

THE POWER OF PODCASTS: FEMINIST DISCOURSES OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN THE
DIGITAL PUBLIC SPHERE

by
Maartje Veen (626048)

A Master Thesis
Supervised by dr. (Amanda) A. Paz Alencar
Submitted to Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication
Erasmus University Rotterdam
In Fulfilment of the Requirements
For Media, Culture & Society
June, 2022

Acknowledgements

During the intensive 6/7-month period of writing this thesis, I have not only learned to conduct and report a valid and reliable research from start to finish, but also how to evaluate, improve and appreciate my work. I'd like to thank my supervisor dr. Amanda Paz Alencar for all the guidance and support during this process. In particular, the brainstorm sessions that lead to the idea of conducting a podcast analysis, the quick replies with helpful feedback, and the consistent enthusiasm about my topic which helped me stay motivated and excited.

I'd also like to thank all the women present in the analysed podcast episodes. I have learned a great deal from all the stories, perspective, and experiences you have shared, and will henceforward take these lessons with me in my worldview and feminist identity.

Abstract

The representation of Muslim women in Dutch mainstream media continues to be one-sided and stereotypical, resulting in misinformed assumptions and perceptions of media consumers toward Muslim women. Podcasts enable Muslim women to bypass mainstream media power structures and represent their own positions, stories, and experiences on their own terms, as such, providing alternative discourses to the mainstream narratives. The primary goal of this study has been to investigate discourses of feminism among Muslim women in Dutch feminist podcasts, in order to provide new insights from a mostly underrepresented (intersectional) perspective of Muslim women. From the context of Dutch secularism and postfeminism, digital feminism, and the theoretical concepts of intersectionality and situated knowledge, a qualitative 'podcast' content analysis of ten episodes of Dutch feminist podcasts has been conducted. The findings indicate that podcasts facilitate Muslim women to attract power by constructing their discourses of feminism. By accentuating differences, Muslim women counteract the one-sided mainstream media representation. Discourses of feminism are centred around intersectionality, and interpreted from the positionality of the oppressed. In the podcasts, Muslim women illustrate how one's experiences with patriarchal oppression stems from positioning. Yet, patriarchy is universal. In conclusion, the layered identity of Muslim women is reflected in their construction of discourses of feminism. The diverse voices represented in podcasts provide complicated and nuanced perspectives which should be more included in (media) discourses of feminism and other societal/political topics.

Key words: Feminist podcasts, Representation, Muslim women in the Netherlands, Intersectionality, Situated knowledges, Digital agency

Table of content

- 1. INTRODUCTION..... 1
- 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK 4
- 2. METHODS 12
- 3. RESULTS..... 20
- 4. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION 29

1. Introduction

Despite the recent increasing visibility of Muslim women* who identify as feminists, the Dutch media landscape still lacks diverse and inclusive representations. Hegemonic discourses centre around why Muslim women are or aren't feminists, ignoring how they perceive and practice their feminisms (Knibbe, 2019). The Netherlands is a secularized country, where the belief that religion should not influence society is dominant (Bracke, 2011). The assumption prevails that secular is a synonym for progressive and emancipatory, in opposition to religion, which refers to a backward society (Nyhagen, 2017). Moreover, it is assumed that an enlightened attitude towards gender equality and women's empowerment has become the norm in the Netherlands. Such secular attitudes are related to postfeminism. According to the postfeminist attitude, the ideological positions of feminism have been met or have become irrelevant (Gill & Scharff, 2011). If gender equality has become the norm in the Netherlands, feminism is no longer needed (Knibbe, 2019). At least, for those who are not supposedly oppressed by their cultural traditions. From a postfeminist perspective, Muslim women are considered victims in need of empowerment through integration with secular practices (Scharff, 2011). This perspective is further developed and ingrained through the mainstream media representation of Muslim women. The representation of Muslim women in Dutch mainstream media is predominantly homogenous and stereotypical (Janson, 2011; Yuksel, 2020). The constant exposure to such one-sided stereotypical narratives can impact the audience's perspective of Muslim women (Janson, 2011). The stereotypical imagery including the victim narrative is often subjected to Muslim women without regard for their agency (Janson, 2011). A particular concern is that the hegemonic narrative is used to make (Islamophobic) claims against immigration (Knibbe, 2019). As such, women's bodies are used to conduct politics regarding migration and integration policies.

Previous studies that have analysed the dichotomy of secular- versus religious feminism have established a diversity among white secular feminists (Van den Brandt, 2014). However, most studies in the field have focused on the dominant (secular/postfeminist) perspective and lack the perspective of Muslim feminists. Research that has included the perspective of Muslim women, tends to direct its analysis on spaces which are linked to religion and commonly not accessible to non-Muslim people (Midden & Ponzanesi, 2013; Nyhagen, 2017). This thesis attempts to fill this research gap by analysing the understanding of Muslim women of (their) feminist identity in the digital public sphere. The digital public

sphere, a communicative online sphere which enables open participation, allows for communication which is more accessible to certain (often excluded) social groups (Schäfer, 2015). Due to contemporary developments in new digital media, Muslim women are increasingly using their voices to counter dominant stereotypical representations (Ahmed, 2020). Furthermore, this study will not approach secularist (post)feminism and religious feminism as dichotomous. Feminist identity and religious identity intersect with each other along with many other socio-cultural factors (Midden & Ponzanesi, 2013). By providing a more nuanced perspective, this paper attempts to increase the visibility of diverse Muslim women in the diverse (online) feminist landscapes and enhance the understanding of digital performative practices shaping these spaces of identity construction.

In the digital public sphere, podcasts are increasingly becoming more popular for media creators and consumers (Vrikki & Malik, 2019). The do-it-yourself approach of the on-demand audio recordings facilitates podcasts to bypass the hegemonic power structures of mainstream media. To date, little empirical attention has been given to podcasts as media platforms. This thesis argues for the relevance of podcasts because they provide alternatives to discourses in mainstream media, oriented towards a community (De Koning, Nolten, & Leurs, 2019). Feminist podcasts recognise the representational void in mainstream media and strive for a more inclusive representation of various voices and communities. This study attempts to make a scientific contribution by examining discourses around feminist identity from the perspective of Muslim women in digital public spaces through a novel analysis of podcast episodes. The qualitative content 'podcast' analysis includes a case study of the feminist podcast landscape to ensure a relevant and rich sample, and a thematic analysis aimed to identify patterns and themes to answer the following research question:

How are discourses around feminism constructed by Muslim women in Dutch feminist podcasts?

This paper is organised in the following way. First, theoretical considerations will be elaborated. Starting with a framework of the context around feminism and Muslim women in the Netherlands and in the digital public sphere. After which, a review of previous literature around digital feminist identity is displayed, including the key concepts of intersectionality, situated knowledge, and (digital) agency, through which the main argument of this thesis is further developed. In the following section, methodological considerations will be delineated

and justified. After which, the findings of the analysis are presented. The paper will finish with a conclusion to the analysis and an elaborate discussion of the study's implications.

1. Theoretical framework

Contextualizing Feminism and Muslim women* in the Netherlands

Dutch exceptionalism: Secularism and Postfeminism

Bracke (2011) attends to the context of ‘the multicultural debate’ through the scope of Dutch exceptionalism. The belief that something is exceptional, centres in the Dutch context around the notion of toleration. Toleration stems from a type of secularism ‘pillarization’ where the Dutch society is organised into segmented groups based on religion or ideology. Dutch society continues to include features of pillarization and the notion of tolerance remains highly valued. The pillarized structure of Dutch society should suggest the possibility of Islam integration, allowing Muslim schools, media access, and political participation (Bracke, 2011). However, it is exactly those existing structures that prevent Islam integration, as they do not perceive Islam as a legitimate religion and contribute to the stigmatization of Muslim people. While Dutch secularism claims to be constructed for tolerance and religious or ideological diversity, it simultaneously initiates a defence against Islam. Nowadays, secularists perceive the secular regime as having transformed such that tolerance is no longer possible (Bracke, 2011). Ironically, this transformation is often blamed on Muslim people, who supposedly make the notion of tolerance towards them impossible by not fitting into the secular structure. However, the exclusionary characteristics of Dutch secularism have initiated this transformation. As secularists mourn for the type of secularism that they have transformed themselves, a phenomenon called secular nostalgia, the ‘blame’ on Muslim people is yet another reason for ‘Othering’.

“Othering is a process whereby individuals and groups are treated and marked as different and inferior from the dominant social group.” (Griffin, 2017). According to Bracke (2011), the Othering of Muslims in the Netherlands is profoundly incorporated within gender and sexuality issues. Women’s emancipation is appropriated to position Muslims as unemancipated ‘them’ versus the emancipated ‘us’. Dutch sexual exceptionalism believes that the Netherlands is exceptionally emancipated, and Muslim women are a victim of their culture (Bracke, 2011). Sexual exceptionalism, like secular exceptionalism, holds exclusionary attributes; it belongs to ‘us’ and not to ‘them’. This is also a postfeminist perspective. Postfeminism, as a concept, is difficult to define. Mostly due to the lack of consensus. According to Oxford’s Dictionary of Gender Studies, postfeminism describes a period in which the ideological positions of feminism have been met or have become irrelevant (Griffin, 2017). However, this paper will follow Gill’s conceptualisation in which

postfeminism is not linked to a particular historical period but rather an attitude and hegemonic response towards feminism (Gill & Scharff, 2011).

As in most of Western Europe, the postfeminist attitude has become the norm in the Netherlands (Knibbe, 2019). This could be explained through the contemporary neoliberal context (Wilkes, 2015). The Netherlands effectively positions itself as a pioneer in legislation and policies regarding gender equality and women's emancipation during the second feminist wave (roughly between 1965 and 1985) (Bracke, 2011). Women gained economic and sexual liberty, birth control and abortion became legislated, and the Netherlands was the first country to legislate same-sex marriage (Koops, 2021). The engagement of feminist values with governments and policymakers has led to the mainstreaming of feminism, in which issues regarding gender equality have become common sense (Wilkes, 2015). To which the hegemonic response was; if feminism is common sense, hasn't feminist activism become irrelevant? Ignoring the still existing systematic power structures and (gender) inequalities. Neo-liberal discourses dismiss the significance of feminism, yet they draw on shared themes of individual freedom (Wilkes, 2015). As such, the postfeminist attitude has incorporated neoliberal notions of choice and agency.

However, such neo-liberal and postfeminist discourses including individualism and empowerment strongly contrast with the Othering of Muslim women, who are portrayed as victims of their culture. An empirical study by Scharff (2011) on the engagement of young women with feminism illustrates this paradox. Results show that self-representation as 'empowered' is intertwined with the Othering of Muslim women, as individualist discourses are employed to distance oneself from (no longer needed) feminism by portraying 'other' Muslim women as victims of patriarchal oppression. As such, "the construction of empowered selves is constituted by the Othering of Muslim women" (Scharff, 2011, p. 119). The following section will elaborate on the portrayal of 'other' Muslim women in Dutch mainstream media.

Representation of Muslim women in mainstream Dutch media

Mainstream media can play a crucial role in the imagery of Muslim women (Yuksel, 2020). By means of framing, messages create narratives consisting of stereotypes. In Western mainstream media, Muslim women are portrayed in three stereotypical ways; "as passive, as victims, and/or as veiled" (Janson, 2011, p. 188). The continuous exposure to these stereotypes and the one-sided depiction of Muslim women, (unconsciously) impacts the conceptions of the audience toward Muslim women. As explained by Hall's Representation

Theory, the audience creates meaning through representation, and through stereotyping, the meaning of a representation is fixed into a 'preferred meaning' (Hall, 2013). To investigate the representation of Muslim women in Dutch media, Yuksel conducted research on the largest Dutch image database, ANP (2020). Both print media and digital media frequently use the photos of this database to illustrate news items, stories, and reports. Therefore, the depiction of Muslim women in these images largely portrays the dominant representation of Muslim women in Dutch mainstream media. It was found that, despite the large diversity among Muslim women in the Netherlands, they are dominantly represented as one homogeneous group. Images including Muslim women are often framed negatively, creating stereotypical narratives such as "Muslim women are part of a problematic group" and "Muslim women don't have a mind of their own" (p. 8-9). The narratives are often used regarding religion and refugee-based politics, in which images of Muslim women are more frequently used than those of Muslim men, increasing the visibility of Muslim women in those political discourses.

In a literature review of research results on dominant representations of Muslim women transmitted in the Western hegemonic media discourse, Navarro (2010) addresses the dominant presence of 'Otherisation' caused by the construction of 'us and them' oppositions, assigning positive elements to 'us' and negative ones to 'them'. The portrayal of Muslim women as passive, veiled victims can be explained by the exclusion of diversity among Muslim women (Navarro, 2010). Muslim women are not portrayed as individuals and therefore represented as one homogeneous group. Additionally, information on Muslim women is accompanied by photographs rather than a diverse range of Muslim women's voices as sources of knowledge. The homogeneous representation paints a picture of one single story. In the Ted Talk, *The danger of a single story*, Adichie (2009) emphasises the importance of stories by illustrating that too often we operate from the perspective of one single story. According to Adichie, the danger of a single story is that it can lead to incorrect default assumptions, conclusions, and judgments, as well as misinterpretation. Operating from the context of a single story can prevent us from seeing a situation in a more complicated, nuanced light.

However, the media landscape is changing. New media enable Muslim women to express their voices and counter dominant stereotypical representations (Ahmed, 2020). As a result of the growing presence of Muslim women's voices in media, discourses are evolving. New media acknowledge diversity and difference, and access to new media platforms enables Muslim women to create and express a diverse range of voices and discourses, challenging

the dominant homogenous representation in mainstream media (Ahmed, 2020). Additionally, new media allow for connections among Muslim women and with other women. Through digital public spaces, a diverse group of individuals can engage with what it means to be a Muslim woman in the Netherlands and to be a feminist.

Counterpublics: Feminist Podcast landscape in the Netherlands

Feminists in the Netherlands state that the fourth wave of feminism is in ‘full swing’ (Heithuis, 2019). Fourth-wave feminism centres around an inquiry which has been addressed before, but not to the extent now required; “the need to turn from concerns about ‘me’ to concern for the planet and all its being” (Trier-Bieniek, 2015, p. 21). Additionally, and perhaps most accepted, the fourth wave is characterized by the use of technology and digital culture. Through the communicative practices in digital cultures, knowledge is disseminated and learning spaces are created (Fotopoulou, 2017). Such media practices can contribute to the making of counterpublics. A counterpublic actively establishes itself against the exclusionary mainstream public sphere through engagement with it (Kelly, 2014). The recognition of exclusionary hegemonic media representation and refutation of dominant stereotypical representations by Muslim women forms such a counterpublic (Vrikki & Malik, 2019). Podcasts are often used by feminists as a tool for online activism (Fox & Ebada, 2022). A podcast is “a digital audio recording stored online but (unlike broadcasts) designed for offline use on the user’s computer or mobile device” (Chandler & Munday, 2016). As a relatively new media, often produced through a ‘do-it-yourself’ approach, podcasts bypass certain power structures of mainstream media and allow for usually ignored or stigmatised topics to be addressed (Vrikki & Malik, 2019). Therefore, podcasts arguably provide the ideal platform for counterpublics. Feminist podcasts are a type of community media (De Koning et al., 2019). Community media provide community-oriented alternatives to the mainstream media discourse. As such, feminist podcasts construct counterpublics and orient their alternatives around their ideological commitment. Feminist podcast makers perceive the representational void in mainstream media and strive toward a more inclusive representation of different voices and communities.

The premise of the fourth wave that feminism should be concerned with “the planet and all its being” is reflected in the feminist podcast landscape in the Netherlands. Dutch feminist podcasts are more than simply a podcast, they are feminist platforms (Alle Vrouwen Netwerken, n.d.). While the podcast is the main form of media through which the message is spread, this is complemented by social media channels, websites, online magazines, published

books and even organised events, through which, an online community is created. The platforms are known to focus on multiple issues. They would for instance dedicate each episode to a different topic with a different guest. However, there are also shorter podcast series which are more dedicated to one specific topic or issue. The online community which is created around podcasts can create a safe space to form counterpublics (De Koning et al., 2019; Vrikki & Malik, 2019). In these counterpublics, fourth-wave intersectional feminism is reflected. The following section will elaborate on the construction and expression of such feminist identity.

Digital Feminist Identity

Digital Feminism

The accessibility, availability, and normalisation of digital media in our everyday life, as well as the powerful impact of representations and imaginaries, make it necessary to consider their role in contemporary feminist identities (Fotopoulou, 2017). The concept of ‘digital feminists’ was initiatively developed to refer to feminists who analyse and critique the practices of digital technologies and the internet (Griffin, 2017). However, with the increasing online practices of feminists in everyday life, the term is increasingly used to refer to such daily online practices. ‘Doing feminism’ - as Fotopoulou phrases it - in digital media involves more than simply creating and disseminating content and information (Fotopoulou, 2017). It is about how digital media activities facilitate social processes of community development and subjectivity transformation. New media, such as social media, have accelerated the dissemination of information across borders, and thereby aided feminist organisations to form transnational networks (Fotopoulou, 2017). Transnational networks are enabled through digital media, and digital connectivity has likewise become necessary due to the competitive media environment. Contemporary feminists do not only compete with established institutional power structures, but additionally compete for political voice, recognition, and publicity in online spaces.

Participation in the online public sphere differs between various social groups (Fotopoulou, 2017). For some, new media technologies provide opportunities for direct engagement with civic society. While for others, digital media contributes to new forms of marginalisation. It is important to consider the immense diversity of feminist cultures. Feminism consists of a complex set of identities, with varying digital media practices and varying political priorities. Feminism as a complex set of identities is not a new conceptualisation. However, digital feminism can be seen as a turning point in facilitating the

intersectional debate (Fotopoulou, 2017). The theory of intersectionality has been advanced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, who argues for the importance of understanding the interaction of factors that are commonly treated separately from each other (Griffin, 2017). Factors such as race, class, and gender are not mutually exclusive but rather intersect with each other to create complex situations of oppression. In recent years, intersectionality has circulated outside of academia as part of the prominent concepts in contemporary feminist digital cultures (Kanai, 2021). Digital culture promotes the visibility of intersectional identities by allowing an easier articulation of one's own knowledge, experiences, and perceptions. And yet, despite the new visibility of online activism, it has been delineated that the online expression of feminist concerns has frequently marginalized the priorities and concerns of non-white women in order to emphasize the apparent unity of a feminist 'centre' (Kanai, 2021).

According to Midden and Ponzanesi (2013), feminism does not rely on universal ideas but rather engages with women's experiences in light of the idea of situated knowledge. Coined by Haraway in 1991, the concept of situated knowledge refers to "knowledge is socially situated and one's position in society shapes and constrains what one knows, even what one can know" (Midden & Ponzanesi, 2013, p. 197). Situated knowledge argues that we have to position ourselves and be accountable for the way we perceive and where our perception comes from. Regarding digital feminism, we must also position ourselves in the digital public sphere. Digital communicative spheres "have become platforms for subjectively 'lived' public spaces" (Fotopoulou, 2017, p. 18). The increasingly lived, embodied, and experienced aspects of the digital public sphere constitute new forms of governmentality which paradoxically offer opportunities for articulating new subjectivities. Subjectivity is "the self-conscious perspective of a person" (Griffin, 2017). It involves "daily practices and negotiations within dominant norms" rather than actively countering the norm (Midden & Ponzanesi, 2013, p. 199). Social life within the digital public sphere is complex due to the preoccupation with mediation. Mediation is the process of involvement and interference of institutionalised media in the widespread use of symbols in social life (Fotopoulou, 2017). Through communication of messages, mediation represents reality to audiences which has ideological implications (Chandler & Munday, 2020).

The process of mediation affects the capacity of someone to act in digital public spaces. "The sociocultural mediated capacity to act" is called agency (Ahearn, 2012, p. 278). Agency is inherent in all humans, but the specific forms of agency can vary enormously and are culturally determined by certain structures. The structures include the conditions that can constrain, enable, regulate, etc. human action. While seemingly oppositional, agency and

structure rather presuppose each other (Ahearn, 2012). In digital media, agency becomes apparent through the concept of vulnerability (Fotopoulou, 2017). New media offers the opportunity and enables the capacity to move away from passivity and victimisation to vulnerability. The conscious practise of publicising vulnerability by situating it into its socio-political context, diminishes these conditions of their toxicity and can be empowering. The following section will elaborate on how Muslim women in the Netherlands exercise their (digital) agency.

Digital Agency of Muslim Women

While Western mainstream media might suggest that Muslim women are passive, veiled, victims (Janson, 2011), this representation does not account for their agency. Muslim women are often depicted and therefore interpreted as powerless individuals who lack agency and voice in the face of cultural oppression. However, according to Michel Foucault, agency can be exercised by anyone, even those in a position of relative powerlessness (Griffin, 2017). Thus, Muslim women might be positioned in a relatively powerless situation due to the stigmatizing hegemonic media representation which does not include the diverse range of Muslim women's voices, they do not lack the possibility to act and execute their agency. Midden and Ponzanesi (2013) have presented how Muslim women exercise their agency in ways that are often not recognized as such. The development of alternative feminist knowledge can be seen as a form of agency for several reasons. Muslim women rethink emancipation away from the hegemonic neoliberal and postfeminist discourses by creating their own feminist discourses from their own standpoint. However, their own standpoints are not always fixed. Muslim women who identify as feminists constantly negotiate multiple positions. They challenge conventional interpretations in their local and religious communities while simultaneously defending their religious and national communities from outside criticism. Furthermore, Muslim women make the conscious decision to follow religious dogmas while countering the stereotypical representations that depict them as passive. The development of alternative feminist knowledge is increasingly enabled through and expressed on digital media platforms.

New media give Muslim women the opportunity to participate in online content creation and thereby giving them a voice. Having a voice is having “the right to participate in decision making – in social, economic, cultural, and political life – and as a crucial human and citizenship right” (Tacchi, Watkins, & Keerthirathne, 2009). Community-based media provide a voice through pluralism and diversity (in ownership and content). Digital media has

an important role in the development of contemporary Muslim (community) media (Ahmed, 2020). Muslim media is a source of culturally specific information, which presents alternatives to stereotypical portrayals and negative depictions in mainstream media. Muslim (online) media platforms give voice in the wider public sphere and foster and maintain cultural unity and collective identity as well as establish connections with mainstream media. Ahmed (2020) demonstrates how media content and discourses in contemporary Muslim media are developing as a result of the increasing presence of women's voices. As demographic developments occur in the community, media production and consumption change (Ahmed, 2020). As younger female minorities take more prominent positions in society, there is an increasing presence of Muslim women's voices in contemporary Muslim media. Due to the changing interest of the younger generation of Muslim women, Muslim media re-centres its focus from maintaining connections with the diaspora to the accentuation of ethnic and religious identity but within a Western cultural context. Within this context, there is a greater reflection of diversity regarding age, gender, locality, and even religion (Ahmed, 2020). This repositioning is sought to recognize and express a new culture being created and lived by Muslim women in the Netherlands. Muslim women face stereotypes and marginalization as a result of their gender and religion. But the growing presence of their voices that are occupying new media spaces are allowing them to speak for themselves and participate in discussions about 'mainstream' issues. In doing so, they are not only countering dominant representations of Muslim women in Western media, but also creating new discourses about being a minority woman. Muslim women's voices in Muslim media are becoming more confident, assertive, and proactive, and they are being heard not only by members of their own communities but also by members of other groups. These voices provide more realistic representations of Muslim women in the Netherlands, highlighting changing gender roles as well as the energies and ambitions of younger people. The voices of women are changing perceptions of both minority and majority communities (Ahmed, 2020). They are confronting media discrimination and prejudices against all women and proposing new frameworks for viewing gender, religion, ethnicity, and 'minority status.' Additionally, access to new media platforms allows Muslim women to create and express a diverse range of voices and discourses that challenge preconceived notions of 'Muslim women', and they use this to connect with other women (Ahmed, 2020). Through which, new media are enabling 'Muslim media' to evolve in simply 'media'.

2. Methods

The main objective of this research has been to examine how Muslim women construct their feminist identity in Dutch feminist podcasts. In order to explore the discourses of feminist identity among Muslim women, a qualitative content analysis of Dutch feminist podcasts has been conducted. A qualitative approach is appropriate for this study due to the interest in latent and more context-dependent meaning. Schreier (2013), defines qualitative content analysis as “a method for systematically describing the meaning of qualitative data” (p. 170). The method enables a deeper understanding of material and context, making it a suitable method for understanding discourses around feminist identity as constructed by Muslim women. Qualitative content analysis is characterised by three features which promote the suitability of the method for this thesis. Qualitative content analysis reduces data, requiring the researcher to specifically focus on the aspects that are relevant to the overall research question, increasing the validity of the analysis (Schreier, 2013). However, the reduction of data could lead to a loss of concrete material. This has been accounted for through a systematic examination of every relevant part of the material. A systematic procedure increased reliability and reduced the risk of viewing data through the lens of assumptions and expectations (Schreier, 2013). Lastly, qualitative content analysis combines a concept-driven and data-driven approach (Schreier, 2013). Through this mix, categories have been created through previously advanced concepts and developed through the material. The systematic steps of data collection and data analysis are further outlined in this section.

Data collection: A case study

The data collection process of this research involved two phases. The first phase concerned the selection of feminist podcasts, and the second phase consisted of selecting episodes from those podcasts. The selection of feminist podcasts has been carried out through a case study of the Dutch feminist podcasts landscape. By means of a case study, this research engaged in a “close, detailed examination” of a few individual accounts (podcasts), “to illustrate a wider story or trend” (Calhoun, 2002; Harcup, 2014). According to Swanborn (2010), a case study can generalise key themes to provide a better understanding of an important research problem. In the case of this thesis, the podcasts provided a space for Muslim women to construct discourses around feminism. Through a purposive sampling method, by browsing sites such as podcastluisteren.nl (an online archive of Dutch podcasts) and several blogs on online feminist platforms reporting recommendations of Dutch feminist

podcasts, a selection was made of three podcasts: *Dipsaus Podcast*, *Fufu & Dadels*, and *Error Lilith*. The criteria for selecting the podcasts were as follows: The podcast needed to be Dutch (although they might include English episodes with international interviewees), so that each podcast would operate out of the same national context, including experiences with Dutch exceptionalism, and secular and postfeminist attitudes. The podcast needed to ‘identify’ itself as producing (intersectional) feminist content or having a feminist orientation. This should have been evident on their website or in the podcast description such as this description of *Fufu & Dadels*: “(the hosts) ask each other and their guests critical life questions about feminism and gender roles, about intercultural sisterhood and fuckboys, about traditions and sexuality, about mental health and healing.” (Dag en Nacht Media, n.d.). Another criterium was that the podcast needed to present a diverse range of topics and include a diverse range of voices, including but not limited to Muslim women. As such, the podcasts would reflect the fourth-wave feminist premise of concern for the planet and all its being, and exclusively white feminist or postfeminist podcasts would not be included in the selection. For example, *Dipsaus Podcast* produces episodes about racism and educational inequality, but also about popular media and black togetherness (Dipsaus, n.d.). And while *Error Lilith* specifically invites guests from the Muslim community, each episode tackles another topic such as mental health, queer identity, or Islamophobia (El Maroudi, 2021). A diverse range of topics and voices provided the analysis more accessible digital spaces than ‘Muslim media’ platforms, allowing for connections among Muslim women and non-Muslim women, which would provide additional insights about similarities and differences in regard to the construction of feminist discourses. The final criterium was that each podcast had to differ from each other on some level so that they each brought a new and relevant perspective to the analysis. For instance, the voice in one podcast might represent the perspective of an older/younger generation, or one podcast might discuss novel topics or introduce a remarkable guest. Below, a more detailed description of the podcasts is presented in relation to the criteria for their selection.

Dipsaus Podcast

Dipsaus is a biweekly podcast presented by and for women of colour and anyone who is interested in a different sound (Dipsaus, n.d.). *Dipsaus* is critical of society, interested in culture, concerned with politics, and incorporates humour, originality, and stubbornness. The podcast was founded in 2016, out of the need to tell stories and address socially relevant topics from the perspective of women, and to give them a voice which is mostly missing in mainstream media. A diverse range of topics and stories, that usually don’t get much attention

in Dutch mainstream media, are told in the various podcast episodes, such as ‘anti-Asian racism’, ‘fat positivity’, and ‘queer and Muslim’. Over the years, Dipsaus has become more than just a podcast. They have an online magazine, where they publish Dipsaus Exclusives: original stories which offer immersion into actualities. Furthermore, Dipsaus has worked with publishers to release books such as ‘The Good Immigrant’ and also produces other podcasts among which Fufu & Dadels.

Fufu & Dadels

Similar to Dipsaus, Fufu & Dadels also centres around the forgotten voices of women emancipation. The podcast is presented by millennial women of colour and does not shy away from intimate taboo-breaking conversations (Dag en Nacht Media, n.d.). The podcast offers the sound of black women, migrant women, Muslim women, queer women, and women of colour. The hosts and their guests ask each other critical life questions, about feminism, intersectional sisterhood, mental well-being, and many other topics. The first episode was launched in 2019. While Dipsaus mostly represents women of colour in the Randstad (Amsterdam, Utrecht, Rotterdam, Den Haag), Fufu & Dadels also gives voice to those outside of the big cities. Another distinction between the two podcasts is that Fufu & Dadels has a more conversational podcast format compared to the interview style of Dipsaus.

Error Lilith

Different from Dipsaus and Fufu & Dadels, the podcast Error can be better described as a podcast series, only featuring six episodes. In the podcast, host Suzan Yücel investigates social errors by opening a conversation with Muslim women (El Maroudi, 2021). The podcast discusses subjects which often go unspoken, in a candid and vulnerable way. In each episode, one guest is invited to talk about a certain topic. What all episodes have in common, is that they address identity, religion, and culture. The podcast Error is a production of *Lilith Mag*, an intersectional feminist media platform where predominantly women and other marginalized people will speak about politics, economics, media, art, fashion, and science (Lilith Mag, n.d.). Lilith combines substantive journalism, activism, and lifestyle. On their platform, Lilith maps the fourth feminist wave, making women more visible and stimulating media participation.

The second phase of data collection involved the selection of podcast episodes. Through a process of conducting a systematic, critical inquiry into each of the chosen

podcasts, episodes were selected to generate an understanding of the research topic and each episode contributed to the knowledge of the topic (Simons, 2009). Comparable to the selection of podcasts, the episodes were also collected by means of a purposive sampling method, based on the following three criteria: each episode must have included at least one voice of someone who identifies as a Muslim woman. Secondly, each episode must have included a conversation around feminism or feminist identity. Lastly, each episode must have added a new perspective/topic/insight to the analysis. A list of all ten selected podcast episodes is presented in table 1. Important to note is that, out of the six episodes produced by Error Lilith, only three were still available online. Due to the interest in the digital public sphere, the decision was made to focus on the publicly available episodes.

Table 1

List of Selected Podcast Episodes

Nr.	Podcast	Episode title [English translation]	Date of release	Time
1	Dipsaus	#23 – Fatima Elatik: Politiek, Politie & Tegenslagen [#23 – Fatima Elatik: Politics, Police & Setbacks)	14-04-2018	1 hour, 34 min
2	Dipsaus	#27 – Ramadan & Koerdistan met Alina Jabbari [#27 – Ramadan & Kurdistan with Aline Jabbari]	08-06-2018	1 hour, 21 min
3	Dipsaus	#38 – Rouwen om #Christchurch, solidariteit & Islamofobie met Ibtissam Abaaziz en Jamila Faloun [#38 – Grieving #Christchurch, solidarity & Islamophobia with Ibtissam Abaaziz and Jamila Faloun]	17-03-2019	1 hour, 31 min
4	Dipsaus	# 41 – An exclusive interview with Mona Elthahawy & #BoycottDeBalie	26-04-2019	1 hour, 8 min

Nr.	Podcast	Episode title [English translation]	Date of release	Time
5	Fufu & Dadels	#3 – Moslimvrouwen ain't sorry [Muslim women ain't sorry]	29-05-2019	1 hour, 5 min
6	Fufu & Dadels	#8 – Live Show – MEME KWEEN (met Aminanta Minte)	09-10-2019	1 hour, 4 min
7	Fufu & Dadels	#9 – The day after the revolution (met Mona Haydar)	24-12-2019	1 hour, 17 min
8	Error Lilith	Error met Nur Aydin [Error with Nur Aydin]	15-11-2021	52 min
9	Error Lilith	Error met Dounia Jari [Error with Dounia Jari]	30-11-2021	55 min
10	Error Lilith	Error met Ibtissam Abaaziz [Error with Ibtissam Abaaziz]	07-12-2021	57 min
Total				11.73 hours

Data analysis: Thematic Analysis

The data analysis of this thesis has moved away from the case study method because of the objective to identify patterns of meaning across the data set, rather than within one specific data item. The analysis of data has been conducted through a thematic analysis. As defined by Braun & Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a “method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (p. 79). A major advantage of thematic analysis is the flexibility of the method. Podcasts as media platforms are to date understudied in the field. A flexible method of analysis, independent of theory and epistemology yet containing clear systematic steps, would therefore be appropriate to adopt. Prior to analysis, a number of

decisions have been made. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), themes should be identified based on prevalence. In this study, the prevalence of a theme was first and foremost measured on an individual level. Based on the significance to one Muslim woman in one data item, because the interest lies within personal perspectives and experiences. After that, the recurrence of a theme across the dataset was measured, to examine the prevalence of the theme in a diverse range of Muslim women. The analysis has been conducted by means of an inductive approach, in which the identified themes were strongly linked to the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis did not try to fit within a specific coding frame and was rather data-driven. The themes first came from descriptions in the data and were then developed from interpretation of subtext. Subtext refers to personal information of the speaker, current events and actualities, and other contextual elements that could impact certain stories. In the podcasts, the subtext would be introduced in the beginning. However, it is important to note that the analysis was not free of theoretical and epistemological commitments. The thematic analysis has been conducted within a constructionist epistemology, which sought to explain the sociocultural contexts and structural conditions that enable the individual narratives that are presented (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the research epistemology informs the researcher what can be said about the data, and how to theorise meaning. In order to explain the sociocultural contexts and structural conditions that enable the presented individual narratives, sensitising concepts have been adopted. “Sensitising concepts are constructs that are derived from the research participants' perspective, using their language or expressions, and that sensitise the researcher to possible lines of inquiry” (Given, 2008). Sensitising concepts are the starting point in analysing data derived from a social group the researcher is unfamiliar with. In this study, the sensitising concepts were intersectionality theory and situated knowledge. The concept of intersectionality was employed in order to make the analysis sensitive to complex power relations, that is, alert and responsive to them without presuming an underlying hierarchy of differences (Flemmen, 2017). Through situated knowledge, this research started from the perspective of ‘the other women’, namely Muslim women, which allowed a better understanding of the impact of dominant groups (Trier-Bieniek, 2015). When the analysis is conducted from the perspective of a marginalised woman, from her/their standpoint, the research becomes more advanced. To accurately comprehend a phenomenon, research must begin from the perspective of people, in this case, Muslim women who have experienced exclusion. Furthermore, recognition of one’s own position as researcher is critical, “because researcher position leads to the introspective

element found in feminist analysis” (Trier-Bieniek, 2015, p. 23). My role as researcher is further outlined below, but first, a step-by-step guide of the executed thematic analysis.

The thematic analysis as conducted for this thesis has followed the step-by-step guide developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The first step involved familiarisation with the data. This step was executed by listening to the podcast episodes, while taking notes, and collecting all transcriptions. The following steps have been carried out through the qualitative data analysis and research software Atlas.ti. During the open coding process, the first initial codes have been generated. The codes consisted of a feature in the data that address interesting topics, perspectives, experiences, and/or anecdotes. During this initial coding phase, all data extracts have been coded to ensure that no relevant or interesting data might get lost during the next steps. In the next coding phase, the analyses refocused from codes to themes. First, codes were grouped together based on overlap in topics, perspectives, and experiences, forming categories. Next, the associations and relationships between categories were considered in the formation of overarching themes across the dataset. In the following phase, the initial themes have been reviewed and refined. First in relation to the dataset, to ensure that the themes formed a coherent pattern and accurately reflected the dataset. Secondly, in relation to the research question, to ensure that the themes were able to tell a ‘story’ which provides an answer to the research question. Once satisfactory, the themes were concisely and appropriately named and defined. The reviewed, refined, named, and defined themes have been developed in a thematic map (see appendix A). The data set has been described by means of a more detailed and nuanced account of each theme in the next chapter.

Role as researcher

Throughout the entire research project, it is important to consider and reflect on my positionality and role as researcher (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). The knowledge derived from a qualitative study is interpretive in nature, even if there is no interaction with participants in this study. Given this interpretive nature, the researcher's personal biography has a significant impact on the project. It is therefore critical that I developed an awareness of my role in this thesis. I am a white Dutch woman who was not raised in any religious environment and does not have a religious identity nor migration background. I do identify as intersectional feminist, and believe it is important to learn about feminism from other perspectives than my own (mostly privileged) standpoint. Before this study, I noticed stigmatising stereotypical beliefs about Muslim women around me, which came from a postfeminist attitude, and realised I had to actively search for the voices of Muslim women, as they are not represented

in mainstream media. Throughout the duration of this study, I have taken on the role of 'learner'. Rossman and Rallis (2017) define the 'learner' role of researcher as "actively engaged in constructing deeper understandings (knowledge) about their topics, the participants, the research process, and themselves as inquirers. Moreover, our researcher-learners learn more than how to do something; not all that they learn is instrumental or observable. We hope that they learn to reflect, contemplate, reason, appreciate, and honour." In other words, I have acknowledged my agentic role as researcher in the constructive process of acquiring knowledge. Rossman and Rallis (2017) also describe the importance of a researcher to reflect on one's perspective. The descriptive interpretive paradigm seeks to comprehend the social world as it is through the lens of individual experience. Individuals are viewed as creators of their world. Thus, agency in constructing the everyday world is central to the paradigm. Due to the interest in subjective worldviews and individual constructions of feminism, the present thesis has operated out of this paradigm.

3. Results

In order to examine the discourses around feminist identity among Muslim women in digital public spaces, a thematic analysis of ten Dutch podcast episodes has been conducted. Four broad themes were identified from the analysis, illustrating the discourses among Muslim women regarding feminism in the podcasts. Space is power, The complexity of diversity, Interpersonal awareness, and Unity against universal patriarchy. This chapter will further elaborate on each theme in more detail.

Space is power

A recurrent theme in the podcasts was that the ability to freely and safely express (feminist) identity, is very much connected to space; including physical, digital, and symbolic space. Throughout the podcasts, Muslim women expressed a number of concerns regarding the lack of safe spaces and oppressive experiences of Islamophobia and sexism in the public sphere. As explained by one of the founders of 'Meld Islamofobie' [Rapport Islamofobie], Muslim women, particularly visible Muslim women who wear a veil, are most often victims of Islamophobic violence; both physical and institutional. Other Muslim women in various podcast episodes demonstrated consistency with this statement by sharing several personal experiences. Talking about this issue, one woman said: "I do indeed remember myself. I also wore a headscarf at that time. And what I remember is that I got intense fear, especially after the murder of Theo van Gogh. That I was really scared to go home. That I didn't dare to do it alone because I experienced being called names and spat at. So, I found that very scary. I also had therapy for that. because I. I didn't realize that that was a traumatic experience." In all podcasts, Muslim women reported on the importance of safe spaces. The podcast itself, and the platforms created around the podcasts were considered safe spaces. Several Muslim women expressed how the platform they were given by the podcast allowed them to openly discuss their thoughts and experiences. As one put it: "That's why own platforms are so nice, which are a safe space to discuss those things." Another view regarding podcasts as a safe space was in relation to narratives: "That is why podcasts like yours are so important. Because the other story, the alternative story has to get out." This suggests that podcasts are indeed deemed as ideal platforms for counterpublics, as also indicated by Vrikki and Malik (2019).

A common perspective amongst Muslim women in the podcasts was that space equals power. For example, one woman explained that inventing the power that her freedom requires means creating platforms, networks, and communities, "which we were prevented from

creating in the past, in which we bypass the hierarchy of the patriarchy, of white male supremacy of capitalism, and the kind of organizational structures that have always traditionally kept us out.” To which another Muslim woman responded: “And I completely understand why some can't, but if there are women out there, especially women of colour, who are trying to create a platform where you can actually freely say whatever you want, I mean, where you do not have to explain like, does racism exist? You know, we can skip the ABCs and we can create sentences we can create a narrative and that is something that has been very liberating for me.” In other words, (Re)claiming space is the realisation that you have to create your own space, create your own networks, and create your own communities. By that, you invent your own power. Such self-created spaces, such as the podcasts themselves, bypass hegemonic power structures and therefore become a space which is safe to share personal stories. With these comments, Muslim women demonstrated how they did not lack the possibility to act and exercise their agency, and how they developed an alternative feminist knowledge on digital media platforms. The safe space created in the podcasts allowed for a more complex and diverse discussion of feminist identity which the next section will further elaborate on.

The complexity of diversity

The podcasts which have been analysed each presented a diverse range of voices of women of colour, both Muslim and non-Muslim, amongst which interesting similarities and differences were addressed. Additionally, in the discussions of feminist identity, the complexity of layered intersectional identities of Muslim women was demonstrated. As outlined in the previous section, Space is power, and the podcast is a safe space to share personal stories, which creates narratives people can identify with. In one of the first episodes of Fufu & Dadels, the hosts discussed the responses to their new podcast among which the following Tweet: “Funny, I can identify with all three (hosts). With Suheyla my Dutch roots, I recognize my sister in the white-passing. My sister has other experiences than I. With Christelle, the black African roots, my mom has the same issues with her name. And with Hajar, because I am Muslim.” This comment of how one listener can recognize herself in three hosts illustrates both the diversity and inclusivity of the podcast. A common perception among Muslim women in the podcasts was the lack of recognition they've experienced growing up and still today. This includes a lack of recognition in their surroundings, as one woman states: “I didn't have many MENA-women* around me. I grew up in the Achterhoek, so yes, I thought I was the only person with these problems. When you don't have any

structures, any groups you can turn to, that is very isolating.” And a lack of recognition in mainstream media as explained by another woman: “We see for instance in the media a large image of Muslim women. But that is a one-sided image. Namely, a Muslim woman wears a veil and is by definition oppressed. And there are conversations surrounding that. But Muslim women themselves are not visible.” This one-sided stereotypical image is consistent with the mainstream representation as outlined by Janson (2011) and Yuksel (2020).

Muslim women on the whole expressed their appreciation for recognising similarities with one another and with other women in the podcasts. For instance, one woman mentioned: “Yes, I think that when you have so little recognition in your daily life, then you really crave it. So it is indeed a celebration of recognition when you meet someone else in which you can also see yourself.” Contrary to this appreciation of recognition, several Muslim women pointed out how the podcasts also serve as platforms which allows for differences and disagreements. As one woman put it: “As Muslim women, we must, and we should always disagree, because we’re not monolithic. And I think that it’s essential to complicate the narrative around Muslim women. And we complicate it by openly disagreeing, disagreeing with respect, obviously, but recognizing that we have every right to disagree. And I think the best way to humanize someone is to complicate them. Because I think that the more you simplify someone, the more you make them, the more you collapse them into monoliths, the more you dehumanize them.” To which she later continued: “I’m also aware of our right to disagree because I think that white feminists are allowed freedom and latitude to disagree that we are not allowed. And I recognize that we are not allowed this difference, because we are only given a very small platform over which to argue. And I refuse to argue on this very small platform, which is why I’ve come on your show. Because you decide, or your podcast, you decide your parameters with no person outside of there telling us what we can and can’t say.” In other words, the Muslim women in the podcasts did not recognize themselves and each other in the one-sided mainstream media representation and they opposed this one-sided image of Muslim women by respectfully disagreeing with one another and embracing their differences in the podcasts. This shows that the access to new media platforms such as the podcasts indeed allows Muslim women to create and express a diverse range of voices and discourses that challenge preconceived notions of ‘Muslim women’, and they use this to connect with one another and with other women, as previously indicated by (Ahmed, 2020).

The majority of disagreements which were presented in the podcasts stem from a difference in standpoint. For example, in one discussion about the oppressiveness of the Dutch police systems, the different standpoints could be deducted to a difference in age and

generation. As one fragment from the dialogue reveals: “Exactly, but I am talking about terminology.” “I know, but I’m talking about practice. So I think that might be the difference between your generation and mine.” In another podcast, a discussion arose about the agency of Muslim women to wear what they want, and whether it is easier to avail or to choose to not veil. The women came to the conclusion that that depends on the positioning. As one explained: “In Egypt ... freedom was to take off her headscarf. She said that was when my revolution happened. I'm marching through the streets of Alexandria, taking off my headscarf was the revolution, for me to say this to a woman who was navigating both patriarchy and racism and Islamophobia in the UK, that doesn't register for her. Because for her, her revolution is, as you're saying, to be able to go to work wearing her hijab, and not be attacked on the street as a visibly Muslim woman.” This discussion portrays how Muslim women rethink emancipation by developing their own feminist discourses from their own standpoint. A form of agency as presented by Midden and Ponzanesi (2013). How Muslim women are aware of their own positioning and that of others in these conversations, is further outlined in the following section.

Interpersonal awareness

There was a strong sense of interpersonal awareness amongst Muslim women and other women in the podcast episodes. Meaning, that the Muslim women demonstrated a strong awareness of themselves and others in the podcasts. Part of this awareness was the understanding of one's own privileges. The majority of Muslim women accounted for their own privileges in the podcast. Some even included checking their privileges as a key element in defining what feminism means to them. “So, feminism in my life is all about standing up for equal rights and equal treatment. I mainly look at my own privileges. That’s what I call the advantages in life that give me an advantage over others. I want to use those advantages for people who did not get that advantage or who are not aware of it. I am black, female, and an ex-refugee. But I am also hetero for example. I am academically educated. Those two positions have opened doors for me, which often remain closed to others.” To which another woman responded in agreement: “Feminism to me means equality for everyone ... Everyone has the right to equal rights. And that is not yet the case in our society. I would like to speak out about that. Feminism should be self-evident in my view. I also see it as understanding your own privileges. So, I think it is very important to apply ‘check your own privilege first’. I try to apply that myself.” With these statements, Muslim women in the podcasts suggested

that feminist identity indeed engages with positionality and being accountable for where our knowledge, experiences, and perceptions come from.

According to Muslim women in the podcasts, being aware of one's own privileges goes hand in hand with the awareness of other people lacking certain privileges. Several women expressed their understanding towards other people not being able to, or allowed to, or even wanting to fight the patriarchy in the way they are doing. As one commented: "Not everyone can afford to boycott things, not everyone even has, you know, the platform to be able to because it's one, it's a matter of money. That's one. But it's also a matter of where you are in your career. Because when you have no institutional power, you're junior or even when you're trying to get your project off the ground. Because you know, you started you need, whatever you can get. You cannot afford to take these political stances and I'm fully aware of that." However, according to the majority of women in the podcasts, that does not grant them to take over someone else's fight, someone else's space, or share someone else's story. As one woman put it: "And the thing is that and it's the same as it's a full circle now that use your privilege. So I'm not going to try to fight the fight for they're perfectly able to, they know the country better than I do." In the first theme, Space is power, it is mentioned how Muslim women have experienced being denied space. Having been denied space on so many levels, the Muslim women in the podcasts are very aware of when not to take up space and when it is not their story to tell. They see the value in stories being told by the people that experience them and are affected by them. One woman shared this view through an example: "But it even happened to us once where we were invited to speak in Belgium. And we were like, but there are, there are plenty of interesting black women in Belgium, let's invite them, as well."

Throughout the dataset, it seemed that interpersonal awareness is very self-evident for all Muslim women. The way they expressed their consciousness of their own identity, privileges, prejudices, and forms of oppression, and the way they addressed understanding of other people, their positioning, and their forms of oppression, appeared to come very naturally. The majority of Muslim women represented in the podcasts have been brought up in diverse, multicultural communities. This (multi)cultural context contributes to the realisation that there are multiple perspectives in the world. As one woman expressed it: "But you internalise it and you have to train yourself for that. You have to keep that in mind and you do that with the people standing next to you. By calling each other, by looking each other up without claiming energy from the other. And especially with the queer community. I want us to visit each other but I also respect that you have your own space. And I don't want to go into that either. Do you understand? And that is constant training because we all grew up in a

very heteronormative world. So, we have to check our reflexes. Our motives. Our thoughts. You have to train yourself for that. And I can imagine if you've never had to do that in your life... Look, we may have a little more built-in. Because we are migrant children, Muslim, Moroccan..." To which another woman responded: "And we've been raised in multiculturalism. Because I remember in high school, we were in a class with the whole world. And you learned, and that was dismissed as a black school, but that was such a beautiful experience. Because you really learned what diversity is. And also, what solidarity means." These statements illustrate that the interpretation of feminism through complex intersectional identities is not new. However, through the podcast platform, Muslim women use digital media to accentuate ethnic and religious identity within a Western cultural context. In this context, there is a greater representation of diversity in terms of age, gender, location, and even religion. The next section will further expand on the meaning of solidarity, within a universal context.

Unity against universal patriarchy

The final recurrent theme reported by Muslim women throughout the podcast episodes is Unity against universal patriarchy. By unity, being united, it is not meant that there is an absence of diversity. As outlined above, the podcasts represented diversity to a great extent. As the women in the podcasts themselves often named it, the uniting of women is sisterhood. As defined by one woman, sisterhood "feels like a warm bath. All women, different women ... like-minded women, like-minded in the sense of the feminist part. Not necessarily like-minded because we both studied, or because we both work in the same sector. No, none of that matters." Sisterhood is expressed in various ways by Muslim women in the podcast. One recurrent element was 'shout-outs'. Shout-outs are related to the value expressed by Muslim women that stories should be told by the people that experience it and are affected by it, which is delineated in the previous theme. With a shout-out, the women mentioned and gave credit to other women, especially other marginalised women, who were not present in the podcast. One woman explained the importance of giving credit where it's due as: "We live in global white supremacy and patriarchy. It's not explicit. Black women black people are erased from the narratives that they're creating that they're writing ... I learned this from black women I am who I am and what I am to black women giving credit where credit it's due. They taught me to use my voice. I say the same thing every single time, right? Because this is my truth. This is my story. It doesn't change depending on where I go. And one time this white woman said to me you can just own your own story and own your own power. You

don't need to give your power away. By saying all of this every time like she saw me doing that. And didn't see it as honouring these people. She saw it as like dishonouring myself in my own power as a woman that I could give the credit away. She's like, No, you're an artist in your own right? Yes, I am. That's absolutely certainly true. But I learned it from somewhere. I didn't learn it from nowhere.” This statement also illustrates how experiencing intersectional forms of oppression, by being a black Muslim woman, and having been denied credits, makes Muslim women more aware of the value of giving credits where it's due. Furthermore, giving credits where it's due does not mean they are taking away space, and therefore power, from themselves. Or, as one woman described it: “Justice is not a cake.”

While all Muslim women agreed that sisterhood, “women supporting women”, should be self-evident, some women expressed how it does not come naturally and that they have to actively work towards a point of collaboration. They recognized that they have been socially conditioned to see each other as competition. One Muslim woman described how her layered intersectional identity caused her to experience ‘sisterarchy’ (hierarchy within sisterhood). “I also noticed within my own community that people were surprised if I said I was Muslim. And that I have to prove myself ... I have completely different culture but I am still Muslim. And you have within certain cultural... there are always groups. And that is very annoying. I have always tried to move between different groups. There are so many... yes my identity is layered. So it is not one or the other for me. I am Muslim but I am also black.” With this statement, the woman explained the importance of understanding the interaction of her layered identity that is commonly treated separately from each other. As such, the podcast facilitates the intersectional debate.

The issues that Muslim women endure, as they expressed in the podcasts, are also intersectional. When talking about issues of sexism, racism, Islamophobia, or homophobia, Muslim women didn't express to perceive and experience various forms of marginalisation as coming from different places. Patriarchy within their own religious institutions, patriarchy within Dutch national institutions, or patriarchy within media institutions do not exist separate from each other. Rather, patriarchy is universal. One woman elaborates on this statement by describing how Muslim women are caught between two forms of patriarchy. “The right-wing Islamophobic racist entity that wants to weaponize Muslim women's bodies as a way of demonising Islam and Muslim men specifically ... and the misogynists and patriarchs in the Muslim communities plural, that want to silence Muslim women and want to shut us up in order to defend Islam against all the terrible things that (the first entity) says.” This quote illustrates how Muslim women experience the symbolic employment of their bodies from

multiple sides, which can explain the following statement that “feminism for me is the destruction of patriarchy.”

The universality of patriarchy was validated through some interesting suggestions that the gendered Islamophobic issues that Muslim women endure are similar to universal feminist issues which white (post)feminists typically focus on. For example, street harassment. As one woman explained: “That is why it is an important topic for the feminist agenda. To take into account that you don’t only get whistled after on the streets. No, as a Muslim woman, you also experience Islamophobic violence. So that is also relevant for the feminist agenda.” Another example is the right to self-determination. When discussing the ‘burqa ban’ one woman pointed out: “But in the end, there is a state, there is a legislation that makes up rules about how women should or should not dress. And as long as we stay there, feminism has a long way to go. Because ultimately it comes down to the fact that women’s self-determination is not recognized. And that’s what we, I say we but especially white feminists, have fought for in the ’60s. Let’s not forget that. The fight still goes on.

How one individual experiences, and therefore fights against, patriarchy stems from positioning. In the theme Complexity of diversity, an example is given of the difference between an Egyptian woman’s revolution and the revolution of a British woman, which illustrates how someone’s fight against the patriarchy can differ from different standpoints. Another woman described how her experience of the patriarchy stems from her layered intersectional identity: “I, as a woman of colour as a woman of Muslim descent, as someone who increasingly identifies as queer as someone who wants to oppose all forms of hierarchies and authority, and capitalism, and the violence of the state and the violence of religion and the violence of heteronormativity. Patriarchy for me is so much more than just misogyny, patriarchy is fighting white supremacy, racism, capitalism, homophobia, ableism, classism, all forms of bigotry.”

Throughout the podcasts, Muslim women presented some concrete examples of why and how they, individually or collectively, fight the patriarchy. Within their own religion and the Muslim community, many Muslim women in the podcasts demonstrated their feminist interpretations of Islam and the Koran. For most women in the podcasts, it is their religion that makes them feel empowered to stand up for their own rights. One woman explained her (re)interpretation of the Koran through liberation theology. “God is on the side of the oppressed. And the scriptures have come to liberate the oppressed. Especially today, how we interpret de scriptures, especially here in the Netherlands, in Western Europe, we have to read the scriptures by positioning ourselves ... Reading from the position of the oppressed. What

does that mean to me? How are we gonna act?” While the majority of Muslim women in the podcasts agreed that the interpretation of faith, feminism, and activism is personal and stems from positioning, they also realised that the fight against patriarchy should be fought collectively. Intersectionality plays a key role in the collective fight against universal patriarchy. Some of the podcasts recorded in 2019 discuss the Women’s March in Amsterdam, where a diverse collective of feminists with varying goals came together and supported each other. Excitingly, one woman stated “I have never gone crazy as I did during the March. The passion, the energy, and also the frustration. But just how diversity and intersectionality came together, everyone who was there, just power.” A final recurrent facet of activism is raising awareness. For example, one woman explained the goals of her organisation to “stand up for our own interests, but at the same time, inform society of what we’re going through.” The podcasts are also platforms used to raise awareness, make certain issues visible, attract attention, and change the narrative. Through this, change can be enacted. This brings the analysis back to the first theme, Space is power.

Overall, the results in this chapter indicate that discourses of feminist identity among Muslim women in the podcasts are represented in an open manner. The podcasts are considered safe spaces which provide Muslim women to share their personal stories, creating a counterpublic to the mainstream media discourses. By changing the narrative, Muslim women draw power from the digital public sphere. Through the counterpublic, more women are able to identify with the diverse range of stories and voices presented in the podcasts. Contradictory, the podcast also provides a safe space for Muslim women to represent their differences and to disagree with one another. Which likewise creates a counterpublic against the one-sided mainstream media representation. The discourses of feminist identity are carried out through intersectionality. Muslim women define their feminist identity not only through their own intersectionality but also that of others. They interpret feminism from the position of the oppressed. Activism is a major topic in discourses on feminism in the podcasts. Muslim women generally agree that women, with their differences, should unite against patriarchy, which is universal. Because fighting against others’ oppression would ultimately be a fight against your own oppression. The next chapter moves on to the discussion of these findings, and their implications.

4. Conclusion and discussion

In Dutch mainstream media, the representation of Muslim women remains one-sided and is often stereotypical (Janson, 2011; Yuksel, 2020). The affordances of podcasts allow Muslim women to bypass the power structures of mainstream media and represent their own position, stories, and experiences on their own terms (Vrikki & Malik, 2019). As a platform, podcasts can provide alternatives to these mainstream discourses and create a community of like-minded yet different people to connect to (De Koning et al., 2019). The main objective of this study has been to explore the discourses of feminist identity among Muslim women in the digital public spaces of Dutch podcasts, in order to provide new insights from a mostly underrepresented (intersectional) perspective of Muslim women, both in research and in media. After analysing ten episodes of Dutch feminist podcasts, in which the feminist identity of Muslim women is represented, the findings revealed that the podcasts are regarded as safe spaces in which Muslim women can share their personal stories, thereby creating a counterpublic to mainstream media discourses. This finding reflects the argument made by Vrikki and Malik (2019), that podcasts provide the ideal platform for counterpublics. An interesting finding was that Muslim women reported gaining (a sense of) power from podcasts as a digital public space. By changing the narrative and providing alternative feminist knowledge, Muslim women exercise their agency and invent their own power. Midden and Ponzenesi (2020) have already demonstrated how Muslim women exercise their agency by developing alternative feminist knowledge from their own standpoint. This study contributes to this insight by illustrating how Muslim women also take the standpoint of others into consideration with the development of their feminist knowledge, as feminism is interpreted from the position of the oppressed. That reflects the premise of fourth-wave feminism to shift from concerns about oneself to concern for the planet and all its being (Trier-Bieniek, 2015). Moreover, this thesis argues that 'alternative' feminist knowledge is not the appropriate term, since it suggests that it deviates from the conventional mainstream media discourses. Instead, Muslim women in the podcasts expressed that their feminist knowledge is their reality and their norm.

Another key finding is that more women are able to identify with the diverse range of stories and voices presented in podcasts thanks to the counterpublic. In contrast, the podcast offers a safe space for Muslim women to express their differences and disagree with one another. This, in turn, creates a counterpublic to the one-sided mainstream media representation. Previous literature delineates how one-sided stereotypical media

representation impacts the perception of media consumers (Hall, 2013; Janson, 2011; Yuksel 2020). This thesis contributes to these findings by illustrating the impact of one-sided media representation on the perception of Muslim women; their value for differences and the ability to respectfully disagree with one another. Interestingly, the way Muslim women value their differences can be compared to individualism in postfeminist discourses. Scharff (2011) illustrates that individualist discourses in postfeminism are employed to 'other' Muslim women as victims of patriarchal oppression. This study shows that Muslim women use similar individualist discourses to oppose Othering. Instead, diversity in the podcast is promoted to increase identification. Furthermore, as perceived by the women in the podcasts, the Othering of Muslim women to construct an empowered self will ultimately lead to more universal patriarchal oppression. Muslim women, despite their differences, or due to their differences, generally agree that women should unite against patriarchy, which is universal. Because fighting against the oppression of others is ultimately a fight against one's own oppression.

Overall, the results indicate that in the podcasts, discourses of feminist identity among Muslim women centre around intersectionality. Kanai (2021) suggests that intersectionality has recently become prominent in contemporary feminist culture. However, the findings of the current study suggest otherwise. For the Muslim women in the podcasts, intersectional feminism is ingrained in their identity, as a result of the intersectional forms of oppression they experience. Consistent with Kanai (2021), this study does provide evidence for the increasing visibility of intersectional identities promoted by digital media. Interestingly, the concept of visibility in the analysis can be connected to the concept of vulnerability, as conceptualised by Fotopoulou (2017). In the podcasts, Muslim women express certain safety risks that they face with increased visibility. By consciously publicising their perspectives and experiences, Muslim women publicise their vulnerability and exercise their agency. The podcasts enable Muslim women to move away from passivity and victimisation, to not only counter hegemonic discourses but providing new narratives in the media landscape. In conclusion, the feminist identity of Muslim women is layered, and so should the discourses be represented. As long as there continue to be platforms which bypass the hegemonic power structures of mainstream media and provide a safe space, the variety of discourses will advance. Most importantly, stories and experiences should be shared by the appropriate people, to establish a new norm of feminist identity stemming from a socially situated position and intersectionality.

The podcast analysis presented in this thesis provides a nuanced perspective on the academic field. Podcasts bypass the hegemonic power structures of mainstream media and

provide alternative discourses oriented to their community (De Koning et al., 2019; Vrikki & Malik, 2019). Feminist podcasts specifically, acknowledge the representational void in mainstream media and aim toward a more inclusive representation of diverse voices. Through podcasts, Muslim women can (re)claim their space in the digital public sphere and construct discourses around feminism from their perspective and experiences. However, the podcast analysis as executed in this study is not without any limitations. Due to the limited prior empirical research of podcasts, there was little to no framework available to follow. Despite its exploratory nature, the findings of this thesis contribute a novel perspective to the established academic field, demonstrating podcast analyses to be a fruitful area for future work. However, further research is required to elaborate the analysis of podcasts. Moreover, the women who were represented in the podcasts are all academically educated, activists, and/or active/acquainted in the media landscape. Therefore, the discourses around feminism were mostly centred around feminist theories and high awareness of (media) power structures. This makes the study less generalisable to all Muslim women in the Netherlands. Future research, in the form of in-depth interviews, should be carried out to establish how Muslim women without such prior knowledge construct discourses around feminism, and whether they demonstrate similarities or differences with the women presented in this study.

The findings of this study have a number of practical implications. As already established in previous research, our society too often operates from the perspective of a single story, due to homogenous media representation (Adichie, 2009; Janson, 2011; Yuksel, 2020). For Muslim women, in particular, incorrect assumptions and judgements are particularly concerning because they are appropriated to make Islamophobic claims against immigration. The present study has demonstrated how the one-sided stereotypical mainstream media representation does not reflect the diverse and dynamic voices of Muslim women in the Netherlands. There is, therefore, a definite need for more diverse voices to be represented and heard by policymakers to complicate and nuance certain perspectives. Another important practical recommendation is directed at the (white) postfeminist movement. Instead of Othering Muslim women to construct an empowered self, take an example from the Muslim women presented in this study and rather implement an intersectional feminist perspective from the position of the oppressed to construct an empowered self.

As a final note, I'd like to share a personal take on the analysis. As Ahmed (2020) describes, new media platforms facilitate connections between Muslim women and other women. Through the podcasts, I myself was able to engage with what it means to be a

Muslim woman and a feminist, and learn a great deal from all the women represented in the podcasts.

References

- Adichie, C.N. (2009, July). *The danger of a single story*. [Video]. TEDGlobal.
https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story
- Ahearn, L. M. (2012). *Living language: An introduction to linguistic anthropology*.
Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Ahmed, S. T. (2020). Women in British Muslim media: New voices and emerging discourses.
In: *Minority Women and Western Media: Challenging Representations and
Articulating New Voices*. Lexington Books.
- Alle Vrouwen Netwerken (n.d.). <https://allevrouwennetwerken.nl/>
- Bracke, S. (2011). Subjects of debate: Secular and sexual exceptionalism, and Muslim
women in the Netherlands. *Feminist Review*, 98(1), 28–46.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/FR.2011.5>
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research
in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Calhoun, C. (2002). Case Study. In *Dictionary of Social Sciences*. Oxford University Press.
- Chandler, D. & Munday, R. (2016). Podcast. In *A Dictionary of Social Media*. Oxford
University Press.
- Chandler, D. & Munday, R. (2020). Mediation. In *A Dictionary of Media and
Communication*. Oxford University Press.
- Dag en Nacht Media. (n.d.). *Fufu & Dadels*. <https://dagennacht.nl/serie/fufu-dadels/>
- De Koning, L., Nolten, E., & Leurs, K. (2019). Community makers and the mediation of
difference. In *Culture, Citizenship and Human Rights*. Routledge London.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429198588>
- Dipsaus. (n.d.). *De Dipsaus Podcast*. <https://www.dipsaus.org/de-podcast>
- El Maroudi, H. (2021, September 29). *Proloog: 'Ik wil verhalen naast elkaar zetten, niet
tegenover elkaar.'* [https://www.lilithmag.nl/blog/2021/9/29/proloog-error-de-
podcast?rq=error](https://www.lilithmag.nl/blog/2021/9/29/proloog-error-de-podcast?rq=error)
- Flemmen, A.B. (2017). Chapter 5: Sensitizing Concepts in Action: Expanding the
Framework. In *Concepts in Action*. Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill.
https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004314207_006
- Fotopoulou A. (2016) Introduction: Conceptualising Feminist Activism and Digital
Networks. In: *Feminist Activism and Digital Networks*. Palgrave Studies in
Communication for Social Change. Palgrave Macmillan, London.
https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-50471-5_1

- Fox, K. & Ebada, Y. (2022). Egyptian female podcasters: Shaping feminist identities. *Learning, Media and Technology*, 47(1), 53-64.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2021.2020286>
- Gill, R., Scharff, C. (2011). Introduction. In: Gill, R., Scharff, C. (eds) *New Femininities*. Palgrave Macmillan, London. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230294523_1
- Given, L. M. (2008). Sensitizing Concepts. In *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412963909.n422>
- Griffin, G. (2017). Agency. In *A Dictionary of Gender Studies*. Oxford University Press.
- Griffin, G. (2017). Cyberfeminism. In *A Dictionary of Gender Studies*. Oxford University Press.
- Griffin, G. (2017). Intersectionality. In *A Dictionary of Gender Studies*. Oxford University Press.
- Griffin, G. (2017). Othering. In *A Dictionary of Gender Studies*. Oxford University Press.
- Griffin, G. (2017). Postfeminism. In *A Dictionary of Gender Studies*. Oxford University Press.
- Griffin, G. (2017). Subjectivity. In *A Dictionary of Gender Studies*. Oxford University Press.
- Harcup, T. (2014). Case Study. In *A Dictionary of Journalism*. Oxford University Press.
- Hall, S. (2013). The work of representation (2nd ed.). In *Representation* (pp. 1-47).
- Heithuis, S. (2019, November 26). *Huh? Zitten we kniediep in de 4^e feministische golf?* [*Huh? Are we kneedeep in the 4th feminist wave?*]
<https://www.womeninc.nl/actueel/blog-sander-heithuis-huh-zitten-we-kniediep-in-de-4e-feministische-golf>
- Janson, E. (2011). Stereotypes that define “us”: The case of Muslim women. *ENDC Proceedings*, 14, 181–196.
- Kanai, A. (2021). Intersectionality in digital feminist knowledge cultures: the practices and politics of a travelling theory. *Feminist Theory*, 22(4), 518-535.
 DOI:10.1177/1464700120975701
- Kelly, M. (2014). Silence. In *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* (2 ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Knibbe, K. (2019). Gender: Religion, secularism, and women’s empowerment. *Religion and European Society: A Primer*. DOI
- Koops, E. (2021). Groeiend geluk: 225 jaar vrouwenemancipatie [Growing prosperity: 225

- years womens emancipation]. *Historiek Online Geschiedenis Magazine*.
<https://historiek.net/groeiend-geluk-225-jaar-vrouwenemancipatie/71956/>
- Lilith Mag. (n.d.). *Wat is Lilith*. <https://www.lilithmag.nl/wat-is-lilith>
- Midden & Ponzanesi. Digital faiths: An analysis of the online practices of Muslim women in the Netherlands. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 41, p. 197-203.
 DOI:[10.1016/j.wsif.2013.07.012](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2013.07.012)
- Navarro, L. (2010). Islamophobia and sexism: Muslim women in Western mass media. *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, 8(2), 95-114.
<https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/islamophobia-sexism-muslim-women-western-mass/docview/845800374/se-2?accountid=13598>
- Nyhagen, L. (2017). The lived religion approach in the sociology of religion and its implications for secular feminist analyses of religion. *Social Compass*, 64(4), 495–511. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0037768617727482>
- Rossmann, G. & Rallis, S. (2017). The researcher as learner. In *An introduction to qualitative research* (pp. 23-47). SAGE Publications, Inc,
<https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781071802694>
- Scharff, C. (2011). Disarticulating feminism: Individualization, neoliberalism and the othering of 'Muslim women'. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 18(2), 119–134.
 DOI: 10.1177/1350506810394613
- Schäfer, M. (2015). Digital public sphere. In *The International Encyclopedia of Political Communication* (pp.322-328). DOI:10.1002/9781118541555.wbiepc087
- Schreier, M. (2013). Qualitative content analysis. In *SAGE Handbook of Qualitative data analysis*. (pp. 170-183).
- Simons, H. (2009). Evolution and concepts of case study research. In *Case Study Research in Practice*. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446268322.n1>
- Smaling, A. (2021). Sensitizing concepts, wat kun je ermee? [Sensitizing concept, what can you do with them?] *KWALON*, 26(1), 65-67. DOI:
<https://doi.org/10.5117/KWA2021.1.007.SMAL>
- Swanborn, P. (2010). *Case study research* (First Edition ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.
<https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781526485168>
- Tacchi, J., Watkins, J., & Keerthirathne, K. (2009). Participatory content creation: voice, communication, and development. *Development in Practice*, 19(4-5), 573–584.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09614520902866389>
- Trier-Bieniek, A. (2015). Introduction. In *Feminist Theory and Pop Culture*. SensePublishers

Rotterdam. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6300-061-1>

Van den Brandt, N. (2014). Secular feminisms and attitudes towards religion in the context of a West-European Society — Flanders, Belgium. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 44, 35–45. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.WSIF.2014.03.001>

Vrikki, P. & Malik, S. (2019) Voicing lived-experience and anti-racism: podcasting as a space at the margins for subaltern counterpublics, *Popular Communication*, 17:4, 273-287, DOI: 10.1080/15405702.2019.1622116

Wilkes, K. (2015). Colluding with neo-liberalism: Post-feminist subjectivities, whiteness and expressions of entitlement. *Feminist Review*, 110, 18-33.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24571995>

Yuksel, C. (2020) 'Moslima.' Een onderzoek naar de representatie van Moslima's in de beeldbank van de ANP. ['Muslima.' A research on the representation of Muslima's in the database of the ANP. Retrieved from <https://jimdo-storage.global.ssl.fastly.net/file/56488ce0-95b3-4a0f-a8c7-940d2e36638e/Moslimas%20in%20beeld%20Cigdem%20Yuksel.pdf>

Appendix A – Coding tree

Open codes	Categories	Themes
Being denied space Double standards Public violence against Muslim women Visibility of Muslim women (in public spaces)	(Gendered) Islamophobia in the public sphere	Space is power
Collective networks Feeling at home Identification Inclusivity/ accessibility Online communities (Online) platforms Podcasts	Safe space	
Appropriation of space Freedom of expression Privilege (Re)claiming space (Re)framing narratives	Power	
Identification Importance of role models Lack of recognition in media Lack of recognition in personal surroundings Similarities among women	Recognition	The complexity of diversity
Disagreements Diversity Learning from each other Multiculturalism	Difference	
Awareness of own prejudice Awareness of own privilege Expectations from communities Expectations from self Self-development Taking responsibility	Awareness of self	Interpersonal awareness
Awareness of other minorities/ other forms of oppression Communities (plural) Context collapse From the position of the oppressed Generational trauma Multiple perspectives Stories told by the right person Taking accountability	Awareness of others	

Open codes	Categories	Themes
Allies Giving credits where it's due (International) solidarity Shout outs Sisterarchy Women uniting	Sisterhood	Unity against universal patriarchy
Capitalism Dehumanising Muslim women Discrimination Individualism Neoliberal ideology Patriarchy within religion Oppression Sexism/ racism/ Islamophobia	Patriarchy	
Breaking taboos Feminist interpretations of Islam Making a difference (actions) Performative activism Women's march	Activism	
Body positivity Right to self-determination Street harassment	Issues of Muslim women are universal feminist issues	

Appendix B – Raw data

Stored in separate file.