

# #MeToo, Too: How Feminist is the #MosqueMeToo Movement?

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As a result of the #MeToo movement's concentration on problems faced by dominant groups, marginalized groups have formed new movements; an example of this would be the #MosqueMeToo movement, which emphasizes the Muslim women's experiences with sexual misconduct (Rezaian 2018; Sicari 2018, p. 200-202). A key question that deserves our attention is how does the #MosqueMeToo movement serve as a more progressive, reactionary movement to the exclusive #MeToo? I argue that even though the movement itself is explicitly focused on the experiences of Muslim women, the message behind the movement is much more progressive than the #MeToo movement. While the #MeToo social media movement unified women, it also contributed to further marginalization of other groups in that it pushed rich, white, cisgender women to the forefront of the movement, causing other women to feel unheard. Following the #MeToo movement's footsteps, Eltahawy was able to unify Muslim women and discuss a shared experience through social media. Through focusing on Muslim contexts, the #MosqueMeToo movement benefits all women because it highlights the experiences of a marginalized group, shifting the conversation from individual accounts to how the patriarchy manifests itself in different settings. Building on previous studies of how social media influences movements, my research focuses on the understudied #MosqueMeToo movement which highlights sexual misconduct specifically within Muslim contexts (Beckwith 2000 p. 431-468; Rezaian 2018; Sicari 2018, p. 200-202; Xiong, et. al. 2019, p. 10-23).

The #MeToo movement is an online social movement organization (SMO) which aims to expose and eradicate sexual violence faced by women transnationally (Xiong et al. 2019, p. 10). The movement was created by Tarana Burke, an African American woman from an underprivileged area in the Bronx, New York, who was a victim of sexual violence (Hasunuma & Shin 2019, p. 98). As a victim of sexual assault herself, she coined the phrase #MeToo when she was speaking with a young survivor of sexual assault and wished to express solidarity by saying "Me too" but could not get the words to come out (Hasunuma & Shin 2019, p. 98). Burke's movement was designed to help "women and girls from her own community, Black women and girls from underprivileged neighborhoods, but her words of solidarity began a movement to break the silence that keeps these private experiences and struggles hidden" (Hasunuma & Shin 2019, p. 98). #MeToo constitutes as a movement because it is a collective action that aims to make a long-term systematic change that has political or social implications. #MeToo aimed to grant solidarity to underprivileged girls and women in its early phases; however, once the movement became popularized by white actresses, activists within the movement began to fear that Burke's work within the movement would become overshadowed by the narratives of white women celebrities, such as Alyssa

Milano who is credited with making the movement mainstream (Hasunuma & Shin 2019, p. 98).

Media perception of SMOs are heavily influenced by the channels of communication used by the movement to spread their message (Xiong et.al 2019, p. 10). SMOs often achieve their goals by spreading their message through both formal and informal communication channels (Xiong et. al 2019, p10). In this case, the social movement organization, #MeToo, uses hashtag activism through a social media platform that has a horizontal power structure, which has allowed for the movement to be accessible to a large variety of people (Xiong et.al 2019, p. 12). In other words, there is not an official hierarchy in terms of who is allowed to determine the movement's narratives, behaviors, or any other related factors. Instead, the organization is accessible to everyone and is directed by the preferences of the majority. The use of social media as a means of communication has served as a political opportunity structure for the #MeToo movement in that it allows people to share their ideas with a widespread, global audience very easily (Ferre & Mueller 2003, p. 9-10).

Consequently, the movement has served to prompt many women and some men to step forward about the sexual violence they were victims of; in fact, there was such a substantial amount of victims who stepped forward that *Time Magazine* recognized the "Silence

Breakers” who shared their experiences as “Person of the Year” in 2017 (Herbert 2018, p. 322). These “Silence Breakers” included people of all backgrounds such as celebrities, housekeepers, farmworkers, and hospital workers and were overwhelmingly based in the U.S. (Herbert 2018, p. 322). This acknowledgment of the victims by an extremely popular and mainstream magazine in the U.S. demonstrates a shift in the way that victims are viewed by society; *Time Magazine* portrays these victims as brave people who defended themselves and stood up for justice, which is arguably a reflection of how society is beginning to be more receptive to the stories of victims.

Additionally, while the use of an informal communication channel was initially designed to allow people to feel as though they have been invited to the conversation to share their stories, the movement has failed at doing so. Although the movement aims to be accessible to all, there is a great disparity between those who are able to participate in the movement and those whose voices have been heard by the general public (Sicari 2018, p. 200; Xiong et al. 2019). Western media has predominantly centered the movement around narratives of Western celebrities, with little focus on the global influence that the movement has. Although the media has not properly acknowledged the global scope of the issue of violence against women in the context of #MeToo, underrepresented groups have decided to create their own reactionary movements to share their narratives which take inspiration from the #MeToo (Rezaian 2018).<sup>1</sup>

There are several examples of such reactionary movements across the globe. In South Korea, hundreds of women, regardless of occupation, have used the #MeToo movement as inspiration to speak out against sexual harassment (Hasunuma & Shin 2019, p. 99). Many #MeToo related hashtags were spread to demonstrate solidarity with the victims, including #WithYou, which led to many women feeling empowered.<sup>2</sup> Japan, on the other hand, was not as successful. These movements have experienced varying success as a result of different levels of civil engagement and the nature of the media coverage of the women who participate in the movement (Hasunuma & Shin 2019). As a result of this, despite the fact that the two countries are very similar in terms of women’s economic and political status, the #MeToo movement has seen considerably more success in South Korea than in Japan (Hasunuma & Shin 2019).  
2. In South Korea, over 20,000 citizens engaged in a “protest to end sexual discrimination and sexual violence” (Hasunuma and Shin 2019, p. 101-102). These protests forced authorities to take action against the injustices faced by these victims. As a result of these pro-

cessful because very few women wished to speak out, and many of those who did preferred to remain anonymous. Furthermore, since sexual harassment has not yet been criminalized, women feel as though it is something that they must endure (Hasunuma & Shin 2019, p. 104). Although Japan has not yet experienced much success in their fight to end violence against women, #WeToo was popularized on Twitter in order to demonstrate support for the victims (Hasunuma & Shin 2019, p. 104). Another example of a movement that seeks inspiration from the #MeToo movement and aims to make advancements in the violence against women campaign is the #MosqueMeToo movement, which highlights sexual violence faced by Muslim women in religious contexts, especially violence faced during Hajj (Rezaian 2018). One key question that deserves our attention is to what extent does the #MosqueMeToo movement serve as a more progressive and feminist, reactionary movement to the #MeToo?

### Analysis of the Movements

I use the term progressive in reference to anything that leads to forward movement or progress being made in a field/area of interest; however, understanding what constitutes as progress requires a deeper analysis of the goals of the movements. In order to understand the goals of a movement, it is critical to identify whether the movement is a woman’s movement, a feminist movement, or just a movement that has women in it (Ferree & Mueller 2003, p. 2-3).<sup>3</sup> Based on Ferree and Mueller’s definitions, I would define the #MeToo movement as an ideologically feminist movement that is a woman’s movement in practice (Ferree & Mueller 2003, p. 2-3). Although the movement’s goal is to highlight sexual violence through solidarity on social media regardless of gender, race, or religion, its narrative is seemingly dominated by white Western women, especially celebrities (Sicari 2018, p. 200).

tests, 139 bills were proposed and seven laws were passed by the end of 2018 (Hasunuma and Shin 2019, p. 102).  
3. According to Ferree and Mueller’s definition, a feminist movement is one that is inclusive of all people and transcends race, gender, religion, etc. She defines a woman’s movement as one with gendered language that is exclusively aimed at women and women’s issues. Finally, she defines women in movements simply as women who participate in a movement. She argues that it is important to distinguish between the different types of movements because it helps to avoid making generalizations and to get a more in-depth understanding of the movement’s motives (Ferree & Mueller 2003, p. 2-3).

As a result of the hegemonic nature of Western media, in which it only displays stories that fulfill the narrative they are trying to maintain, stories that stray away from their notion of reality are disregarded (Abu-Lughod 2005).<sup>4</sup> Western media and scholarship typically attempts to depict the Western world as leaders in the campaign for gender equity, while demonizing other nations, especially in the Middle East (Abu-Lughod 2005, p. 85). In the same way that the 2005 Arab Human Development Report (AHDR) failed to offer a comparative perspective in describing the oppression that women faced in Arab countries, the U.S. media is failing to offer comparative perspectives on women's actions to fight violence against women (Abu-Lughod 2005 p. 85). The popular media in the U.S. disregards movements that have been inspired by the #MeToo movement so that women in other countries appear to not have the agency to speak out in the way that Western women do (Abu-Lughod 2005, p. 85). That being said, given that the narrative of the movement has been overshadowed by a select group of people, the mainstream movement lacks the intersectional lens that warrants a feminist movement (Ferree & Mueller 2003, p. 2-3).

As aforementioned, the participation of celebrities has played a large role in shaping the way movement is perceived by the general public. According to Dr. Ann Larbee social media platforms can offer ordinary people a direct connection to celebrities which develops a sense of kinship amongst those who are following the celebrities towards the influencers (Larbee 2018, p. 7). This sense of kinship has significantly increased the role of celebrities, especially regarding their participation in social movements such as #MeToo (Larbee 2018, p. 7). Dr. Larbee has noted that the participation of celebrities in this movement bespeaks an era in which celebrities have taken on a new role in a "mediated social world that now shapes political action" (Larbee 2018, p. 7). Furthermore, she argues that without the influence of social media, the #MeToo movement would not have reached the heights that it did in terms of creating awareness of the problem. That being said, the ability to communicate and have access to highly influential figures has served 4. In Abu-Lughod's critique of the Arab Human Development Report (2005), she criticizes how Western scholars have created an "imagined community" of the Arab world. She argues that by "continually pointing to gender inequalities in the Arab world without offering a comparative perspective, the ADHR 2005 subliminally reinforced the presumption that gender equity has been achieved elsewhere" (Abu-Lughod 2005, p. 85).

as one of the greatest political opportunities for the #MeToo movement in that it contributed to the momentum that allowed the movement to be publicly recognized (Ferree & Mueller 2003, p. 9-10).

Despite its role as the movement's primary opportunity structure, social media has also served as a barrier. Although the use of celebrities to bring light to this issue has been effective, the movement lacks the ability to maintain sustainability (Larbee 2018, p. 7; Sicari 2018, p. 201). Given the fact that the primary actors who serve to bring attention to the issue come from Western backgrounds, the global #MeToo movement is almost exclusively viewed in a Western context (Sicari 2018, p. 200). Since a majority of the celebrities that Western media accentuates are also upper-class white people, the movement is promoting a very biased and one-sided narrative of how sexual violence against women manifests itself. If a shift in the movement does not occur soon, the theme will be perceived as simply as an issue that is occurring in Hollywood as opposed to a systematic occurrence as a result of the patriarchy (Hebert 2018, p. 337).

Mona Eltahawy was aware of this looming conflict and decided to jumpstart the shift that needed to occur in order for the #MeToo movement to be sustainable (Rezaian 2018). She developed the #MosqueMeToo movement to be an extension of the #MeToo movement that changes the focus from a rich, white, Western context to a Muslim context (Rezaian 2018). As an Egyptian-American Muslim woman, she did not feel as though her experiences of violence as a result of the patriarchy were being represented to the extent that privileged groups were (Rezaian 2018). Eltahawy was inspired to create the #MosqueMeToo movement as a result of experiencing sexual harassment twice, with both times having occurred during Hajj (Rezaian 2018). Although the #MeToo movement was developed to be inclusive of all people, Eltahawy did not feel as though her story would be heard if she expressed it via #MeToo (Rezaian 2018). This feeling of exclusion led to her creating a social movement to empower Muslim women to speak out against sexual violence they face, especially in religious contexts, where they are often shamed into silence (Rezaian 2018). In an interview with The Washington Post, she claimed that her goal was to push the #MeToo movement to "make sure #MeToo breaks the race, class, gender and faith lines that make it so hard for marginalized<sup>5</sup> people to be heard" (Rezaian 2018).

5. The term marginalized is used to refer to the U.S's

Through this statement it is made very clear that the #MosqueMeToo movement has a feminist goal based on Ferree’s definition of the term feminist (Ferree & Mueller 2003, p. 2-3). This global movement resonated with thousands of Muslims; in its first 24 hours, the movement was shared about 2,000 times. It has appeared on the top 10 trends on Farsi twitter (Amidi 2018).<sup>6</sup>

The purpose of the #MosqueMeToo movement was not to exclude non-Muslims in the way that the #MeToo movement excluded marginalized groups, but instead to encourage other marginalized groups to create their own movements within #MeToo (Rezaian 2018). Due to the #MosqueMeToo movement’s name, it allows for a specific marginalized group to feel like they can contribute to the conversation. In doing this, the #MosqueMeToo movement will propel the #MeToo movement forward. One of the major political opportunity structures of the #MosqueMeToo movement is the global attention that the #MeToo received. Given that the world was already receptive of the #MeToo movement’s exposure of violence against women, the likelihood of #MosqueMeToo being well-received increased. Furthermore, the use of social media, which contributed to the #MeToo movement’s success also plays a critical role in raising awareness of the #MosqueMeToo movement. One of the major reasons why the #MosqueMeToo movement has the potential to be an extremely instrumental tool in the violence against women campaign is that it allows women to speak to each other without the interference of men (Rezaian 2018).

A key factor that has the potential to stunt the growth of this movement is that in patriarchal societies, men tend to have great control over the messages that are being received by women, specifically in regards to popular culture and media; however, with the eroding popularity of satellite television and increasing popularity of the Internet, people are able to connect with one another more easily (Rezaian 2018). This allows victims to overcome the fear that prevents

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treatment of Muslim people as “the other.” Women are not marginalized in the context of Saudi Arabia, which is the location in which the Hajj takes place, nor other Islamic nations. They are, on the other hand, oppressed on the basis of their gender in that women do not have as much access to safely and freely speak out against the sexual violences they are victims of, which is why the #MosqueMeToo movement is necessary. 6. #MosqueMeToo has been tweeted about globally in countries such as Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Turkey, France, and Germany (Rezaian 2018).

them from stepping forward and using solidarity as a means of empowerment. This empowerment will lead them to questioning aspects of society they formerly did not feel as safe about discussing. One key conversation that was sparked by the #MosqueMeToo movement is why women are sexually assaulted even when they are veiled or dressed modestly. While the veil serves many purposes in Muslim culture, one of the key purposes is to protect women by separating them from men who are not family members. Once they realize that there isn’t much they can do to protect themselves against sexual harassment, they will realize that being a victim of sexual assault is not their fault and recognize how the patriarchy manifests itself in oppressing women. Leading conversations that are focused on the power structures that allow women to be victims of male violence will ultimately result in the longevity and success of the movement.

Unfortunately, like almost every other movement, the #MosqueMeToo movement faces obstacles such as harsh criticisms that deem the movement’s framing to be radical and foreign. One major fear that critics have is that the movement may contribute to the Islamophobic notion of Islam being naturally oppressive of women (Gharib 2018). While western media and scholarship has proved itself guilty of contributing to such racist narratives, this critique fails to take into account that the movement is originally based in America. Therefore, it would be extremely contradictory of the West to condemn another nation for participating in a movement that was created in opposition to its own failure to protect women. Another major fear that the critics hold is that the movement may cause political leaders to revoke women’s rights under the guise of protecting women from sexual harassment (Gharib 2018). While this concern is understandable, it should not prevent women from fighting for justice. The ability to recognize how the patriarchy manifests itself in all contexts is critical to the success of the campaign to end violence against women. That being said, as long as the campaign to end violence against women continues to resist such acts of backlash, it will be able to halt any regressions the government attempts to make. In order to become more successful, the #MosqueMeToo may benefit from modifying its message in a way that makes the movement appear to be less foreign to those who are reluctant to support it out of fear that the movement may unintentionally cause the aforementioned harms

(Ferree & Mueller 2003, p. 14-15).<sup>7</sup>

### Conclusion/ Implications

The #MosqueMeToo movement's greatest potential sociopolitical implication is its potential to shift the narrative of the #MeToo movement to one that would be sustainable for making long-term progress in the violence against women campaign. One criticism against the #MeToo movement is that it fails to address the patriarchy as the cause of the problem, which prevents the movement from being able to sustain itself (Sicari 2018, p. 200). Although I agree that the #MeToo movement should frame itself around fighting the patriarchy, I believe that this can be done through the use of narratives. While it began with intentions of intersectionality, the #MeToo movement became popularized when the hashtag was used by upper-class, white celebrities, which brought attention to it from a global scale (Hasunuma and Shin 2019, p. 98; Larbee 2018, p. 7). Now, the #MosqueMeToo movement has led the path for the #MeToo movement to become more relatable on a global scale through using global narratives, as it was originally supposed to be. Once the #MosqueMeToo movement becomes increasingly globally recognized, people will begin to notice that the common factor that has created the environment in which women experience sexual violence frequently is the patriarchy. This shift is necessary to make the #MeToo movement sustainable and progressive.

As Dr. Karen Beckwith contends in her scholarly literature, it is critical to do comparative research about women's movements such as the #MosqueMeToo movement and the #MeToo movement (Beckwith 2000, p. 456). It is only through comparative scholarship on women's movement that the field will be able to "build a body of knowledge, [to] develop new indicators and perspectives and [to] hone existing ones and [to] increase our confidence about strategic and policy recommendations for women's movements" (Beckwith 2000, p. 456-457). Comparative studies of movements allow for a clearer understanding of how movements operate globally. Furthermore, it

7. This can be done through an emphasis on the how sexual harassment prevents women from being able to properly fulfill their religious duties as well as through other religious/ cultural emphasises that are culturally appropriate. As Western media and scholarly works have gained a negative reputation of being racist and exclusive in the Muslim world, it is critical for a movement to avoid appearing to be to western in order to appeal to Muslim audiences (Abu- Lughod 2005).

provides insight on the role that social media plays in the advancement of SMOs. This research reveals how marginalized and oppressed groups of individuals use the social media to create spaces for themselves to be activists for causes they are affected by when they feel underrepresented by mainstream popular culture. Through an analysis of the global scope of as well as the goals of the movement, it demonstrated that although movements are not always fully capable of fulfilling their initial goals, people who identify with the movement may create reactionary extensions of the movement so that the group can make progress. The #MosqueMeToo movement was created as a reaction to the #MeToo movement's shift in focus from oppressed people to Western celebrities, which neglects its original goal of being intersectional; Mona Eltahawy's reactionary #MosqueMeToo was designed to shift the movement's focus to become more intersectional, which would force society to focus on power structures, as opposed to narratives (Rezaian 2018; Sicari 2018).

My comparative study of the #MosqueMeToo movement and the #MeToo movement revealed that the #MosqueMeToo movement has served as more progressive, reactionary movement to the #MeToo through its expansion of the movement's focus. The shift of conversation from personal narratives to the patriarchy will also lead to a shift in the way that society thinks about sexual harassment (Sicari 2018). Instead of simply viewing sexual assault as motivated by sexual desires, people will take into consideration the power structure that allows men to systematically abuse women (Hebert 2018, p. 327; Tippet 2018). Once we are able to recognize that sexual harassment is just one part of the larger scale issue of the patriarchy's global oppression of women, we will be better suited to fight the issue. This change has to occur not only on a legal level but also on a societal level. While the government can pass laws to make the actions illegal, a shift in society's thinking of the issues will lead to more everlasting changes, such as the eradication of the patriarchy. The recognition that the #MeToo movement has received in addition to the global lens that the #MosqueMeToo movement applies to the cause will contribute to the sustainability and success of the global campaign to end violence against women.

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