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## Acts and practices of citizenship: Muslim women's activism in the UK

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### ABSTRACT

Drawing on the growing literature on Muslim women's activism, this paper explores grammars of action that frame political mobilizations of Muslim women in the UK. By taking a broad view of political activism, we identify acts and practices of citizenship through which Muslim women activists engage with, reinterpret and challenge social norms. The article critically engages with dominant readings of post-migration minorities' political mobilization through the lens of citizenship regimes and draws attention to more processual and agency-centred perspectives on citizenship. We focus on two salient themes that Bristol-based Muslim activists were concerned with: mobilizing against violence against women, manifested in the anti-FGM campaign by Integrate Bristol, and attempts to re-negotiate the terms of participation in religious spaces, manifested in claims for more inclusive mosques. In both instances, mobilization was not confined to the local community or national level, but supported by and embedded in related transnational struggles.

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### Introduction

In January 2016 British Prime Minister David Cameron announced a £20 million language tuition fund to teach “isolated” Muslim women to speak English. Linking “forced gender segregation” and discrimination with “a slide towards radicalisation and extremism”, he asserted this initiative was needed to end the “passive tolerance” of Muslim separatism and “confront the minority of Muslim men whose ‘backward attitudes’ exert ‘damaging control’ over women in their families” (Cameron 2016). In so doing, Cameron echoed dominant themes of public debates across the UK and Europe that characterize Muslim women as especially vulnerable to

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patriarchal practices and manipulation by terrorist ideologues, or as “moderating and correcting influences against a ‘combative-masculinist’ and radical Islam” (Brown 2008, 482). These themes remain remarkably fixed, notwithstanding the growing research literature which advances a more nuanced picture of Muslim women’s political and religious agency. Thus, research has explored Muslim women’s struggles for their rights to wear religious attire (Rosenberger and Sauer 2012), involvement in protest movements (Werbner 2000; Massoumi 2015), agency in relation to the “War on Terror” (Brown 2008; Rashid 2014; Wadia 2015), and religious activism (Mahmood 2005; Bano and Kalmbach 2011; Hafez 2011; Hammer 2012). This scholarship has remained largely disconnected too from the wider sociological literature on post-migration minorities’ political mobilizations (Bousetta 2000; Koopmans et al. 2005; Modood 2005; Però and Solomos 2010; Cinalli and Giugni 2013; Lewicki 2014; Statham and Tillie 2016), including work that focuses particularly on the mobilization strategies of European Muslims. This article links these literatures more explicitly and highlights the insights that the analysis of Muslim women’s activism can add to the literature on post-migration minorities’ political mobilizations.

Political mobilization research has been dominated by a “citizenship regime studies” approach, which, we contend, draws on a narrow understanding of citizenship as formally affiliated with the state, and defined by macro-political features such as nationality, rules of access and integration regimes. More nuanced and inclusive notions of citizenship, that encompass the political subjectivity of those frequently excluded from formal politics, have evolved in the fields of feminist, childhood and youth studies. These considerations, however, have been insufficiently incorporated into citizenship regime studies. In this article, we show how attention to the diverse range of mobilization strategies adopted by Muslim women activists can add to the analysis of citizenship in the context of European cultural and religious diversity.

We propose a perspective on post-migration political mobilizations that focuses on the negotiation, co-production and enactment of citizenship (e.g. Isin 2009; Però 2011; Erel 2013). Citizenship, we suggest, goes well beyond legal ascriptions of nationality, and constitutes an enactment of political subjectivity that involves the “doing” and “undoing” of social norms – the claiming of rights and the right to have rights. This definition is derived from a combined focus on the literatures on acts and practices of citizenship, which allows us to view political contention over social norms, articulated through informal, everyday grammars of political action, as well as the “glocal” and transnational features of post-migration minorities’ political activism.

These issues are explored through two case studies of Muslim women’s activism: mobilization against gender violence, manifested in the campaign against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM); and attempts to re-negotiate the

terms of women's participation in religious spaces, manifested in claims for more gender-inclusive mosques.

Of course there is a danger in reifying categorizations such as "Muslim-woman" (Cooke 2008) by reproducing them in academic analysis, especially as the women we worked with were also involved in these and other campaigns as citizens, mothers, neighbours, friends, professionals or community workers, etc. Yet, we suggest, speaking of them as Muslim women in the context of this research is appropriate as their activism and political subjectivity were explicitly articulated in a creative renegotiation of roles allocated to them as Muslim women, either through UK public discourse, or within the context of specific cultural and religious practices. Thus, the subject "Muslim woman" emerges both as a claim and a response to broader social and political discourses.

We investigate the discursive tools and action repertoires of women activists, and trace how their activism interacts with politics within the city and communities to which they related, in one particular locality in the UK, the city of Bristol. Before turning to our case studies, we briefly outline our key analytical concerns and methodological considerations.

## **Analytical framework**

Citizenship, especially in the context of research on migrant groups' or post-migration minorities' political engagement, is often studied as determined by state based citizenship "regimes" that shape possibilities or limit options for the articulation of minority actors' political claims. Since the 1990s, a largely comparative literature has emerged examining cross-nationally how laws and legal norms, political institutions, ideas of the nation, or histories of immigration have provided distinct institutional and discursive opportunities and constraints for the framing and content of post-migration groups' political claims (e.g. Koopmans et al. 2005; Cinalli and Giugni 2013; Statham and Tillie 2016). In these accounts, citizenship is predominantly understood as an assemblage of rights and obligations tied to its main reference frame: the conditions of membership within states and the political cultures (e.g. civic republicanism, or multiculturalism) that underpin them.

Drawing on cross-national datasets, this scholarship typically analyses claims-making by minorities, identified through analyses of mainstream newspapers and research interviews with representatives of minority organizations (e.g. Statham and Tillie 2016, 184). The claims identified on this basis are explained with reference to patterns of established religion or secularism in public life, the liberal or restrictive tendencies of state's policies and legal frameworks in areas such as multicultural accommodation or anti-discrimination, and prevailing ideas of national identity (Statham and Tillie 2016, 184). Engaging with legal-political contexts across European countries, the approach

aims to offer insights into “everyday debates” on Islam (Cinalli and Giugni 2013). The content of claims articulated in the UK, for instance, can be explained then by its multicultural citizenship regime, whose established church has facilitated the accommodation of minority faiths. Patterns of minority mobilization are depicted as facilitated by national discourses and institutional structures that enable and fashion the kinds of claims that are possible. This macro-political lens rests, however, on a reductive account of citizenship, and accounts for a limited range of forms of political action.

Three analytical and methodological shortcomings are relevant here. Firstly, citizenship regime studies have been criticized for treating minority actors as objects of politics rather than active political subjects (Bousetta 2000; Peró and Solomos 2010; Peró 2011; Lewicki 2014), and confining their conception of what is politically meaningful to action intended to influence political institutions – rather than on more informal and socially oriented forms of action and contestation (O’Toole and Gale 2010, 2013; Peró and Solomos 2010).

A second and related concern with the citizenship regimes literature is that its focus on claims as they appear in mainstream media does not account for more informal, and particularly *gendered* forms of political mobilization. There is a long-standing literature pointing to the gendered assumptions that underpin the study of political participation, particularly when it is conceived as public acts that seek to influence formal institutions – based not least on a critique of the histories of women’s exclusion from formal political arenas as well as on the claim that informal, personal and domestic arenas should be recognized as sites of political contestation and struggle. As Wood argues, current interest in forms of everyday political engagement owes a debt to feminist scholarship with its concern with the “hidden spaces” of the “private, the domestic and the ordinary”, and its aims “to bring to light the embodied, informal practices of traditionally disempowered people” (2014, 216). A focus on mediatized claims as articulated by largely male dominated community organizations (Jones et al. 2015) does not pay sufficient attention to sites of contestation within minority communities, such as struggles over gender norms.

Finally, citizenship regime studies provide insights into the ways in which institutional contexts matter and shape actors’ perceptions and the content of their claims. In so doing, they contextualize activists’ claims, showing how they are “reactive” to mainstream discourses and institutional arrangements in the national setting. However, this approach tends to fix context at the level of national institutions and forms of citizenship regulation. Even if “there so far is nothing beyond the nation-state that can serve as a new anchor for collective identities” (Koopmans et al. 2005, 4), there are multiple transnational publics and political and cultural flows that shape and animate contemporary activism. Thus, activists’ claims can involve engaging in transnational issues, ideas and movements.

Scholarly work that explores acts (Isin 2009; Erel 2013) and practices of citizenship (Peró 2011; Neveu 2015), by contrast, recognizes that citizens shape the contours of citizenship by actively engaging in communal and public affairs, including in everyday ways, and in personal, domestic and community spaces. These literatures account for less conventional or publicly visible political action, gendered enactments of citizenship, processes of political contention, and the significance of international and transnational struggles.

Beyond habitual, routinized or institutionalized procedures of democratic practice, *acts of citizenship* can be conceptualized as ruptures to hegemonic orders. Acts of citizenship, according to Isin, are deeds by which actors constitute themselves and others as subjects of rights (2009, 371). "Acting beyond the script", breaking habitus "in a way that disrupts already defined orders, practices and statuses" constitutes an enactment of citizenship (Isin 2009, 384). Such enactments challenge common assumptions, which may involve "questioning essential categories such as 'woman' or 'immigrant' as given" (Isin 2002, 4). In contrast to the citizenship regime approach, the literature on "acts of citizenship" stresses agents' capacities to act politically regardless of public authorities' "formal" authorization, and despite being socially marginalized in various ways (Isin 2009). Activists' claims contribute to expanding the existing body of rights. Acts of citizenship as we understand them here point to ways in which women may enact their political subjectivity by challenging the roles allocated to them by actors in public institutions, or those who claim authority over the interpretation of Islam. Through such acts, women may articulate political claims that re-create their citizenship.

Whilst the literature on "acts of citizenship" is helpful in accounting for the transformative effects of mobilization, we also turn to scholarly work that focuses more explicitly on everyday *practices of citizenship*. The concern of this literature is that everyday conversations and activities can be constitutive of politics and claims-making; whilst many of these may not necessarily qualify as transformations in a cultural, economic or political sense, they engage with smaller changes that are deployed "to cope with, neutralize or resist adverse policies" or circumstances (Peró 2014, 165). This perspective explores instances of infra-political or undeclared resistance or agency, which may involve seeking gradual adjustments or simply refusing to operate on somebody else's terms, without necessarily questioning the norms underpinning a particular social order.

The scholarship on acts of citizenship, on the one hand, is mainly focused on ruptures that project transformative social visions. The literature on practices of citizenship, on the other, is concerned with forms of small scale resistance and agency that do not necessarily aspire to transform institutional arrangements. Yet, each of the two perspectives draws attention to a range of forms of activism manifested either in the "undoing" or the "doing" of

social norms. Bringing the analytical concerns of both perspectives together allows for a more comprehensive understanding of political mobilization.

We suggest that the interplay of both acts and practices of citizenship helps us to grasp the varied spectrum of grammars of action reflected in Muslim women's mobilization. In summary, we argue that Muslim women activists' political subjectivity finds expression in the "undoing" and "doing" of norms within mainstream society and their communities. Importantly, activists' grammars of action include, but also extend well beyond, public claim-making directed at formal institutions. Our focus on acts and practices of citizenship includes repertoires of campaigning or protest aimed at challenging political structures or social norms, but also everyday, or "Do It Yourself" (DIY), forms of political action, such as consciousness-raising acts, performance, debating within "counter-publics" or social media activism (O'Toole and Gale 2010, 2013; Peró 2011, 2014; Neveu 2015).

To explore Muslim women's political activism using this account of acts and practices of citizenship, our analytical frame focuses on (1) the significance of institutional citizenship, discursive and social regimes in shaping opportunities for Muslim women's mobilization, (2) the identification of acts of citizenship which challenge, or seek to undo, existing arrangements, regulations and norms, and (3) practices of citizenship which are reflected in everyday forms of resistance or agency.

## Methodology

This study was part of a multidisciplinary research programme called "Productive Margins – Regulating for Engagement", which is based on a collaboration between the University of Bristol and Cardiff University and community partners from civil society and social enterprise organizations from Bristol and South Wales. Programme objectives were to create a dialogue between academics and practitioners, build bridges between their fields of expertise and explore community engagement and its effects from a bottom-up rather than a top-down perspective. The study in question originated from an initial phase of research into mechanisms of Muslims' political involvement in Bristol through a local Muslim civic forum, Building the Bridge.<sup>1</sup> Based on interviews and discussions with Building the Bridge participants, including community groups, the City Council and police, the research found that the forum had instituted a new political opportunity structure for the participation and representation of Muslim interests and concerns in the city that had not hitherto existed, which connected with but extended beyond its remit as the implementation body for Prevent in Bristol. In evaluating the participatory nature of the forum, and based on discussion with its members, the project developed a second phase of research focused on Muslim women's engagement in decision-making in the city. Through collaboration with a specially

constituted Steering Group of sixteen Muslim women participants, drawn from the membership of Building the Bridge, and including community, faith and student activists concerned with Muslim women's inclusion in decision-making structures, the project set out to co-produce research into how spaces for Muslim women's engagement might be made more effective.

The Steering Group brought together women concerned with addressing the lack of involvement of women in civic and religious spaces of decision-making, as well as the lack of public acknowledgement of women who *were* actively involved in decision-making processes. The group included women of different ethnic backgrounds and ages, including English, Moroccan, Pakistani and Somali, and from early adulthood to retirement age. The women had worked or volunteered with a range of organizations, two members had previously stood as candidates in local and national elections, and most were involved in ad hoc or institutionalized local authority consultations – including through Building the Bridge, but also through community, women's, youth and inter-faith organizations. The research team and Steering Group collaborated to design activities that would enable research and reflection on the role and engagement of Muslim women in decision-making, driven by an ethos that these activities should recognize and contribute to women's critical and mobilizing capacities.

To achieve this, events were held at the University and in community centres across the city. The first public event set out to explore women's experiences of being active in public arenas, with presentations by Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, who was the first Muslim woman to serve in cabinet, Sughra Ahmed, the first elected female president of a national Muslim organization, the Islamic Society of Britain, and Fahma Mohamed, a student activist in the campaign against FGM. Their presentations were supported by a poetry performance by Shagufta K, a poet and theatre-maker. The event was attended by over 100 men and women, many of whom were from local Muslim communities. Footage from the presentations formed part of the materials to stimulate discussion and reflection in eight subsequent workshops with Muslim women from across the city. These were facilitated by Steering Group members and explored the political, intellectual, theological and social contributions of Muslim women in different contexts. The workshops investigated issues, aspirations and obstacles to women's participation in local, community and public decision-making. Seventy Muslim women of various ages and ethnic backgrounds (including Somali, Pakistani, Bengali, Indian, Moroccan, Sudanese, Eritrean and Kenyan) participated in these workshops. The project's findings were disseminated via a public event, with representatives of the City Council and Muslim women's and community organizations. Participant-observation notes taken during the eight workshops, notes from the Steering Group meetings and public events, as well



as publicly accessible material constitute the dataset on which this article draws.

## Case study 1: campaigning against FGM

### *Institutional and discursive opportunity structures*

Western feminism provides a key, although highly contested, frame of reference for contemporary Muslim women's struggles. Research participants in our study acknowledged feminism's historic and ongoing achievements for women's rights, but problematized how feminism had been implicated in public debates that constructed Muslim women through the narrow lens of oppression (see Mirza 1997; Abu-Lughod 2013), and this emerged as a key concern for the ways in which Muslim women's "empowerment" is articulated across a range of public discourses.

Whilst well-meaning yet patronizing concerns frequently inform the terms of debate *about* Muslim women in the UK, and more often than not exclude Muslim women's own perceptions from the circle of discussants, the Steering Group was aware, particularly given their involvement in forums such as Building the Bridge, that such discourses also helped them to enter political circles as "representatives" of Muslim women in the UK, which in turn enabled them to raise public awareness of issues they felt needed re-negotiation. Those Steering Group members who had been involved in activism and campaigning in mainstream institutions or organizations suggested that highlighting their "Muslim" positionality sometimes accorded them a representative role which allowed their voice to be heard more widely. It is the widespread perception that Muslim women are particularly oppressed, under-represented in public life or subject to violence that makes public authorities in the UK seek to include them as "representatives", especially to discuss issues such as abuse or gender discrimination. This interest becomes even more emphatic when such issues are subsumed within the counter-extremism agenda as recently proposed by the Home Secretary, Theresa May (Travis 2015), and echoed in the statements by David Cameron cited at the opening of this article, which elide culturally based gender discrimination with extremism. Although the previous Prevent strategy's focus on "empowering Muslim women" tended to position Muslim women as "peace-makers" and viewed their inclusion instrumentally as a mechanism for "domesticating out of control Muslim men" (Brown 2008), it nonetheless, as Wadia notes, "brought a significant number of women into civic and political life" (2015, 86). In the process, she argues, it enabled women to challenge both "the political strictures imposed by male community leaders" and their exclusion from mainstream institutions, consequently many "took up the state's offer to be 'empowered' through the Prevent

programme" (Wadia 2015, 97–98). Whilst activists perceived this as a door-opener, they found the sensationalist reception of their statements unhelpful, and rejected the processes of cultural labelling that appeared to be driving public interest in women's experiences of culturally or religiously based forms of gender discrimination, such as FGM.

Thus, in her talk at the project launch event, Fahma Mohamed, who led the Bristol-based 2014 campaign against FGM, challenged categories associated with Muslim women arguing:

... none of this abuse is a Muslim issue – it does not happen because you are a Muslim, it happens because you are girl. Violence and abuse can happen to all women, from all countries, from all races, all socio-economic groups ( ... ) and just for the record: we are not deprived, we are privileged, we hate labels, so those who get their votes by labelling people like me, they do us women no service at all.

The British context with its specific history of women's struggles and mainstream actors' ambivalent interests in "empowering" Muslim women, often informed by racial and post-colonial ascription, but also underpinned by traditions of involving minority representatives in political processes, provides both discursive constraints *and* institutional opportunities for Muslim women's activism. Many activists we worked with made use of such public interest to advance claims in public spaces, but sought to re-negotiate the terms of the conversation, for instance by refusing to narrate their political subjectivity within the boundaries available within mainstream discourses.

### ***Acts of citizenship***

Whilst opposition to FGM has been articulated by a variety of UK groups over the last decades, Integrate Bristol's campaign recently received unprecedented public attention. The organization is managed and run by a team of teachers from Bristol and aims to provide young people with a platform to express their views and ideas. The charities' projects seek to develop young people's skills in areas such as film-making, drama and media. The concern with the prevention of FGM has become a focal point of Integrate Bristol's activities, and they work closely with Daughters of Eve, three Bristol-based survivors of FGM, who seek to "advance and protect the physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health rights of young people from female genital mutilation practising communities" (Ali 2012). This orientation reflects an enactment of citizenship inasmuch as it establishes a direct link to the rhetoric of feminist and civil rights struggles, by striving to implement as well as expand the existing body of rights to women. This involves renegotiating practices within affected communities, and challenging British health care and education systems to oppose this manifestation of the subjugation of women.

In Integrate Bristol's early days, activities were aimed at problematising the continuation of FGM practices in the UK and raising awareness within local schools, health clinics and statutory organizations. In activists' accounts, teachers, health practitioners or social workers were "walking around on cultural eggshells", and were either unaware of its implications for women, or saw it as a cultural practice that was to be respected, comparable to a "Bar Mizvah" (Ali 2012). To address this, they produced a film, "The Silent Scream", which was shared and distributed widely via social media, and subsequently received local, national and international attention and awards. More recently, Integrate Bristol published their video clip "Use your Head", which calls upon education authorities to include FGM awareness in the school curriculum (Integrate Bristol 2015). The video, which was also internationally circulated via social media, shows images of dancing, singing and rapping young activists, with appearances from figures from Bristol public life. Subsequently, Fahma Mohamed created an online petition that received nearly a quarter of a million signatures within a couple of weeks and appeared on the front page of "The Guardian", which invited readers to sign her petition (Hoeschler et al. 2014).

In their public appearances, the young activists describe FGM as child abuse and patriarchal control of the female body, do not shy away from describing physiological details of the mutilation of female genitals, and elaborate on their vision of prevention through education. Their grammars of action encompass arts-based acts of citizenship, which include artistic performances as well as what are perceived as "provocative" speech acts in more conservative circles within some Muslim communities. Internet-based tools make the message accessible to wider and international audiences.

### ***Practices of citizenship***

The early campaigns evoked decisive responses from statutory organizations in Bristol, who implemented, in consultation with the activists, what has become known as the "Bristol model" of FGM prevention. Teachers, National Health Service (NHS) staff, police, FGM survivors and activists now work together to spread awareness and to help those at risk to access information and support (Stockham 2015). The activists' "undoing" of social norms in the public domain is thus accompanied by the regular "doing" of day-to-day activities that support staff in voluntary, statutory and private sector organizations to recognize signs of abuse. But the resonance was not limited to the local level. The then Education Secretary, Michael Gove, met with Fahma Mohamed, and subsequently sent out a letter to all schools in the UK to remind them of the safeguarding issues surrounding FGM. A Home Office Minister, Lynn Featherstone, sought to replicate the "Bristol model" across the UK and made reporting of FGM cases mandatory for teachers, doctors

and health and social care professionals. The campaign also developed an international dimension, when the Nobel-prize winner, Malala Yousafzai, an international education campaigner, expressed her support, and met with Muna Hasan from Integrate Bristol. The United Nations General Secretary Ban Ki Moon invited Fahma Mohamed to the UN Headquarters, and the campaign and its leading activists have received a series of awards.

### ***Significance***

It became evident during Steering Group meetings and workshops that the activists' claims were widely known, although not necessarily received consensually. Some research participants worried about what they perceived as "white" Western and "feminist" teachers steering the campaign and soliciting the use of inappropriate language. The public description and mention of genitals during the launch event proved controversial. Whilst some participants viewed such language as unnecessarily provocative, many endorsed the activists' stance. Subsequent workshops revealed that young women, and especially those of Somali heritage, related to Fahma Mohamed and her fellow activists as vocal role models who are mobilizing processes of social change within society and their own communities. Women across age groups suggested that the debate instigated by Integrate Bristol was helpful in enabling the revising of long-standing cultural "scripts". Thus, young activists, many of whom have not reached the age at which they would be able to make use of formal citizenship entitlements, such as voting or standing for election, enacted their political subjectivity via arts-based practices and mobilized through online petitioning or social media – to the effect that their claims have influenced government policy and are contributing to re-shaping particularly Somali community discourses and practices. Their action repertoires encompassed both provocative speech acts and arts performances, as well as informal everyday negotiations. Given the linking of FGM with the counter-extremism agenda, nonetheless, the visibility of the FGM campaign gave rise to concern for some activists that the issue potentially facilitated ever more intrusive surveillance of, and interventions into, Somali families by health, education and security professionals under the guise of empowering Muslim women.

### **Case study 2: mobilizing for inclusive mosques**

#### ***Discursive and institutional opportunity structures***

The presence of an established Church in Britain, some argue, has ensured a public role for religion and fostered a receptive environment for accommodating religious minority claims within the public sphere (Statham and Tillie

2016). The establishment of minority religious, and particularly Muslim, places of worship has nonetheless been contested and was often achieved via the mobilization of minority community resources and activism (Gale 2005).

As elsewhere in the UK, the establishment of mosques in Bristol was prompted by the arrival of a predominantly male population in the second half of the twentieth century. Mosques tended to be located in confined properties, such as terraces or warehouses. Mainly due to financial constraints, but also the view upheld by several Islamic schools that only men have to pray at the mosque,<sup>2</sup> many mosques do not provide spaces for women's worship, even after the demographic composition of post-migration communities changed due to family unification and marriage migration to the UK. Whilst some mosque communities have subsequently moved to larger facilities and enabled women's attendance, others only invite women to larger functions, but do not offer suitable prayer space. The governing boards of the seventeen Bristol-based mosques where decisions about internal procedures, finances and events are made, have been exclusively male.

During Steering Group meetings, members aired what they perceived as unsuitable or even undignified arrangements for women's prayer in mosques, including relegation to a narrow kitchen space or behind curtains at the back of the room. Given the lack of representation of women on mosque committees such arrangements are not easily challenged.

### *Acts of citizenship*

Some women on the Steering Group viewed the provision of women's prayer spaces and inclusion on mosque committees as peripheral to a more radical vision of women's inclusion, based on an interpretation of Islamic scriptures that attributed equal responsibility in ritual leadership to women, including the delivery of sermons and prayers to mixed congregations. Their inspiration was, among others, the US based Islamic scholar Amina Wadud, who has provided theological justifications for women's ritual leadership, and was among the organizers of events during which she led audiences of women and men in prayer (Hammer 2012) – an act regarded as controversial by many. Activists who supported the ideas behind Wadud's activism reasoned that current local mosque leaderships were so unresponsive to women's concerns that the only way to bring about social change was to hold separate events for those who agreed on more inclusive procedures. Social media such as Facebook and Twitter, but also women's personal networks, allowed them to connect to like-minded individuals, including Amina Wadud in the USA, and the Muslim Women's Network UK (MWNUK) in Birmingham and Inclusive Mosque Initiative (IMI) in London. MWNUK provide theological expertise, circulate doctrinal scholarship, and offer community support and role model resources for Muslim women. IMI has conducted research on the inclusivity

of mosques in the UK (2013), and focuses on the collective performance of rituals within a sacred space that is respectful of and welcoming to all. The women involved organize regular prayers, discussions and public events to celebrate Islamic holidays. These gatherings are organized in a variety of “pop up” spaces. IMI works with similar organizations in Indonesia, Switzerland and other countries with the aim of establishing at least five physical mosque spaces within the next years. Members of all faith and no faith are invited to IMI’s events, participants are encouraged to stand or sit wherever they are comfortable and recordings of the gatherings are often posted on YouTube (IMI 2015). The IMI Facebook group, liked by about 4,800 followers, links these international audiences and offers regular updates via a newsfeed that covers areas such as disability and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) rights, as well as themes of racism or Islamophobia, on a global scale. Occasionally these internationally linked counter-publics meet off-line. On International Women’s Day, for instance, Amina Wadud joined IMI for an inclusive service in London. Some members of the Steering Group were involved in organizing collaborative events with IMI to take place in Bristol.

During the project workshops, some participants proposed ideas for more inclusive mosques, some debated strategies of improving dialogue with mosque leaderships, and others discussed how civic spaces such as City Hall or schools might better address women’s needs. Participants’ self-understanding as citizens thus encompassed “secular” as well as “religious” spaces within which they sought more involvement in decision-making. Their activism should not be seen as confined to the mosque, or labelled as specifically religious, pious or Islamic, but reflected their spiritually motivated vision of a social order that enables their full involvement in decision-making across different spheres of their lives. This enactment of citizenship was reflected in Sayeeda Warsi’s presentation at the launch event, when she argued “let not today’s men interpret your faith in ways that deny you the rights that your faith gave you 1400 years ago”, which elicited strong interest in the subsequent workshops. This reference to women’s historically guaranteed rights within Islam, which many felt could not be fully exercised in contemporary contexts, resonated for many research participants (see also Cheruvallil-Contractor 2012, 158–159). The insights gained during the workshops underpinned a co-authored policy briefing by the Steering Group and researchers, which offered recommendations to statutory and community organizations on how they could improve mechanisms of inclusion (Productive Margins 2014). Knowledge production, manifested in research-based recommendations added another element to activists’ grammars of action. Thus some activists aspired to an “un-doing” of established Islamic practices, and to enacting and ritualizing their understanding of a more inclusive Islam. Given the contested nature of their claims for women’s religious leadership within interpretations of Islam, as well as

their transformative aspirations, these action repertoires figure as acts of citizenship.

### ***Practices of citizenship***

Other members of the Steering Group reported attending ad-hoc mosque committee meetings, and using civic forums, including Building the Bridge, to express concerns about the lack of women's prayer facilities and representation on mosque committees. Their strategy was one of continuous negotiation and dialogue with mosque leaderships. They noted some mosques intended to provide educational and worship facilities for women, and were raising funds or undertaking construction work to that effect.

The strategies of mobilization adopted by these activists involved gradual dialogical attempts to enhance women's participation in religious spaces, which reflected their "doing" of social norms, inasmuch as prayer spaces are available for both men and women in countries where Islam is a better resourced majority religion.

Even within the Steering Group, strategies for achieving social change and visions of women's participation in mosques differed considerably. One Steering Group member, and advocate of women's greater inclusion in mosque governance, for instance, declared: "If I was to enter a room and noticed a woman leading a mixed congregation in prayer, I would simply walk straight out and never come back again". Other members of the Steering Group were more sympathetic to the argument for women's religious leadership, but were concerned that mosque leaders would perceive a quest for women's delivery of sermons or prayers as so controversial that they would not be prepared to negotiate other "achievable" claims, such as the provision of reasonable prayer facilities for women or the inclusion of women on mosque committees. The strategies adopted, the spectrum of roles envisaged for women within religious institutions, as well as the aspiration to negotiate common ground with current community leaders, reflect gradual practices of citizenship, which may bring about longer term processes of social change.

### ***Significance***

The concern with enhancing Muslim women's decision-making capacity in civic and religious spaces, and the framing of struggles to assert and enact rights that were rooted in Islam, resonated strongly with workshop participants of all ages. Younger participants engaged with the variety of role models presented in the workshops and were critical of the lack of attention to Muslim women's contributions to historic and contemporary public life either in the school curriculum or faith based forms of tuition that they were receiving. A group of women in their twenties and thirties discussed

strategies of how women might claim more involvement in mosque decisions. Asked what religious spaces would look like if women were more involved in their decision-making procedures, participants sketched a vision of a welcoming and safe shared space attended by men and women, younger and older people, and people of varied religious or ethnic backgrounds. Importantly, women explained they wished to be “in the midst” of events, and to participate in prayers at the mosque (for similar findings across the UK see IMI 2013). Participants elaborated on how to reconcile claims of modesty with possibilities of participation, by proposing a mosque design with a gallery on the top floor to allow women to be in the same space as men, and to follow the imam directly. Several women articulated a vision of mosques as multifunctional spaces to pray, study, celebrate but also as spaces of welfare or refuge, offering advice, counselling and support to community members, and anybody else in need, including asylum seekers, refugees, people who struggle with addiction and so on. Part of this vision was also that governing committees and boards should be accountable to and representative of all members of their congregation, and provide space for critical and open debate within the wider community.

The visions of mosque life that were articulated by Steering Group members and workshop participants constituted a mix of “undoing” and “doing” Islamic norms, inasmuch as some sought to transform existing structures, while others sought gradual and dialogical engagement with current structures and practices.

Whilst this struggle is ongoing across the UK and beyond (Bano and Kalmbach 2011), this too is a case in which women’s claims have become more audible because they have been expressed at a community level and within civic consultation forums. Research conducted with mosque leaders in Bristol indicated awareness among mosque committee members that women were demanding representation in mosque governance. Whilst some mosque committee members displayed limited understanding of the implications, arguing women could express their views to mosque committees via their husbands, there were mosques that were undergoing construction works in order to address women’s needs, and some planned to appoint women to the committee in the future (Lewicki, O’Toole, and Modood 2014, 36–39).

The example of women’s mobilization for inclusive mosques shows how such struggles can draw on multiple spaces and scales. The grammars of action included pop-up spaces for religious worship staged by transnationally linked counter-publics, blogging and news-feeding on social media, but also negotiating and lobbying within civic and religious spaces. The production of knowledge emerged as a key strategy in this context, such as women’s Islamic doctrinal scholarship, research conducted by IMI on UK-wide conditions for women’s participation in mosques, or the workshops and policy briefing



produced by the project's Steering Group. The mobilization thereby included a "doing" of norms inasmuch as it drew on visions of mosque life that partly reflected experiences from countries in which Islam is a majority religion, and also sought to "undo" mainstream Islamic norms by advocating a more egalitarian approach to women's role in mosque life. Whilst the content of some of these claims was highly contested among the Steering Group, and within Muslim communities in Bristol, the women involved in our study contended that their activism was an enactment of rights framed by their faith, which applied to both religious and civic spaces of decision-making.

## Conclusions

The two examples of women's activism and mobilization, the interlinked local, national and international campaign against FGM, as well as the localized but globally connected struggle for more inclusive mosques, speak to the literature on citizenship in several respects. Both forms of mobilization are embedded in and shaped by opportunities and constraints provided by the institutional, legal and discursive context in the UK. Integrate Bristol's mobilization targeted statutory organizations and educational authorities, thus their claims were directed at and framed by UK institutional arrangements. Activism around inclusive mosques too problematized a situation that emerged in the context of post-war migration to Britain. In both instances, the liberal setting with its history of women's struggles played a part in facilitating these mobilizations. A further contextual feature is the political climate shaped by the UK's Prevent agenda, which conflates political terrorism and conservative gender practices with "extremist values". The counter-extremism agenda has fuelled interest in Muslim women's struggles (Grillo 2015) and increased the salience of their claims in public forums, as was evident in the anti-FGM campaign and the claim for women's participation in religious spaces. The activists we worked with were aware of the tensions between these agendas, and many renegotiated the roles allocated to them by rejecting the processes of racialized labelling and reductive focus on values that accompanies much current government policy relating to Muslims.

Whilst the UK's citizenship regime provides an ambiguous frame for Muslim women's struggles, the two case studies discussed here also point to some of the limitations of a macro-political lens on citizenship. First of all, the grammars of political action that citizenship regime studies are mainly concerned with, namely political claims-making within mainstream politics or by means of public protest, only partially reflect the mobilization strategies chosen by the activists involved in our two cases. Rather, campaigners against FGM and in favour of more inclusive mosques made use of art, drama- and film-based forms of expression, mobilization via networks, social media and online petitioning, offered day to day advice to statutory

agencies and health care providers, organized pop-up prayer venues, used consultation forums to advance their claims, and turned to research and blogging as tools of activism.

Secondly, the citizenship regime literature's focus on claims as they appear in national media is of limited value in detecting either of the two processes of mobilization we explored here, and importantly, we suggest neglect the forms of contestation among groups who have historically been excluded from public domains. Although the campaign against FGM reached the national political mainstream at its peak, many of its activities were focused on challenging and changing local community practices. Similarly, whilst the IMI achieved some public recognition, much of the lobbying and negotiation about women's roles in mosques takes place in less formal public settings, with the mosque as a key site of contestation.

Finally, whilst citizenship regime studies emphasize the national and transnational dimension of post-migration minorities' claims that target politics in the countries of origin and country of settlement, the two case studies point to the significance of local sites, as well as the transnational links between activists and organizations. The campaign against FGM received support from global campaigners and organizations such as the United Nations, and the mobilization for inclusive mosques draws on experiences with mosques in activists' home countries, and in Indonesia or the USA (see also O'Toole and Gale 2013 who found similar patterns of "glocalised struggles" among young Muslims in the UK).

Our analytical focus on acts and practices of citizenship, as well as our qualitative-participatory methodological approach, enables us to analyse these various scales and strategies of mobilization. The acts and practices of citizenship we observed complicate a top-down notion of citizenship, inasmuch as activists' political subjectivity is enacted and re-created through an ongoing "undoing" and "doing" of social norms. These acts and practices of citizenship do not of course sit necessarily in an uncomplicated relationship with one another – as witnessed in the disputes on the language, challenges and prominence of the FGM campaign, or on the issue of women's role in providing religious leadership in mosque settings. Nonetheless, this processual and agency-centred notion of citizenship allows us to make visible how political mobilization and activism can involve transformative steps and informal everyday negotiations.

## Notes

1. Building the Bridge is a forum that involves Bristol City Council, the Police, statutory and voluntary agencies and representatives from Muslim communities, and was initially created to implement the previous government's Prevent agenda (Lewicki, O'Toole, and Modood 2014). Prevent is one element of the government's CONTEST counter-terrorism strategy. Up to 2010, it had evolved as a

community engagement approach to countering extremism, which led to the creation of Building the Bridge in Bristol.

2. In some contexts, such as Indonesia, women are respected Quranic reciters (Mahmood 2005, 66). A majority of schools in Islamic law allow women to lead other women in prayer rituals, however, the common custom is that if an imam is present, he would lead the women in prayer (Mahmood 2005, 87), even if a woman of equal qualification was present.

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