referred to dress were concerned with pleasing God and/or not upsetting others and not drawing unwanted masculine attention and described how modesty in dress helped them achieve these ends. A member of Ichthus wrote “I believe it is pleasing to God and sensible to dress modestly though my church does not have a formal ‘modesty code’”. Another respondent, a GP, wrote “The code relevant to me is to ensure I do not cause offence to my neighbour, so I dress conservatively at work where patients are of varying ethnicity, some devout Muslims, and I would not bathe topless!”

The comments about dress suggest an often unspoken dress code which may be drawn from the answers of the women who did respond to the modesty questions and from words of the interviewees. My interviewee Margaret, in response to the observation that none of the Jesus Fellowship Sisters I had seen wore make-up, said: “There is no rule about wearing make-up but I just got convinced about it. Then you find people accept you”. So this does seem like an implicit code which transmits itself by approval and acceptance. Regarding dress also, she showed concern, as did some of the Christian and Muslim respondents to the questionnaire, for a perceived inability on the part of men to control their own sexuality. She suggested, “If women are dressed immodestly this is a problem because men are susceptible to what they see. They are more easily stumbled than women”. Frequently, for cultural or whatever other reasons, this proves to be the case but the majority of feminists would have a problem with the idea that women should take responsibility not only for their own sexuality but also for the sexuality of men.

Different churches clearly have different dress codes. On my visit to the Pioneer People office in Cobham to interview Martin Scott, the woman who greeted me at the door wore trousers as well as lipstick. At an interview with ‘Sally’ a church leader of the Pioneer Network in a postindustrial town in South Wales, Sally wore jeans and Doc Martins. She commented, regarding dress, that when she goes to speak somewhere, “I make sure I am acceptable”. This form of acceptability of dress no doubt changes from venue to venue, where she encounters groups which range from male

evangelical ministers to the youth with whom she has a special ministry.

Comments which did not refer to dress (seven in all) related to behaviour which was described severally in terms of not swearing, abstinence from alcohol and not having a sexual relationship outside marriage. One respondent wrote how because of her faith she does not "put people down". Another respondent suggested that the moral code she keeps gives her a sense of purity and acceptability to God; another commented that she felt she did "stand out" and two respondents felt more able to cope with the pressures of life whilst two others found that their moral code gave them boundaries and structure to their lives. This issue of limits to behaviour and guidance is an important one which finds echoes in answers to questions in other sections of the questionnaire. It is an issue which is discussed in the following chapter.

Conclusion

The ways in which women wear or do not wear head covering in the many faith communities which make up Christianity and Islam in Britain today differ according to culture and belief. Even within the revivalist communities there are many differences. In the Christian context head covering can be read in a number of ways, as a sign of celibacy, as a sign of submission to masculine authority or, in a more subversive reading, as a sign that a woman has a right to make prophecy and therefore to the prophetic voice. The fact is that it is possible to make oppressive readings of head covering in both Christianity and Islam. Equally it is possible to make subversive readings which represent head covering as empowering to women. This is significant in that patriarchal discourses may be subjected to feminist readings which overturn their meanings.

In the Christian case, the recent history of Christianity in Britain means that Christian practices have not been marginalised in the same way as have Muslim practices²⁹. Nevertheless, in intra-Christian terms in the UK certain practices identified with Catholicism or Protestantism were issues for polarisation and, of course, this remains the case in relation to Northern Ireland. But the fact that a form of Christianity is the state religion serves only to heighten the importance of the symbolism of the

dress code in the Islamic case and to decrease it in the Christian case.

Although there are some similarities between the comments of the interviewees and respondents there are many differences. Even though they might interpret modesty in a different way, the one thing that the majority of Muslim and Christian respondents would agree upon is the need for modesty. Like Islamic dress, modesty can be the cause of rejection by associates. It is a kind of invisible *hijab* which becomes obvious through relating. Similarities included a conviction of the importance of modesty in terms of behaviours, sexual constancy and no sex outside marriage. A number of Christian respondents shared a prohibition on alcohol with the Muslim respondents and a concern that modest dress should keep them safe from unwanted masculine attention as well as to not tempt men into error. Further, there was a shared interest among some of the respondents concerning boundaries or guidance and the sense of order which living according to a modesty code brings. Interestingly, although I have heard Muslim men suggest there is a great importance in expressing gender difference in dress³⁰ (as did two of the Christian respondents) none of the Muslim respondents mentioned the necessity for clothing to reinforce gender boundaries.

There is a vast difference in the ways in which these ideas about modesty are expressed, not only between Muslims and Christians but between the Christians themselves. The 'covering' of authority in some restorationist and Evangelical churches and women covering themselves with the *hijab* are not the same thing. In fact, wearing the *hijab* in the context of British society is an assertive act. The interviewee, Miriam, explained how she wore *hijab* against the wishes of her husband and certainly not as a sign of submission to him. Further, the more a woman covers herself in the context of Western society, the more she becomes a spectacle. To wear *hijab* is to "stand up and be counted".

There are some similarities in terms of an architecture of separation. In Islam this is often played out in terms of spaces, in Christianity in terms of authority. Some restorationist churches take literally and universally Paul's instruction regarding head covering. But in terms of Christianity, liberalisation, in the way in which women are expected to dress and behave during Christian worship, is a modern adjustment. Changes in Islamic dress, have shifted in the opposite direction, moving from a more

liberal previous generation, some of whom rejected the *hijab*, to a more strictly defined form of Islamic dress. Yet both revivalist groups seek a representation of their faith which harks back to a 'pure' tradition, a tradition which will inevitably be interpreted differently in different times and places.

All modernists and reformists counter the conservative practices relating to modesty and, particularly, dress by relating them to the specific cultures and times of early Christian communities in the case of Christianity, and the first Muslim community, in the case of Islam, and to possible mistranslations of key words as in the Christian case of *kephale*. Biblical feminists who are Conservative Evangelicals have, interestingly, taken some of this thinking on board whilst still accepting the Bible as the inspired word of God and using it as the starting point of their feminism.

According to the respondents, the positive elements of modest dress and behaviour, for them, outweigh the problems. It takes courage to swim against the consumerist tide. Many of the Muslim respondents experienced difficulties with non-Muslims in relation to Islamic dress. The 'host' society is also hostile to white women who adopt Islamic dress, who are seen as negating their white identity. The problems the Christians' experienced in relation to modesty were less marked. This is not surprising considering their lower visibility and greater accord, in many ways, with Western thinking and ways of being. A few Christian respondents experienced problems but these generally related to their behaviour and the boundaries beyond which they would not go rather than their dress. In keeping to their modesty codes these women are backed by their faith communities but they show determination in carrying their beliefs into the everyday practices of their lives.

Notes

1. See Karam (1998) and Fadwa El Guindi (forthcoming) Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance University of South California Press
2. Mernissi (1994) note 7 p. 201
3. See Mernissi (1991) Women and Islam p.85. She refers to Marmaduke Pickthall The Meaning of the Glorious Qu'ran p. 305
4. Pickthall translation
5. Selma Douglas 'What About the Men's Hijab?' Q-News 7-13 July 1995:7
6. Foucault 1980 'The History of Sexuality: An Interview' G. Bennington (trans) Oxford Literary Review Vol 4, No 2 (1980):13
7. Karima Umar in 'Islamic Dress: the Total experience' wittily describes how she finds herself buying a lot of 'Girl Scout Cookies' because she asks herself "What impression do I (as a visible Muslim) make on this child?" Q-News 7-13 July 1995: 6-7
8. 'First Sex' Channel 4 26/7/94
9. Nilufer Gole (1996) The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press
10. Nilufer Gole is referring to Pierre Bouddieu (1984) Distinction Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press
11. Twelve respondents answered in the affirmative and six of these answers related to Islamic dress.
12. 'Victorian hostility prevails against hijab' Q-News No 290 May 1998:9
13. Rakeem al Shabazz, Q-News No 291 June 1998:5
14. 'Victorian hostility prevails against hijab' Q-News No 290 May 1998:9
15. Haleh Afshar, Women's Hour, BBC Radio 4 20/8/98
16. The Runnymede Trust (1997) Islamophobia: A Challenge For Us All
17. Shagufta Ygub 'Ameena Mohammed: Boxing and kicking the habit' Q-News No 293 August 1998:30-31
18. Ibid
19. XURL: <http://so146.essex.ac.uk/users/rafiam/women4.html> 11/1/96
20. J.L Esposito (1991) Islam. The Straight Path (expanded edition) New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press: 156
21. As Suzanne Brenner (1996) puts it in 'Reconstructing Self and Society: Javanese Muslim Women and "The veil"' American Ethnologist 23 (4): 673-697
22. Catherine Kroeger (forthcoming) Women's Bible Commentary InterVarsity Press
23. An observation made by Fiona MacDonald 'Jesus Army Wants You' Independent 29 Apr 1995, Features 16-22

24. Interview with Valerie Griffiths at her home in Surrey 1/5/97
25. Under the caption 'Jesus Christ Changed my Life' Jesus Lifestyle no 22, Fourth Quarter 1992 :25
26. 'Brothers in Arms' Everyman BBC1 2 June 1996
27. For instance, Catherine Clark Kroeger ' The Classical Concept of Head as "Source" in Gretchen Gaebelein Hull, Appendix III: 267ff
28. Martin Scott makes a critique of the argument put forward in John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Eds) (1991) Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism Crossway Books :110
29. The Runnymede Trust (1997) Islamophobia: A Challenge For Us All
30. Abdul-Haqq Baker, head of Brixton Mosque, London, suggested that to remove the beard is to become "effeminate" as "the beard is the one main characteristic of the man" at a talk for Islamic Awareness Week, University of Leeds 14 November 1996

Chapter Six

Why do some Christian and Muslim women choose revivalisms?

This study has uncovered a number of differences in terms of outcome between the Christian and Muslim respondents' and interviewees' choices. These dissimilarities could be seen in terms of attitudes to rights and responsibilities as well as in submission to masculine authority. There were also differences *within* the respective faith communities themselves. Nevertheless a shared outcome, between the Muslim and Christian respondents and interviewees, who identify with religious revivalisms, may be empowerment of some kind. This may seem an unlikely position when one considers that these are women who choose submission in various forms. They all choose to submit to God, and, in varying degrees, the majority also submit to the authority of men be it within marriage or in terms of religious leadership. They also make their religious choices on a mixture of spiritual, intellectual, emotional and practical grounds.

This chapter, in attempting to unravel a number of possible reasons why some women join revivalist religious movements which would appear, on the face of it, to diminish their independence rather than enhance it, to disempower rather than empower, will concentrate on two areas of the data I have collected over the past three years. These include a section of the questionnaire in which I asked respondents to outline the gains and losses which they understood to be the outcome of their religious affiliations. In conjunction with the earlier chapter on rights and responsibilities, these two chapters build a profile of the way in which the informants view themselves as being empowered by their religious affiliation.

So how is this combination of obedience and submission interpreted by these women to be empowering? As I have already indicated in chapter three, the respondents and interviewees generally regard the 'obedience' as submission to God and not to men. It is their contention that in the context

of existing patriarchal structures and prevailing religious constraints, they are exercising their religious rights and responsibilities and are thereby extracting entitlements that they find empowering. Using a complex process of reconstruction and re-interpretation, they are moulding their lives and the men in their lives to conform to important moral standards which offer them ethical authority and intellectual respect. In making an evaluation I have employed the theoretical concepts of empowerment and rational choice, both of which have given some helpful indicators for assessing women's choices. Clearly the form of empowerment achieved can only be viewed as a *kind* of empowerment within the constraints of patriarchal structures.

Empowerment

Michel Foucault (1977) defines power as contextual and relational. From this viewpoint what constitutes subversion in one situation becomes subservience in another and vice-versa. Self-empowerment, in terms of the taking of power for oneself or the bestowing of power is subject to this same kind of situational framework. Empowerment in one situation and relationship may be disempowerment in another.

'Empowerment' is a term frequently used in connection with social work, development and education, often in conjunction with 'enablement'. 'Empowerment' is often modelled on autonomy (Rappaport 1987) and its most conservative use may be limited to situations of absolute self-help (Onyx and Benton 1995:51). Jo Rowlands (1998) draws on the Foucauldian model of power to demonstrate not only that power is relational but also that oppression is internalised, and places, "internal barriers to women's exercise of power" (Rowlands 1998:12). In doing so she comes up with a number of different kinds of empowerment which do not necessarily draw on self-sufficiency as a model. The internalisation of control is demonstrated by Foucault (1977) in Discipline and Punish through the example of Bentham's panopticon prison, an architectural mechanisation of social control. The guard in his central tower is able to view any of the cells at any time. The guard is obscured by shutters and so the prisoner is unable to know when he is object of the gaze. He therefore internalises the surveillance, modifying his behaviour as if he were being watched at all times

(Foucault 1977:195-228). This model is easily transferrable to the self-regulation of women in compliance with the internalised patriarchal gaze (Bartky 1988:72). Thus women are disabled from the exercise of power by that interiorisation of the patriarchal, panoptical gaze: a limitation which comes from within the self but which has its origins elsewhere. This psychological hobbling of women has a global significance for feminists as it presents itself in different ways in a multiplicity of contexts. A respect for, and an attempt to understand the ways in which different women approach the resulting problems and the ways in which they attempt to re-empower themselves has significance for us all.

Jo Rowlands explores the term 'empowerment' in relation to development discourse and she suggests that it has frequently been used in a context "well rooted in the 'dominant culture' of Western Capitalism" (Rowlands 1998:11) in a meaning that has been associated with individualism, consumerism and autonomy. Rowlands suggests four kinds of power to which people might aspire. The first of these, 'power over' relates particularly to dominant hierarchical models and in this context, Rowlands suggests that empowerment for women means a masculine fear of loss or actual loss of power for men. Yet this is the most prevalent kind of power model and women, as well as men, are frequently holders of it. For instance, the mother holds it over the child, the doctor over the patient, and, however she shares her power, the power relation in that particular context, related to knowledge versus lack of knowledge, remains in place. In time, however, the power relation could reverse if, for instance, the patient becomes a consultant surgeon. Further, the power relation between them might be reversed in another situation. The other kinds of power which Rowlands suggests are 'power to'; 'power with' and 'power from within' (Rowlands:12).

The point of an analysis of power is to be found in the structural impossibility of escaping from power relationships of some kind. In order to bring about change in any particular context it is necessary to be able to make an analysis of the dynamics of power in that situation, a configuration of power held by a network of relationships which, according to the Foucauldian analysis, are likely to be multiple, diverse and to some degree, fluid. I do not personally think that we should 'run away' with the concept of the fluidity of power because these power relations still take place within patriarchal structures where the power is deposited largely with wealthy white men and their representatives and where white

middle-class masculinity is still projected as the norm. Nevertheless, it is interesting that Rowlands engages with power in this differentiated way. A desegregated idea of power is far more useful in this particular context than the less nuanced notion of power versus submission and control. This is where an 'earthed' variety of poststructuralist analysis is useful and can still lead to political action. Rowlands looks at the way in which empowerment can be rooted in a person's own self-awareness and be apparently independent of external relations. Especially important is the way in which it can be associated with co-operation with others and does not have to be based upon the given (white middle-class, able-bodied, masculine) model of autonomy.

By 'empowerment' I mean to gain 'agency', 'to be an actor' in the scheme of things, 'to exert power' of some kind and to feel oneself to be 'somebody' through a strategy of self-empowerment which does not, in the context of complementarian discourse, necessarily model itself upon autonomy - a concept which I would argue, generally, has its limits at many stages of the life cycle of women (and men). In the literature empowerment is about advocacy, about giving women insight into their needs. In the discourse of complementarity, the structures within which women can operate are far more clearly delineated, so empowerment here is about reconstruction within clear limits and comes through imposing limits on existing male powers, as well as extracting entitlements. So I should expect the discourse to be distinct in that it focuses on the 'power within' and the 'power to' and occasionally 'power with' rather than 'power over' dimensions: "generative rather than controlling power" (Rowlands:13).

The notion of power is important in this analysis. At any given time there will be a number of models of power operating in a person's life. For instance, Sally, the interviewee who is a church leader of a fellowship in South Wales, described how she has authority over her husband in the context of the church but that as she accepts the requirement to submit to him in terms of his having the "casting vote" in the home, he has authority over her in that context. So they both share the power-over model whereupon the power ceases to be monolithic. When Sally described her ministry within the church she gave evidence of a 'power from within' and especially a 'power to' or power-sharing model. Sally commenced by saying: "I think I'm quite a visionary leader". This 'vision' suggests the 'power from

within' paradigm: like prophesy, it is a knowing which comes from an inner conviction which does not apparently depend upon external influences. Sally continued: "But I think as well that I've got a real desire to see other people develop and reach their potential... to give them opportunity... It's very much a giving away of power. It's about taking risks with people like 'A' who runs the rehab (drug rehabilitation) team. He has been off drugs for five years. It was his vision and he is heading it up with support at the same time." Sally doesn't seem to have a problem with 'power to' or 'power with' in terms of sharing her power. She is interested in generative rather than controlling power. So within the hierarchical structure of Sally's church, there are all kinds of power dynamics going on. A model which can accommodate a multiplicity of different kinds of power and possible empowerment seems far more appropriate to the analysis of such a situation.

The issue of what is and what is not empowering for women has to be assessed from the standpoint of 'difference'. Many of my interviewees and respondents to the questionnaire contest a model of gender equality which is based on 'sameness' in a world organised to comply with patriarchal patterns, which requires women to compete on the same basis as men. They suggest that the autonomy which is requisite in order to participate in this kind of competition does not generally favour women in the different stages and conditions of their life-cycle. This is rarely an insistence on the kind of biological/hormonal 'argument' posited by Shamsad Khan (1993) in his explanation of the requirement for two women witnesses in Islam but a judgement made with reference to the practicalities of child-care and ageing in a society where women still take on the majority of responsibility for nurture and care and where women continue to be valued as objects. As has already been discussed, many of the women who join revivalist movements, especially in the case of Islam, see the 'equal but different model' as the way forward for them.

In attempting to evaluate the reasons why some women should choose what appears to be a subordinate position as a route to empowerment I have asked questions which are influenced to some degree by Rational Choice theory.

Rational Choice Theory

Rational Choice Theory, as described in Chapter 1, is, in terms of the sociology of religion, the 'religious markets alternative to secularization theory' (Becker 1976) (Elster 1986) (Iannaccone 1995) (Young 1995). Secularization theory, which held the view that the 'Sacred Canopy' was irreparably torn' (Berger 1990 [1967]) and that we inevitably move towards a society bereft of religion, has been challenged in the last decade by theories of re-enchantment and the idea that the religious 'market' means that religious movements change, reinventing themselves in order to suit demand. From my perspective, this view fits the postmodern religious movements in which I am particularly interested. Many of them bypass the establishment and communicate religious knowledge by means best suited to meet the needs of believers in the 1990s.

Rational Choice theory is a utilitarian way of looking at things. It suggests not only that religious movements change reflexively to suit demand but also that believers, in some manner, weigh up the pros and cons, material and spiritual, when they choose a religious affiliation. According to Iannaccone "people choose what religion, if any, they will accept and how extensively they will participate in it. Over time, most people modify their religious choices in significant ways, varying their rates of religious participation and modifying its character, even switching religions altogether" (Iannaccone 1995a: 77). I do not agree that most people do that at all. Globally, the majority of people will probably never be in a situation where they can even consider changing their religion. Iannaccone is making the assumption that the majority of people are rich enough and live in societies which allow them to make different 'lifestyle' choices at different times. Yet there are marked inequalities in the availability of choices dependent on gender, race, mobility, geographical location and so on. Nevertheless, the model fits quite well with many of the women who are my interviewees and who come from middle class or lower middle class backgrounds and who live as they do in a Western liberal democracy and consumer oriented society.

Rational choice is appropriate to a study of women and their religious choices in that women are regarded by many writers as receiving more positive social approval and support through participation

in religion than men (Brasher:46) Brasher writes that economic imbalance between the sexes in the USA, whereby women have less disposable wealth than men, (Banner 1992)¹ means that “women’s ability to actualize themselves is more circumscribed than men’s” and following Iannaccone & Miles (1990) she concludes that more women may turn to religious groups as a means of fulfilment. Most importantly she suggests that “religious groups offer them a more economically feasible way to achieve self-transformation and self-fulfilment than the culture in general does” (Brasher:47). Brasher writes how “the three principal avenues (which provide solutions to) life problems... in American society - (are) politics, psychiatry and religion (Lofland and Stark 1965)”², religion being the least expensive of these channels (Brasher: 47). Where she suggests that women turn to religion because of life problems and personal distress I have not been in receipt of much evidence that my respondents made their religious choices as a result of acute social or psychological distress. I do however see societal pressures which result in an economic drive and the requirement for support from a community as significant. Brasher points out that “ religious products” are offered for free or at nominal charge and makes the point that “The unpaid labor of women is a significant factor in religious groups being able to offer free or low-cost services” (Brasher:47). She writes how this creates a “hermeneutical loop”, a kind of parallel economy which services women but which keeps them in a lower pay-bracket. Significant to my analysis is Brasher’s suggestion that a religion “ provides a place to reconstruct the self without the economic cost of consumerism” (Brasher:47). This fits with the evidence I have collected which suggests that women who join revivalist groups do so to become ‘what they are not’. Unhappy with their experiences of secular Western or consumerist constructions of femininity, affiliation effectively allows them the possibility of becoming a new person. On a purely financial basis the cost of so radical a life-change within the secular market place, in terms of counselling, therapies, education and support required, would be prohibitive.

In order to express the manner in which cost must be considered in terms of a wider concept than monetary gains and costs alone, Brasher gives the example of the statement of an unemployed member of the Mount Olive Congregation:

Responding to a query about what, if anything, inspired her involvement with Mount Olive,

Beth, who had converted after her sister's early death explained, 'I'm the person who gets the benefit from all this. I can go there, free of charge, be a part of this organization- God's family. I don't have to open my mouth. I don't have to do anything. I don't even have to contribute. I can sit there and watch all this stuff going on. You do that long enough and the next thing you know, you're walking with the flow' (Brasher:47).

Brasher comments how we must not confine the idea of costs within "any single meaning system":

To Beth, cost factors ranged from monetary (i.e., the absence of any price of admission) to existential (i.e., the lack of any requirement that she personally contribute to public rituals). The poetic ideas and emotive music offered by Mount Olive were affective benefit agents that aroused Beth's conversion experience, but their low contingent cost factors influenced her response as well (Brasher:47-48).

I have found the rational choice model useful in making an evaluation of what the plus side of allegiance with a revivalist movement might be and the ways in which women experience themselves as being empowered by their religious choices. It also helps me to assess the converse. Further, such a model combats the idea that women join such movements out of passive compliance to male demands.

Below I shall discuss the losses and gains, consequent to their religious practise, that my respondents have suggested they have made in their responses to questionnaires and in interviews. In order to ascertain the gains and losses associated with joining their particular religious movement or faith community I asked the questions: "Have you had to give up anything in order to practice your faith?" and "If so what have you had to give up?", and, secondly, "What have you gained through the practice of your religion?" I asked respondents to list the gains according to whether they regarded them as material, practical, emotional, intellectual or spiritual gains. Some respondents, especially some of the Christians, made it plain that they found my question inappropriate. It is an inquiry which does not exactly correspond with the respondents' feelings since they see religion as a holistic experience in which they as people change and gain a new consciousness rather than gaining something material or even specifically definable. So rational choice theory does not necessarily echo the voices of the respondents themselves. Nevertheless, the majority answered the questions, generously setting about splitting up the benefits they gained and in so doing providing interesting data. For analytical purposes it is worth making a categorisation, albeit in a general way.

The Christian respondents

In terms of evangelical, independent or house church groups, who require that women submit not only to God but also to male leadership, Jesus Fellowship appear to represent one end of the continuum whilst Men Women and God, who often call themselves 'egalitarians' (as opposed to complementarians) and who aim at 'biblical equality' represent the other. Yet Christian respondents across the board have repeatedly mentioned, on the plus side, their acquisition of 'confidence', a sense of 'identity', an 'extended family', a sense of security and so on. First I shall discuss what it was that the Christian respondents felt they had given up in order to practise their faith.

Sacrifices

It will be seen below that the Muslim respondents, apart from a few converts to Islam, reported having no sense of having given anything up in order to practise their faith and so it is worth drawing attention to the fact that the sense of sacrifice was largely a Christian one and was especially associated with converts. In all, twenty five of the Christian respondents replied that they had given something up.

The majority of the forty three Christian respondents to the questionnaire described themselves as converts as did seven of nine Christian interviewees. This kind of situation was also the case in Brasher's study (Brasher: 31-35). The prevalence of converts is largely due to a model of conversion amongst many Charismatic Christians and Evangelicals in terms of being 'born again'. Although they may have come from a nominally Christian home, or indeed a practising Catholic or Church of England family, they regard themselves as becoming Christian in the exclusive sense of being 'born again', through the baptism of the Holy Spirit and do not regard themselves as being Christians up to this point (Balmer 1989). As one respondent from Ichthus Fellowship described it: (the transition) "from nominal Christian to a personal fulfilling relationship with Jesus was because I was overwhelmed by His love for me and His work on the cross". Born-again Christians regard themselves as 'saved' by that 'work on the cross' whereas other Christians might still feel themselves to be in need of redemption from sin. People who regard themselves as converts are perhaps more likely to feel that they have given something up. This is because they perceive themselves as having undergone a

radical change which may demand alterations in 'life-style'. Among their answers were a number of repeated themes. Converts felt that they had constructed a new life for themselves which has involved the discarding of old ties and connections and even of free choice itself. But this is a choice to give up 'choice', perhaps because it has not, in some ways, lived up to its promise as a dominant concept in present day Western consumerist society. Nevertheless, the choice to give up the concept of choice is made mainly in order to submit to God which is seen as the greatest and most important choice of all.

This discipline of submission through sacrifice in the case of the Christians and through practices in the case of Muslims (for instance, in prayer five times a day) is a recurring theme amongst both Christians and Muslims. In this respect three Christians named their 'independence' as the thing they had relinquished. One of these who said she gave up her 'independent will' was a Conservative Evangelical who takes a Biblical feminist position. This giving up of independent will, in a Christian who is engaged in struggle over the position of women within her church, should be read in terms of the self-emptying (*kenosis*) required in order to serve God. As already mentioned, the bid for equality which Biblical feminists make is to be 'equal to serve' (Hull 1989). The first two respondents who wrote of surrendering their independence were members of the Jesus Fellowship. I find it interesting that members from both of the groups I regard as being at either end of the complimentary/egalitarian continuum saw themselves as giving up their independence. This certainly does not fit with the 'power over' model of empowerment but is more of an attempt to empty the self in order to become a channel of the spiritual 'power within'. But this can only be conceived of in terms of the power to serve, that is, 'power to' and 'power with'.

A number of others expressed this giving up of independence in different ways: for instance, one Ichthus Fellowship member wrote that she had given up "My whole life!" and two members of the house church fellowship from York wrote that they had given up their past "selfish way of life" whilst a member of the Pioneer Network said she had given up the "pursuit of selfish ambition". So if anything there is a giving up of the autonomy which the post-Christian feminist Daphne Hampson (1996) describes as being central to feminism and incompatible with Christianity. But it may be that

my respondents do not see autonomy as a useful goal. Autonomy is for the wealthy, fit and unencumbered. Some respondents have given up their careers, their physical base and entire lifestyles, as well as personal, physical or familial relationships including emotional or key physical relationships. Two Christian respondents mentioned giving up a career: the first gave up acting, the second, who is a church leader in Pioneer Network wrote that she "recently gave up a career in hospital management as (I) felt it was necessary to give more time to my leadership role in the church". Five Christians reported having given up different kinds of relationships, two of which were with male partners whilst another respondent cited 'physical relationships', another some 'key relationships' and yet another had given up her two dogs in order to live in community.

Those who appear to give up the most in practical terms are those who convert from a different religious background. One convert who is a member of the Jesus Fellowship and who was previously a Hindu wrote how she had given up her culture and that visiting her family was difficult. This kind of difficulty was also described by some Muslim interviewees who were white, Catholic converts to Islam. But converts from secular culture may also describe a yawning gap between their previous and present lives. For instance, one respondent, again a member of Jesus Fellowship, wrote that she had foregone "my previous lifestyles, certain books, music, pictures, items, habits, education habits". Although Jesus Fellowship have members living both in and out of community, the Jesus Fellowship respondents to my questionnaire as well as my Jesus Fellowship interviewees live in community and this no doubt effects the degree to which their lives have changed. Only two Christian respondents mentioned having given up the style of clothing they had previously worn and both of these were members of Jesus Fellowship who have a distinctive way of dressing. Of these, one wrote that she had given up "fashionable clothes" and the other "trousers".

Three of the Christian respondents said they had given up their homes, one to go and live in community and the other two for missionary work overseas. These last two are women now over retirement age, one from Ichthus Fellowship and one from Men, Women and God, both of whom have spent many years as missionaries abroad.

Where some had made sacrifices as a form of self-emptying, abandoning something that has been seen as hampering spiritual purity or preventing them from achieving their spiritual goals, for others the giving up consisted of more practical acts of purification such as abandoning specific 'sins'. Eight Christian respondents said they had given up smoking or the drinking of alcohol, or both. One said she had given up drugs. Two Christian respondents wrote that they had given up 'sex before marriage' and two others wrote that they had given up 'sin' but did not elaborate. This is an interesting area. What does the respondent regard as sin? And do they really think it is possible to 'sin no more'. Womanist theologians have debated and rearticulated what 'sin' might be, defining American patriarchy, for instance, as a sin for the sins committed against black women through the "devaluation of black women's humanity" (Williams 1995:143-144).

One of the older Christian respondents had revised her position upon what it is that might constitute 'sin'. She wrote that she had given up her acting career as well as smoking and drinking but that she "later discerned that some of this was unnecessary and was a man-made rule". This ability to revise one's position and still remain in a house church fellowship is an interesting one associated with 'thinking Christians'. It does not conform with the stereotype of Evangelicals and Charismatics as 'fundamentalist' with beliefs set in concrete. It is also a position that has come with maturity. It makes a dent in a stereotype of house church believers as unanimously by-passing theological thinking and draws attention to the fact that there are a range of positions held by different house church fellowships and their individual members.

The Muslim Respondents

The majority of the Muslim respondents described themselves as having given up nothing for their faith. That is, there was no perception of sacrifice. Where the majority of Christian respondents had described themselves as converts only five out of twenty-nine Muslim respondents to the questionnaire and five out of nine interviewees described themselves as converts to Islam. All but one of these had previously been Roman Catholics. As with the Christians, it is the converts who have a sense of giving up the most. In fact, of the reverts³ to Islam and those who described themselves as having

been Muslims all their lives, eleven answered 'no' (to the question 'Have you had to give up anything in order to practice your faith?'), nine made no reply and four wrote that the question was 'not applicable'.

Of the converts who did have a sense of giving something up in order to practice their faith, one said she had given up her "previous lifestyle, i.e. drugs, music, career." As with the Christians two wrote how they had given up alcohol and mentioned giving up kinds of food which did not fit in with Islamic dietary requirements.

Three of the converts who were respondents to the questionnaire mentioned the dress requirement of Islam which had meant giving up their previous mode of dress. An older sister of forty-two wrote in a similar vein to the older Christian respondent who had revised her view when she commented, "I gave up a lot of things in the beginning which I know now were unnecessary, e.g. my name, my own dress sense, my identity, my culture, my family to a certain extent - sadly, types of food and enjoyment most of which I now understand was all a bit unnecessary". Like the Christian respondent she had later realized that, according to her changing understanding of her belief system, some of the sweeping changes she made to her life in the early years were somewhat superfluous. Perhaps the urge to make drastic changes and to give up many things in an early eager response to conversion mellows with time and age.

Converts: family and friends

Apart from one Muslim respondent who mentioned her family, none of the Muslims said they had actually given up relationships on account of their faith. Two interviewees who were Irish converts to Islam did however describe difficulties in relation to their families. But the general lack of difficulties is probably because of the low number of converts among the Muslim respondents to the questionnaire and because the influences which helped to bring about conversion of the Muslims sometimes came from inside the families or from close friends. Two interviewees had converted through their relationships with husbands. In two cases these relationships were not good but they

had been introduced to Islam and both had remarried Muslim husbands. This contrasts with thirty-one Christian respondents who indicated that there had been a degree of external influence and the majority of these, twenty one in all, suggested the influence came from Christian friends. This may account for a difference in that the relationships which influenced the converts to Islam were often closer: in terms of husbands, potential husbands or brothers. One Muslim respondent did however suggest the influence of friends in her conversion. She wrote that her acceptance of Islam was "down to God" but that "I did receive the pure message of Islam from two other Muslims whilst on holiday in Mexico with my husband. She wrote that, " Their understanding of Islam greatly influenced my decision". Neither she nor her husband were Muslims at that time and both converted.

Like the Christians who had converted to Christianity from another religious background, the two Irish converts to Islam, who were interviewees, had difficulties in relating to their families. It cannot be easy to give up the ingrained religious symbols of a lifetime whilst the family retains those symbols and values. Even though they were now married Muslims and had children, the Irish converts spoke of how the families in which they had grown up (i.e., their own parents, sisters and brothers) still hoped they might turn away from Islam and back to the Catholic Church. There was also, for the Muslims, as indeed there is for some Protestants, a great deal they now considered shocking and idolatrous in the crucifixes and statues and devotion to the saints of their Catholic parents. Linda, who had two children, said that she finds it difficult to visit her mother's house in Northern Ireland. She described how her mother has a "ginormous crucifix in the bedroom made by prisoners from Long Kesh and a giant size portrait of Jesus in another room. It is difficult to go back with the children. There are too many images about." It will be seen below that some converts to Islam regard Islam as a refuge of logic away from what they regard as the irrationality of their previous beliefs.

In summary, it is interesting to contrast what the Muslims do not say with what the Christians do. Amongst the Muslims there is little sense of having given things up and no Muslim has mentioned giving up her life or her will. The things they gave up were mainly practical, like types of food, alcohol, gambling and in one case, "sex during Ramadan". Sex had a low profile although modesty was mentioned by three converts as a requirement of Islam. In both Christian and Muslim cases, it is the

converts who have a sense of giving up their old way of life, habits and connections. For Muslims, there is a greater emphasis on the *Ummah* (the Muslim community as a whole) and upon the family as the basic unit of Islam - most of them did not have non-Muslim friends. Although they support each other through networks and organisations, Muslim women are not obliged to go to the Mosque for Friday prayer and increasingly, young Muslims who are revivalists and converts to Islam find it difficult to find a Mosque to which they feel able to belong. The Christian house church and Charismatic movement depend largely on communal modes of worship and a sense of group identity which, in dispersed communities, often forms a kind of family substitute.

So far, it is not possible to trace, from what has been given up, what it is that might be empowering for the respondents in their religious affiliations. But in order to consider what the gains might be I thought it necessary to count first the costs in order that they might be weighed against the gains.

The gains

The question concerning gains required that respondents list the benefits they felt they had accrued through their religious affiliation in terms of material, emotional, practical, intellectual and spiritual advantages. Although I asked the questions in this order I shall reverse them in writing about them. This is because it is apparent that their importance to respondents and interviewees is in reverse order, commencing with the spiritual. Yet I cannot avoid writing about the spiritual and material gains together. This is because the responses highlight the differences in understanding regarding what is a rightful kind of gain and indeed what, for example, a 'material' gain might be. For instance, five of the younger Muslims, who are not yet married, saw the provision which the Qur'an makes for a woman in marriage, in terms of 'independence of wealth' and in placing the responsibility for financial provision for the family upon the husband, as a material gain. Yet this is a future gain and not a current one. But perhaps it is not that simple, because the expectation of future provision, is in itself a present-day gain in that it takes the anxiety out of anticipation of the future. Lack of financial anxiety may be counted as a material advantage.

As mentioned above, some respondents, mainly among the Christians, clearly regarded my question as being 'out of order'. For instance, one Conservative Evangelical wrote: "Inadequate question - not about gaining something - about identity" and another wrote; "I cannot quantify in boxes like this. I'm a Christian because I believe in truth, not because of the idea of reward". This apparent frustration with the question by Conservative Evangelicals may perhaps be traced to a reaction against the strand of the Gospel of Prosperity which at times finds its way into the house church movement via the USA. I think it also reflects the romanticism of liberal theology which creeps, unnoticed, into Conservative Evangelicalism. Materialism is despised: one becomes a Christian to serve and to give.

The spiritual gains

'Fulfilled', 'calm', 'confident', 'secure', 'inner peace', 'happiness' and 'contentment' are words and phrases that recur throughout the answers of both the twenty four Muslim respondents and the thirty six Christian respondents who described spiritual gains. But confidence was also given as a material gain by one of the Muslim respondents. By spiritual gains I meant those which are abstract and intangible and yet at the core of the belief. The answers appear to be along these lines. They give a picture of calm security, a self assurance that comes with the sense, as described by one Muslim, of a "deep belief and confidence and security in the total submission of oneself to God - that whatever is meant for you will never pass you and what is not for you will never be yours regardless of effort". The respondent is located within firm limits. She is freed from anxiety because God will give her that which is best for her. Another Muslim respondent wrote in the same vein: "When you fully appreciate that God is in full control, life takes on new meaning. You are secure in your belief that providing you are following God then God will only want the best for you".

This serenity which results from a direct relationship between God (also as Jesus and the Holy Spirit in the Christian case) and the believer, is also mentioned by eighteen of the Christian respondents. For them, the emphasis is on a living and interactive relationship with God/Jesus /Holy Spirit. As one Christian respondent wrote: "I feel Jesus around me and the Spirit fills the inner voids of my life".

There is more emphasis on a 'felt' and personal relationship with a living internalised God amongst the Christian respondents, of God as a friend who responds to an individual's particular requests, for instance as expressed in the words of an Ichthus Fellowship member, "I now have an awareness of God that I didn't have before. I can talk to him at all times on anything and see my prayers being answered". Where Muslims and fundamentalist Christians believe revelation to be complete with their respective Holy Books, Charismatics believe that God continues to reveal himself through the Holy Spirit. Sixteen of the Christians mentioned this personal, living relationship with God/ Jesus/Holy Spirit. A Muslim respondent mentions the link with the Creator through the Qur'an in terms of guidance where "All questions, such as why am I here, where am I going etc. are answered. This gives an internal feeling of satisfaction". Another Muslim respondent wrote that she found security in the idea that "Worship of God is not confined to when things are going wrong or when one goes to the Mosque: God and his worship is incorporated in your daily routine of life and is just as 'important' as other aspects of life, not a once a week affair." Another wrote that she was "aware of God and a lot happier". Muslims and Christians alike declared themselves secure and confident in their relationship with God. This perhaps conforms to the 'power from within' model of power suggested by Jo Rowlands. Six of the Christians wrote that they had gained the Fruits or the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as speaking in tongues or discernment. This is in contrast to the more cognitive kinds of spiritual gains described by the Muslims. For instance, one respondent (a convert to Islam from Catholicism) wrote that she found in Islam: "An articulation of the spiritual that is logical, comprehensive, balanced and clear". She is one of five converts from Catholicism who, through questionnaires or interviews, have communicated the degree to which they find Islam to be 'logical' in contrast to Catholicism.

Intellectual gains

In attempting to trace what respondents gained from their faith I asked them to describe any intellectual gains. I wished to know if respondents had any sense of a broader understanding in terms of knowledge or wisdom, in their abilities to think logically or in their sense of perception of the world. To some extent Muslims have, as seen in the previous section, described some spiritual gains in these terms. I also used the term 'intellectual' in an attempt to identify whether the respondents felt their

thinking and analytical skills had been stimulated. I was trying to discover if there is more beyond the stereotype of religious revivalists as unthinking recipients of ideology which they do not process. I am relieved to say that the respondents did not give this impression. Twenty five of the Muslim respondents described themselves as having gained intellectually from their faith as did thirty one of the Christians. Muslim interviewees especially emphasised the importance in Islam of learning and gaining knowledge. Eleven of the Muslims wrote how Islam actively urges the believer to gain knowledge. For example, one respondent wrote that Islam imparts "the vision to seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave." For the Muslims the forms this study may take may be private study based upon the Qur'an, frequently in translation into English and study groups organised by, for instance Young Muslims UK or, the GCSE group for young Muslim women at the Mosque. There are also meetings, films, talks and exhibitions held regularly by the student Islamic societies of the various universities. One interviewee, Zainab, explained how although as a child she had attended Qur'an classes at the *madrasa* where she learned to recite the Qur'an in Arabic, it was not until her brother introduced her to an English translation of the Qur'an that she found new and relevant meaning for herself and chose to return whole-heartedly to Islam. The vast majority of the Muslim respondents and interviewees do not have Arabic as their first language. Christian respondents on the other hand would learn through Bible study groups and attendance at meetings in their respective fellowships and cell groups⁴. Respondents recorded a range of intellectual gains from wisdom and understanding and a general stimulation to learn, to specific academic achievements or a particular gain in knowledge of the Bible or the Qu'ran.

Where the Muslims tended to use and be at home with the word 'knowledge' (ten), the Christians tended to use the words or phrases 'understanding' (six), 'Intellectual stimulation' (five), 'wisdom' (two). This may reflect the Muslims belief that the Qur'an offers clear proof and guidance where the Christian faith is bound up with the mystery of death and resurrection, ideas which require the believer to make a leap of faith.

Two Christians and one Muslim claimed to have had practical or academic success through the practise of their faith. Two Christian respondents used the term 'stretching' as in: "Constantly

(intellectually) stretching even in the 'motherhood phase' as needing to answer and explore theology". Three of the younger Muslims wrote that their faith made them interested in contemporary issues in the world. There was no parallel statement to this among the Christians. The Christian 'knowledge' was expressed in terms of knowing God and knowing the self and there was less concern about gaining knowledge of the world in which we live.

Five Christians made 'meaning of life' statements such as: "I now understand why we are here" and two Muslims made similar statements but emphasised the comprehensive nature of the knowledge gained, for instance: "the Qur'an encompasses all aspects, be it spiritual, scientific, intellectual etc. It again and again tells us human beings to question our existence, purpose and destination." The Muslim statements give a sense of a direct relationship with knowledge and guidance through the Qur'an whereas the Christian acquisition of knowledge appears to be more social and communal through attendance at Bible study groups and having the opportunity to teach others. Seven Christians mentioned bible study or bible knowledge as an intellectual gain. This was the only context in which the Christian respondents used the term 'knowledge'. Seven Christian respondents mentioned interaction with others in terms of teaching or studying on courses or in groups. For instance, one respondent wrote: that she was intellectually stimulated by, "sharing with 'older' (this means older in faith rather than in age) Christians, I get challenged here". Three Christians wrote they had enjoyed having the opportunity to teach. Again, here is the emphasis upon service as being the real goal. Four Muslim and one Christian respondents wrote that their faith had caused them to wish to study or to learn about other cultures and religions.

Overall the Muslim view of intellectual gain was broader in the sense of encompassing all kinds of knowledge. There was not a sense of a division between sacred and profane knowledge with only the sacred being worth having. This may well be because of their view of the Qur'an as containing all knowledge and as revealing (and reflecting) the order of the created universe.

Emotional Gains

With regard to emotional gains, respondent's statements ranged from those which demonstrated a wish to control emotionalism in themselves and those which showed a positive reaction to emotions and which defined the ability to express emotion as a strength or a healing process. These are two extremes to be found within the responses. What is interesting is that faith seems to deliver both 'control over' and 'freedom to'. This is intriguing in terms of Jo Rowlands' analysis of kinds of empowerment. In control over emotions there is an example of the 'power over' which I had not initially expected to find. In this case it is 'power over' the self. This could be interpreted as an example of the Foucauldian internalisation of the patriarchal gaze demanding conformity to a masculine model of contained emotions. Yet there is clear pleasure for some respondents in this sense of control, especially where they have had a previous sense of their emotions controlling them. This same pleasure is reported as 'self-discipline' by some of the respondents regarding practical gains in the section below. My respondents who write of self-discipline do not regard it as oppressive: on the contrary, it is seen as a source of liberation from the tyranny of unfettered emotion.

Homa Omid has pointed out how Ali Shariati, ideologue of the Iranian revolution, wrote about the necessity to understand such a concept and not to confuse freedom and liberty. She wrote how liberty represents "the absence of constraints" but freedom is something richer which is won "through struggles and hardship and wisdom and growth"⁵ (Omid 1994:153-4). Early in second wave feminism some feminists had encountered this kind of problem. A pamphlet The Tyranny of Structurelessness was written by Jo Freeman in 1970 and distributed in the USA. It pointed out that there was "no such thing as a 'structureless group' and that covert power relations were rife beneath the mask of structurelessness (Freeman n.d: 3). This is akin to the idea of liberty versus freedom, that untamed liberty requires some kind of internal structure in order to prove satisfactory. It explains how it is that the structures of the churches and of Islam might appeal to those like my first Muslim interviewee, Amatulla, who had experienced a 'free school' education and found it wanting. Those who have experienced the tyranny that 'liberty' in the form of structurelessness can offer may feel inclined to seek out guidance and boundaries so that they may learn to control their emotions rather than having their emotions dominate them.

Twenty five of twenty nine Muslim respondents and thirty seven of forty three Christian respondents reported emotional gains. Four of the twenty nine Muslims who responded to this part of the question wrote, like their Christian counterparts, that they had peace of mind. Five Muslims mentioned control of negative emotions as making them 'stronger', 'happy' or able to cope with difficult situations or 'more mature and confident'. Another respondent wrote "I find the practice of my religion provides me with the necessary skills and ability to be able to cope with emotional situations". A further four Muslim respondents mentioned 'emotional balance' in terms of being 'less emotional', gaining 'emotional strength' or 'emotional self-knowledge'. So amongst the Muslims there was an emphasis on happiness or peace of mind coming through control of the emotions in terms of an ability to discipline the self and not to be tempted to be led by emotional needs.

The sense of emotional well-being was also important to the Christians but they seemed to have followed a different route. Seven of the Christians explicitly mentioned that they had found 'emotional healing', six more Christians wrote that they had gained emotional stability and five emotional release. This emphasis upon emotional release is at the opposite end of the spectrum to the 'control over' model of dealing with emotions. It is perhaps more in keeping with popular versions of psychotherapeutic practices than with the model of self-control. One Jesus Fellowship member wrote, "I find that with the Holy Spirit, I am able to express myself more, being healed in my emotions and am freed from fears etc. I can be myself and not be afraid of what others might say. I laugh and cry a lot, (a) great release of tensions". Another Christian, a member of Ichthus Fellowship wrote: "I feel its okay to cry. I couldn't let my feelings go (before) but its fine to show emotions". Six Christians reported that they had found peace of mind and five mentioned a gain of 'family' and friends. Seven Christians mentioned a sense of love as a gain and three of these in terms of their sense of being unconditionally loved by Jesus/God or the Holy Spirit. Two Christian respondents mentioned a loss of fear. This emphasis on expressing emotion and losing fear through love and connectedness fits snugly with the model of positive mental health to be gained through reaching out to others in an interdependent way ('power with') as described in Baker Miller (1988), a manner of relating which she identifies with 'subordinates' but which nevertheless leads, in terms of connectedness, to positive mental health. The healing which takes place is 'power from within', in this case the power within

being the Holy Spirit.

Eleven Christians wrote that they had gained a sense of security. Two Muslims wrote that their sense of God's justice meant that they had confidence that all would be well for them in the end or that they had gained a sense of confidence. This is perhaps similar to the sense of security described by the Christians and in keeping with the sense of security described in the section on spiritual gains.

The big difference between the two main groups of respondents was that Muslims seemed to gain by having their emotions more under control or by being 'less emotional' whereas the Christians gained from having an outlet for their emotions and emotional release or healing through emotional expression. The now diminishing emphasis on the Toronto Blessing in some New Christian Churches often took the form of a kind of healing and was frequently described in therapeutic terms. The Muslims seem to have acquired 'power over' their emotions and the Christians 'power to' and 'power with' as well as 'power from within'. However two Muslim interviewees did in fact mention their own healing experiences. Both were converts to Islam. Linda spoke of how she had gone through difficult times with her first husband who was a drug dealer and how, after having her first child and leaving her husband, she had lived in poverty and ill-health. Her conversion to Islam changed her life in every way. She regained her health, wealth and well-being. Another interviewee Rabia described suffering from depression, and that she had exchanged taking anti-depressants five times a day for praying five times a day. She put the sense of control she had gained in her life down to Islamic practices and prayer.

Practical Gains

By practical gains I mean those which actually facilitate the smooth running of life: the everyday ways in which faith might help to oil the cogs of personal existence. The Muslims had a very strong sense of the applications of their religion to everyday life and interpreted them in terms of structures and frameworks of self-management and as the means of exerting control not only over one's self but over time and the everyday organisation of the self. This follows the description of the ability Islam gave

the respondents to take a sense of control over their emotional life. There is a kind of cultivation of the self and the environment. The self is not allowed to run wild. The responses of the Christians were more relational in terms of being about the practical ways in which their faith enabled them both to receive and give help and friendship, and the sense of community and family they obtained from being part of a Christian fellowship. There is a greater sense of autonomy in the practical gains of the Muslims although they too mentioned societal factors. For instance, five mentioned how the woman's role in the family was practical in that it maintained family structures and relationships within the family and between relatives. So they saw woman's role not only as pivotal to family life (and family life as pivotal to Islam) but also saw this as extremely practical for the good of society and for themselves. This view locates them at the centre, rather than at the periphery of Islam.

For Muslims, the theme of self-discipline entered largely into the practical gains in terms of personal organisation as well as in family and societal structuring. Twenty five of the twenty nine Muslims described practical gains. Eight Muslims mentioned how they had obtained organisational skills in terms of time keeping, punctuality and self-discipline which had come out of praying five times a day and other Islamic practices.

Three Muslims mentioned advice and guidance in terms of the Qur'an. This is a means of organising the life. Like the suggestion of Ali Shariati (earlier), two Muslim respondents mentioned how this guidance offered them freedom. One of these wrote, "Islam allows me complete freedom to study, work and participate in society". It may be difficult to see how being constrained by self-discipline or being dictated to by the Qur'an could be defined as freedom. Yet the chapter on rights addresses the fact that women are given specific entitlements within Islam which they find liberating. (Many women who are Muslims do not know of their rights but those who pursue knowledge through an Islamic education, to which they have an entitlement, are in a better position from which to claim these rights.) A woman in Islam has the right to marry whom she wishes. This helps women to resist in situations where they are being pressed into an unwanted or enforced marriage. Islam in this case is empowering because it allows the respondent to make her case, backed up by the Qur'an. She is assisted by meeting other Muslims who seek to overturn cultural interpretations of Islam, such as the

members of Young Muslims UK who work to oppose enforced marriages. The example of Aziza (see Rights and Responsibilities Chapter), the Bedouin woman who claimed an annulment of an enforced marriage, is one which illustrates the way in which Islam can offer women freedoms which they do not otherwise have. In the chapter on modesty some Muslim women described wearing the *hijab* in terms of having the liberty to move freely in society without being regarded as a sexual object. This view of freedom is not uncontested and yet it becomes understandable as a possible freedom if it is analysed in Foucauldian terms.

Self-discipline and the ability to control the self may be perceived as internalised oppression by some but it is experienced by some of my respondents as an improvement in the quality of life and a means of being freed from influences which had caused them to be unhappy and to feel out of control. This was particularly the case for converts who had formerly felt themselves to be tyrannised by consumerist culture, drugs or alcohol and the sexual exploitation of women. Like power, this kind of freedom is contextual. This freedom should be measured against cultural background, Western or Eastern, which might not facilitate in their particular case, the freedoms of which these women speak.

A member each of the Muslim and the Christian groups of respondents mentioned how they had been given help with looking after their children, whilst two more (one from each group) spoke of how they felt their beliefs helped them be better mothers. Thirty-one Christians in all responded to this section of the questionnaire in the affirmative. Thirteen of these wrote how they had acquired an extended 'family', community or friends, a theme which had also come up in the previous section on emotional gain and two more, as in the previous section, wrote that they no longer had fear - one of these in terms of "no longer fear of men" and the other in terms of "no stress, worry or fear". Nine of the Christians also mentioned help and support of a practical kind when needed. Being part of a believing community empowers the individual by offering resources which would not be available to them outside the communal base. This is especially the case where people do not originate from the places where they live and if they have families who are living far away. 'Debbie', one of my interviewees, described how she and her husband had, after finishing at university where they had converted to Christianity, initially been offered a home in order to move to the area to join the church

fellowship. Now they have young children and are living far from their parents, they are offered practical support and encouragement by the substitute family of their church. The community empowers in the 'power to' and 'power with' way.

One Christian who is a church leader in Pioneer Network said that she had gained the ability to speak (in public). It is interesting that she had found her voice through Christianity, rather than the opposite, which is the tendency, when a literal reading is made of the writing of St. Paul 1 Cor 14, 34-35. This is in keeping with suggestions in the chapter about rights and how women can gain a voice through Pentecostalism, i.e. the prophetic voice. This respondent is, however, a woman who has taken on actual church leadership which has given her the opportunity to learn the skill that many women lack.

Respondents made a wide range of practical gains following their religious commitment. These ranged from the ability to structure one's life and environment and exert a sense of control to an experience of freedom, finding a voice and better access to resources such as help with child care and re-skilling. The benefits which come from association are multiple. Religious meetings are one of the few venues where women may be welcomed on their own and where divorced women and single parents might make acquaintances and find assistance.

Material gains

My question concerning material gains was intended to establish whether there were material benefits from affiliation with revivalist groups. In many ways it is difficult to separate the particular material benefits from the spiritual, emotional and practical advantages. This is because an increased sense of well-being and peacefulness, greater self-organisation and better time-keeping and companionship as well as a sense of identity are likely to result in material benefits. Although this question was answered in the affirmative by fifteen Christians and fourteen Muslims who wrote that they had gained materially through their religious affiliation there were some respondents who thought the question was non-applicable to the issue of faith. Of the fourteen Muslims who wrote that they had gained materially through the practice of their religion, one described how she had gained "a good husband

and financial support" when she was a single parent. Five of the younger unmarried Muslims (above) saw the Qur'anic provision for women in marriage as a future (and therefore current in terms of peace of mind) material gain, in terms of 'independence of wealth' and the provision of the husband for the family. Five other Muslim respondents reported a sense of emotional ease over finance which could also be considered a gain. Two other Muslim respondents wrote that to gain material things was permissible in Islam as long as one paid *Zakat* (a form of giving to charity which is one of the Five Pillars of Islam). Two of my interviewees who are converts to Islam described how it was permissible within Islam to do good works in order to receive a reward. This reward is of course a spiritual reward and not a financial one but perhaps these poles are not so easily separated. Paradise in Islam is described in terms which suggest comfort and prosperity and gives the impression that reward is not frowned upon in Islam (Qur'an 3:14-15). The description of Paradise is such as to "entice the readers towards the afterlife" (Wadud-Muhsin: 52-59). The promise of 'gardens with rivers flowing beneath' must have been deeply alluring to the desert Arabs of the 7th century (CE). Linda, an interviewee who had been a single parent, pointed out that this expectation of a reward in Paradise on the part of the giver frees the person in need to receive the gift without guilt or embarrassment. She explained how when, as a single parent, she was in financial distress, a Sister offered her some money which she felt reluctant to accept. The Sister pointed out that if Linda did not take the gift she would be preventing the donor from receiving her reward. This relieved Linda of embarrassment and allowed her to accept the gift she needed. Another interviewee suggested, "There is no reclusive idea in Islam. You take a pot of soup to a sick person because they are your neighbour and because of the idea of reward".

Some of the Christian respondents had benefitted materially in the most necessary of ways: two had gained a home, one of these being a lone parent with two sons and the other a student with housing needs. Two Christian interviewees had also gained assistance with housing. Members of Christian communities seem to help each other a great deal in this way: one interviewee, mentioned above, had been temporarily housed in order to move area and an other was offered assistance with purchasing a house. Five Christians said they had gained materially in terms of financial help when needed, one respondent having received cheques from church members for the replacement of a car which had

been stolen. Seven Christian respondents felt that God provides for them in their daily needs. Three Christians described friends as a material gain. So although there was a sense of the idea of financial or material gain in relation to faith being improper amongst some of the Christians, many had a sense of material well-being and assistance through their belief and their faith community. This echoes the findings of Brasher (1998) in terms of the cost-effectiveness of religious goods and services. Some of the benefits which my informants describe may be counted in financial terms but others represent the kind of goods which it is impossible to buy.

Two Muslim respondents, like five of the Christians said they were less materialistic or not materialistic because of their faith. One Muslim, a convert, wrote: "One does not expect to gain materially except what is ordained for you - materialism is one of the main reasons in society one turns to Islam". Amongst some of the Christians the sense of being less materialistic was seen as something to celebrate, one Jesus Fellowship member wrote "I'm less materialistic -yeah!!" Certainly if one's need to be a conspicuous consumer decreases the feeling of well being must increase and one's pocket can benefit as well. For instance, one Muslim wrote: " The fact that most people wear simple clothes... such that there is a sort of uniformity means less money and time spent on deciding what to wear". Similarly, a Christian respondent wrote that a material gain for her was her "need to not put materialistic things before other things". This is gain indeed because there is a financial well-being in not being constantly preoccupied by lack of money. Another Christian, an Ichthus member wrote, "I used to buy expensive clothing and keep a very nice home. These things don't matter any more". So a simplification of needs is also an improvement in material well-being.

Although some respondents felt that the association with material gain and faith was inappropriate the majority of respondents did not seem to feel inhibited about discussing their sense of improved material and therefore emotional well-being. But it is also the case that lack of want makes for a greater sense of well-being even if it is the result of a simplification of life-style, choice of dress and a redefinition of needs. Further, material gain may take the form of an expected future good as in the case of the provision by the husband and the expected independence of wealth within a Muslim marriage. But clearly a number of respondents gained in terms of actual financial gifts and other

forms of highly tangible assistance when they were most in need through the mediation of their associates and co-believers. Although women clearly do not join religious movements for material benefits, these benefits cannot be ignored.

Conclusion

The choices my respondents and interviewees are making are not confrontational; they do not challenge patriarchy. They are imposing limits on male power but they are not generally contesting it. Some, like the Evangelical feminists, have contested patriarchy in the sense of confronting hierarchical power and male domination within the church and within Christian marriage, but they continue to believe in both the church and marriage as institutions. Many of these women have become radicalised over the years. This is because it is not always easy to accommodate patriarchy even if you set out to do so. Yet there is a kind of empowerment strategy even if not an overt feminist agenda which can be traced within the choices of the respondents and interviewees. They are delineating spaces for themselves within patriarchal structures and are using the opportunities that delineation of gender roles allows them to their advantage. Although I have found more evidence of 'power over' than I had expected they are generally empowering themselves in terms of 'power with' rather than 'power over'. Perhaps the exercise, to a degree, of the 'power over' model of power is an inevitability in a patriarchal society and is also partially explained by the diversity of kinds of power to be found in any given situation. Interestingly, the reports of the acquisition of self-discipline suggest that for some there is gain in terms of 'power over' the self. Indeed the sense of self-control the Muslims gained was emphatic and the consequent sense of freedom was a recurring theme. This difference between the self-monitoring of the Muslims and the self-expression of the Christians is marked and significant in attempting to understand the differences in their approaches. Although it could be argued that the Muslim emphasis on self-control is merely a sign of internalised oppression, the pleasure the respondents feel in having a sense of control over their lives is evident.

What light does the foregoing material throw on why women might join revivalist movements? Clearly there are a number of benefits to be drawn from such an association. The benefits range from the

spiritual to the material but they are by no means mutually exclusive. Many of the gains described across the board point to a decrease in anxiety. These come from two contradictory ways of dealing with control. The tendency among the Muslims is to take control of their lives but the Christians have a tendency to relinquish that control and depend upon the 'power within'. The Muslim way is through defining and implementing 'limits' and following the guidance of the Qur'an and for the Christians it is through their interactive relationship with their maker. A sense of well being and a sense of identity come from the experience of a special relationship with God, and from the very tangible affiliation with other believers as well as from the religious practices both individual and communal. Some of the benefits are highly practical in terms of financial assistance and help with housing. Through their affiliation, the respondents who are converts have been able to become new beings and construct new lives. Some respondents have a sense of gaining love and freedom from fear.

The benefits include the practical meeting of needs that women have, which are different for women from diverse backgrounds at different times in their lives. Some have made the extraordinary choice to abandon choice by "giving up independent will". They have chosen to abandon choice because they have tried it and it did not work out for them. But, ultimately, the respondents have been telling me that it does not matter what they gain or lose. At times, the same faith can provide totally contradictory rewards. Yet there is a consistency in that what is important is identity and the ability to construct a life experience. That is what empowerment is.

Notes

1. Banner, Lois (1995) [1974] Women in Modern America: A Brief History 3rd edition, Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace in Brasher:47
2. Lofland, John and Peter Stark (1965) 'Becoming a 'World Saver': A theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective' American Sociological Review 30:862-875 in Brasher:47
3. I here use the term 'revert' to denote those born into Muslim homes and who, for a time, moved away from Islam but only to return with renewed vigour. Some Muslims use the term in the same way as I am using 'convert'. I use both terms in order to differentiate for the purpose of making an analysis.
4. Regular fellowship meetings held in people's homes
5. Eqbal, Alameh Az Didegaheh Zende Yadeh Dr. Ali Shariati in living memory of Dr. Shariati Kayham 24 July 1991 in Omid 1994:153-4
6. "As in all the churches of the saints, women shall be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church".

Conclusion

The primary aim of this study has been to discover why some women swim against the prevailing consumerist and postmodernist tide by joining revivalist groups. These are groups which although symptomatic of postmodernity do not embrace the postmodern blurring of boundaries and which frequently hold an idea of liberation linked to a binary view of gender. This has been discussed in chapter six where the gains, both spiritual and practical, which interviewees and respondents reported as consequential to their religious choices have been outlined. Although the spiritual motivation for religious choices should not be underestimated, I found rational choice theory to be particularly useful as a means of assessing the benefits that religious affiliation with revivalist groups offered. A secondary aim has been to discover to what degree women who align themselves with such groups fit the stereotype of 'fundamentalist' women and the projection that they are compliant, oppressed and mute. These women *do* reject postmodernist notions of gender fluidity and the relativism of the late 1990s often taking on complimentary and even hierarchicalist ideas of gender boundaries and roles. In doing so they are in opposition to the dominant culture of the day and therefore have to be assertive, a quality which defies the stereotype.

Included within these broad principal aims outlined above are a number of subordinate focuses and endeavours and these can roughly be divided into two theoretical aims, both of which are envisaged in terms of their implications for feminist theory and women's studies. The first of these addresses the division which has taken place between feminists who support postmodernism and poststructuralism and those who do not, the latter on the grounds that the 'unprincipled playfulness' of postmodernism acts as a political neutraliser "by producing an infinite sceptical relativism with regard to values" (Ebert 1997)¹ (Phoenix 1998: 875). It is my view that revivalist women present a lived-out critique of postmodern feminist theory with regard to their sense of its non-applicability to themselves. I do not mean that this is done intentionally but that by cleaving to certainties and a binary view of gender relations they are able to make significant choices which support them in the everyday practical difficulties and responsibilities of their lives.

A ground for the rejection of poststructuralist analysis, especially in its application to women's studies, is the disembodiment which results when gender is considered to be purely a construction of discourses whereby the body ceases to have tangible qualities of its own. I wanted to find ways of applying poststructuralist analysis without the consequence of the political quietism which disembodiment implies. Further, I wondered if it was possible to use the positive theoretical base of poststructuralism with its facility for making an analysis of power relations whilst maintaining a recognition that the configuration of power thus analysed still takes place within a framework of patriarchal power relations: relations which remain relatively unchanged.

The second focus was the theoretical base of 'difference' and the acknowledgement that "all women are multiply positioned" (Phoenix 1998:874) which has by the infinite progression of its theoretical application led not only to the lack of any shared voice (Berkday 1993) but also to the virtual atomisation of feminisms. I therefore commenced this project with the aim of seeking out *shared* views amongst dissimilar women. I wanted to establish whether there was any way in which a feminist agenda could be considered to enter into the discourse of women who identify themselves with revivalist forms of Christianity and Islam in Britain today. Women of different ethnicities, from disparate geographical locations, belief systems and socio-economic groups may not agree on many of issues and some differences may be unreconcilable but there are also issues which touch the lives of many women.

Stereotypes

It soon became apparent that interviewees and respondents to the questionnaire themselves defied the stereotype of passively compliant women. This was illustrated for instance by Miriam who explained how she wears *hijab* against the wishes of her husband and by other interviewees and respondents with their wonderful candour, humour and articulateness. The fact is that intelligent and high-achieving women are part of these movements even though the stereotype of committed revivalists is not one of women who are thinkers. The prominence of high-achievers in this study could be due to a number of causes. It is possible they were selected by gatekeepers in order to give a good impression, it could be that revivalisms attract high achievers, or it could be that revivalisms impart

study skills and the ability to concentrate in the way, for instance, that some Muslims reported their time management had improved. It could also be that an abstemious lifestyle is conducive to study. In terms of leaders wishing to make a good impression there were times during visits, for instance to the YMUK meeting, when I had free access to members who were clearly highly educated. There is room for a follow-up study in this area.

Postmodernism

Some feminist writers do think it possible to reconcile the apparently unreconcilable. Ann Phoenix (1998) points out that although new ideas are thought to be better than old ideas this is not necessarily the case. I concur with this view, the idea of the inevitability of progress is, after all, a liberal and modernist idea. A postmodern contribution to theory has been its ability to scramble the grand narrative of the inevitability of progress. This strength, however, is also its weakness in that postmodern theory eventually unravels itself in terms of the famous quote from Marx, "All that is solid melts into air". This is the kind of postmodern reflexivity and blurring of boundaries from which, it seems to me, revivalists are taking refuge. Two grounds upon which Phoenix sees postmodernism as being contested (in this case in terms of the theory of difference in relation to 'race') "by those committed to binary categorisations (are), either in the maintenance of racialized hierarchies or because it is easier to instigate political change on the basis of dualist conceptions of 'race' and ethnicity" (Phoenix:876). The same analysis could be applied in the case of postmodernism and gender and I believe that the Islamic feminists, in particular, are opting for the binary view of gender and finding ways of making political change. There is a way in which they represent a corporeal feminism as well as a rights-based feminism in a situation where secular Western feminisms have currently, to some degree, rejected both.

The bringing together of postmodern approaches in terms of the theory of life histories has resulted in a treatment of interviewees' narratives in isolation from social influences. This follows Roland Barthe's (1977) 'Death of the Author' in Image-Music-Text whereby the text is, as it were, written afresh by the reader on any particular reading. This iconoclastic change in the way we read texts is

on the one hand liberating, but on the other, taken in isolation, the free-floating text is rendered ahistorical and many of the clues to the nuances of its meaning, for instance, in terms of the impact of social influences on the individual are erased. Milieu has been important in attempting to understand the accounts of my interviewees. I found making visits and participant observation invaluable in building a picture of my interviewees' commitment and in seeing them not only as an individual but as part of a greater picture.

I have already described how Chilla Bulbeck (1997) made a shift in her approach to life histories for her study of the impact of feminism on the lives of three generations of Australian women by departing from the postmodern abstraction of the texts from their social background (Bulbeck 1997:6-7). This methodological shift is appealing in that it unites abstract theorising with the lived reality of the body in society. One of the implications for feminist theory maybe, especially within women's studies as a taught subject, that postmodern feminist theory is better understood in terms of its possible limitations and applications when it is taught within the context of the broad sweep of the history of feminist theory and not as negating it and rendering it *passé*: "grounded theory", to borrow a term from Chilla Bulbeck. The whole of feminist theory is a rich accumulation of scholarship upon which we are able to draw critically.

A shared agenda

The danger of a prioritisation of difference over any shared agenda is an overemphasis on the individual where the individual is seen as responsible in every way for their own well-being and where societal factors and shared interests are ignored. A more richly textured and multi-dimensional representation of difference, will, for instance, demonstrate that different women may be subjected to the same structural, political, educational and economic forces. These will result in diversity because of the presence of difference but there will be moments of understanding and perhaps shared interests among women who share exposure to the dominant forms of enculturation and experience which occur within society at any given place or time. According to Alison Assiter in Phoenix (1998) the bringing together of the apparently irreconcilable is possible in terms of how

"The realist's insight that claims are true, not just for me or for a particular group is vindicated. But the claim of some realists to have provided a "view from nowhere" that mirrors unmediated "experience" of the "world" is not. The relativist's insight that all knowledge is provisional and contextual, is also vindicated; but her claim that viewpoints are true only for herself or her community, is not" (Assiter 1996: 95)²

Although a rights-based feminism is not popular in the present time there are shared concerns regarding motherhood and employment amongst my interviewees and respondents and these may be issues that are shared beyond the parameters of revivalist religions and may indeed be experienced as issues by secular feminists and many other women as well. Motherhood and employment rights (the latter which have become largely non-existent for a new generation of workers on temporary contracts) are issues which have generally, for the time being, been dropped from the feminist agenda. Further there are shared concerns, among some feminists and the revivalists, with regard to combatting the sexual exploitation of women.

My experience of being 'caught in the crossfire' between secular feminists and religious revivalists caused me to intensify my reflection upon how far women's activism within revivalist religions can be considered to have some kind of feminist agenda. The answer depends largely upon one's definition of feminism - a task which has always been problematic because of difficulties related to ownership of the definition, especially in the face of difference. Is it possible to make a definition which is wide enough to accommodate all kinds of feminist agendas? In 1983, Dale Spender attempted a Western feminist definition which was careful to leave room for difference. She wrote "While I would prefer not to define or restrict the meaning of feminism, I feel obliged to give some indication of my usage of the term. I suggest therefore that a feminist is a woman who does not accept man's socially sanctioned view of himself and that feminism refers to the alternative meanings put forward by feminists. That should leave enough room" (Dale Spender 1983:8 note 2). This is in keeping with the later minimalist definition of Parvin Paidar of 'aiming to increase women's rights, opportunities and choices within any ideology or context' (Paidar 1995:xi). This offers a more cross-cultural and inter/extra-faith interpretation. For the purposes of this study I find both definitions are able to accommodate an inclusive view of feminism which is able to embrace women from different cultures and systems of belief and which does not seek to lay down ground rules of what kinds of specific improvements feminists should seek.

In general, my respondents and interviewees are not putting forward alternative meanings, they are not confronting patriarchy. They are however using the boundaries within patriarchal religion to demand that these limits also apply to masculine power and in this way they are involved in a kind of struggle. Brenda Brasher has cited Frances Fitzgerald³ as saying, with regard to fundamentalist churches in the USA, "that women might have invented such churches, given their 'prohibition of 'traditional male vices' and the positive sanctions for male commitment to family life" (Brasher: 168). Nevertheless, this compliance with patriarchy was not unanimous. The Biblical feminists do challenge hierarchy in terms of the church and in marital relationships. They contend that the submission that is required of spouses is mutual and that the New Testament promotes egalitarian marriage. They, however, continue to support marriage and the church as institutions, even though some of them have become marginalised from their own churches because of their beliefs.

In being egalitarians the Biblical feminists were unusual among my informants. Many of my other interviewees and respondents challenge the gender equality which they suggest is based upon 'sameness'. They disassociate themselves from an idea of a feminism which they believe would treat men and women as basically the same. This is because they think that women are then forced to compete upon an identical basis with men. They believe that their reproductive capacity is ignored along with the fact that in the majority of cases women still have the major responsibility of child-care, and they suggest that women miss out in open competition with men. These women put motherhood, which has become displaced from feminist discourse by gender scepticism, firmly back on the agenda. The issue of motherhood is important. Andrea Dworkin's prophecy of how women could become obsolete through the application of reproductive technology (Dworkin 1988) and the words of the womanist theologian Delores S. Williams about how poor black women in the United States could be forced into the situation of becoming surrogate mothers to white babies (Williams 1993:15-33) have a horrible ring of truth about them. Phyllis Chesler has written about the issue of women losing custody of their children to the financially better-off fathers in the United States (1988). Motherhood remains one of the most pressing concerns for women in a society which, in general, requires, in line with equal opportunities, that women work and yet, does not make provision for child-care. Mothers are penalised in this way, torn between child-care and the need for economic

independence. The provisions which Islam in particular and Christianity, to some degree, make, offer a way of dealing with these issues which are not being addressed in other ways.

Both Muslims and Christians see the need to have structures and constraints which facilitate their functioning as women, as mothers, as wives. Because they do not hanker after the autonomous model of empowerment they find the connectedness which they gain from being part of a believing community empowering. In many ways their notion of empowerment comes from abandoning open choice. This is where they are distinct from feminists who are willing and able to respond to difference but who must have the option of choosing. Therefore closing those avenues of choice, though empowering in some ways for these women, is unacceptable to many feminists. Yet sometimes my respondents and interviewees find opportunities for leadership or a means of gaining a voice. Such is the case of the church leader in the Pioneer Fellowship who found that her church had given her the opportunity to learn how to speak in public.

Feminists support women's right to choose. Yet this particular kind of religious choice is one which is frequently not supported by feminists. Yet there are clearly women who are feminists of a kind within these movements alongside those who are not and further there are those who would not dream of defining themselves as feminists who, all the same, are concerned with issues which relate to the well-being of women. This includes some women who are engaged in what I have described as a 'rights-based' feminism within Islam. The provisions which revivalisms in Islam and Christianity make offer a variety of ways of dealing with women's issues which are not being addressed elsewhere.

Notes

1. Ebert, Teresa 1997 'The crisis of (ludic) socialist feminism', Genders Vol 21: 339-69 in Phoenix 1998:875
2. Assiter, Alison (1996) Enlightened Women: Modernist Feminism in a Postmodern Age, London: Routledge in Phoenix 1998:875
3. Fitzgerald, Frances [1981] (1986) Cities on a Hill: A Journey through contemporary American Cultures New York: Simon and Schuster

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