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Women's Initiatives

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Guest Editorial

I approach the subject of 'Islamic feminism' as a historian whose life-long scholarship has focused on feminisms in the Middle East and broader Islamic world. Over the decades, operating in multiple locations, I have continued to examine feminisms that women in the Middle East and Islamic worlds have created for themselves/ourselves.

Historically, feminisms emerged simultaneously in the East and the West. Feminism was not patented in the West. Feminism is not 'Western.' The myth that feminism is Western finds stubborn persistence among many Westerners who charge that Muslim societies and Islam itself are irredeemably sexist. The myth exists as well among Islamists and conservative Muslims living in the West who, like their counterparts in Africa and Asia, discredit the notion of an egalitarian Islam. Ironically, the canard that feminism is Western is even repeated by some Muslim gender equality proponents in the West who insist that feminism is a Western colonialist meta-narrative and in so doing, mirror precisely what arch patriarchal Islamists profess. For such individuals, the notion of an Islamic feminism is anathema.

Critical to understanding feminisms in Muslim societies is recognising the fluctuating connotations of the terms, 'the secular' and 'the religious'. These terms must be historicised as their meanings have shifted from the late nineteenth century when the word 'secular' first appeared in Muslim societies in parts of Africa and Asia. In the Middle East, straddling Africa and Asia, the words 'secular' and 'secularisation' were introduced in the context of socio-cultural, economic, technological, and political transformation starting in the early 19th century in Egypt during processes of modern state-building. During the consolidating of the modern state, education and law, with the exception of personal status or family law, were typically removed from the jurisdiction of religious authorities and placed under the aegis of the state. While religious interpretation on matters relating to the family remained the purview of the religious authorities, such readings to be legally applicable by the state were translated into statutory law, called either 'Muslim personal status law' or 'family law' issued by the secular state as the Egyptian case illustrates. There was thus a confluence of 'the secular' and 'the religious', although the will of the state remained decisive. While 'the secular' connoted separation of religion and state (however imperfect) it also signified 'the national'. Secular feminism in Egypt, thus, indicated Egyptian feminism.

The rise of a new egalitarian discourse of Islam called 'Islamic feminism' in the 1990s and its growing acceptance produced contradictory reactions within the world of Muslim women. The

creators of the gender-egalitarian discourse of Islam, identified as 'religious', in the main, initially objected to the term 'Islamic feminism'. They accepted the allegations perpetuated by Islamists and conservative Muslims that feminism was Western and therefore alien to Islam. Secular women with a feminist orientation, including, those who initiated the term Islamic feminism, marshalled the discourse in their campaigns to reform Muslim family laws. There were also Muslim women among the ranks of the secular feminists who rejected the possibility of an egalitarian Islam.

Because the terms 'secular' and 'religious' or 'Islamic' have been highly loaded, and the term 'feminism' has been widely misunderstood, terminology has fuelled contention. The answer, I argue, is not to jettison the terms but to clarify meanings and to be aware how 'the secular' and 'the religious 'are constituted (even mutually constituted) and contextually situated, and to acknowledge that feminisms have emerged organically from deep within Muslim societies. The challenge now globally and especially locally is not so much further elaborating a gender-egalitarian and gender-just Islam as practicing Islamic feminism and sharpening and putting into action an effective politics. Such a challenge is helped by understanding the wide range of experience over time and place. Samyukta's special issue on Islamic feminism aims to contribute to this.

Guest Editor - MARGOT BADRAN

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BETWEEN FEMINISM AND ISLAM:FATIMA MERNISSI AND HER LEGACY

RAJA RHOUNI

Abstract: Fatima Mernissi (1940 - 2015) was a feminist scholar and activist without equal in the Arab World. Her work was concerned with identifying and critiquing the different structures that intersect to oppress women, ranging from colonialism, Islam (or the patriarchal interpretation of Islam), to capitalist development. But what has most retained the attention of her admirers and critics alike is her work on Islam and women's rights. The present paper focuses on this particular aspect of her work, distinguishing between two moments: a secularist feminist moment and an Islamic feminist moment. This feature makes Mernissi's work particularly interesting in understanding the nature and development of feminism in the region as it epitomises the two main trends in Arab feminism. In exploring these two trends in Mernissi's feminist trajectory, the paper explains both the major factors behind each feminist position as well as the major reactions each triggered. The paper particularly focuses on the strength of Islamic feminism and ends with a discussion of Mernissi's legacy in Morocco.

Keywords: feminist scholar, women's oppression, women's rights, patriarchy, capitalist development, Islamic feminism, Islamic democracy, human rights, religious texts' misinterpretation, sexual harassment, secularist position

Introducing Fatima Mernissi

Born in 1940 in the city of Fes, at a time when Morocco was still under French occupation, Mernissi had a rather unusual life course for a woman of her generation. At a time when few women had access to literacy or schooling, she had the opportunity to go to a nationalist school in the city of Fes, considered the capital of the Moroccan nationalist movement.[1]

Mernissi left Fes for Rabat, the capital, to study political science at Mohammed V University (MVU). It was not long after Morocco had obtained independence in 1956 and MVU was host to a vibrant student movement, the Union National des Étudiants Marocains (UNEM), marked by strong leftist politics in the 1960s. Mernissi got involved in the movement which had a great impact on her political conscience. Later on, she realised that what she wanted to study most was sociology. Her main objective was to interview illiterate women who were denied a voice. This became a sort of lifelong obsession, having herself escaped this ancestral silence through a fortunate turn of fate, as she confesses (Mernissi 1996, 110-11). To study sociology, Mernissi went to the Sorbonne University in Paris, and from there to Brandeis University, obtaining a PhD in 1973. Her dissertation titled "Male-Female Dynamics in Muslim Society," was published two years later under the title *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Muslim Society*. At the time, the American feminist movement was at its apogee and Mernissi frequented feminist circles from which she learnt a lot regarding cultural analysis, organising, and lobbying, as she recalls (Mernissi 1996, 110-11).

After her graduation from Brandeis, Mernissi turned down several lucrative opportunities abroad to go back to Morocco; her objective, as she expresses in one of the interviews she gave, was to remain rooted in Moroccan society to better observe its moves and to influence its course (Mernissi 1996, 102). Mernissi was hired as a sociology professor at MVU in 1974 and since then, she combined scholarship and activism becoming a veritable organic intellectual. In her research, she sought to identify and critique the various intersecting structures that subject women to marginalisation targeting colonialism, the postcolonial state, Islam or its androcentric interpretation, and capitalism or capitalist development. She also conducted pioneering interviews that highlighted the agency, power of resistance, and worldviews of marginalised women. Her writings and research activities marked a turning point in sociology in Morocco, introducing and institutionalising the study of women and gender in the country.

As an activist who believed in the power of communication and networking, Mernissi initiated research groups and writing workshops in Morocco and North Africa that produced edited volumes characterised by interdisciplinarity and multiplicity of topics varying from political prisoners, the dreams of the youth, child abuse, civic action, women's human rights, women carpet weavers, women and the media, and sexual harassment or domestic violence.[2]

But what has most retained the attention of Mernissi's admirers and critics alike was her work on Islam and women's rights. It is important to distinguish her feminist trajectory between a 'secularist' moment in which she adopts an anti-religious position, and a more religion-friendly moment. The latter has been identified as Islamic feminism which is in Margot Badran's words, "a feminist discourse and practice articulated within an Islamic paradigm" (Badran 2009, 242). For Badran, one of the most important observers of this discourse, Mernissi is "one of the earliest to articulate Islamic feminism without taking on an Islamic feminist identity" (Badran 2002). Even though Mernissi has never self-identified as an Islamic feminist, Islamic feminism appears to be Mernissi's greatest legacy, inspiring women from all over the world to reclaim the faith and opening new avenues for doing feminism in the region beyond both patriarchal and orientalist discourses on Islam.[3]

Mernissi's Secular Phase

In her first book *Beyond the Veil* (1975, new ed. 1987), which explores the contradictory effects of both modernisation and Islam on gender dynamics in Morocco, Mernissi adopts a stringent secularist position. For Mernissi, the post-colonial Moroccan state is built on a contradiction. On the one hand, the state embarked on a project of modernisation built on "sexual equality" as it encourages women's participation in the public sphere through schooling and employment, and on the other, it codified a family legislation based on a religious reference that undermined this very project. Mernissi was especially targeting the conservative Personal Status Code, known as the Moudawana which governs areas of marriage, divorce, inheritance and child custody. First promulgated in 1958, two years after independence, the Moudawana defined the husband as the head of the household in charge of providing for the family whereas it identifies the wife as essentially a housewife who owes him obedience. Among the discriminating provisions the Moudawana authorised are polygamy and unilateral divorce, even when the nationalist movement or its leaders had called for their abolition as early as the 1940s.[4]

Mernissi declares: "In this book, I want to demonstrate that there is a fundamental contradiction between Islam as interpreted in official policy and equality between the sexes" (Mernissi 1987, 9).[5] Re-reading the Qur'an and revisiting the interpretative work of early authoritative exegetes, she concludes that Islam's concept of gender is based on a fear of women's sexuality and power; hence practices like polygamy, unilateral divorce and veiling are intended to curtail female power through weakening the couple, or women's power over their husbands. "Sexual equality violates Islam's premises," she continues, "actualised in its laws, that heterosexual love is dangerous to Allah's order." (9) The book is a plea for the Moroccan postcolonial state to embrace modernity and universal human rights without ambiguity and to abandon Islam, understood as essentially fostering male supremacy as a source of legislation.

It is important to note that the secular modernist position displayed in a book written in the beginning of the 1970s was in tune with the times whether in Morocco or in the West. As mentioned earlier, Mernissi's political consciousness was first formed in the Moroccan student movement of the 1960s and 70s, the UNEM, which was the breeding ground of the Moroccan (secular) left. Moreover, at the time she was writing her dissertation at a university in the United States, feminist and leftist ideas were hegemonic in the intellectual and academic circles she frequented. In an interview, Mernissi mentions how the university was home to important figures like Herbert Marcuse, considered the father of the student movement in the US and one of the finest theorists of the New Left, and Angela Davis, a radical African-American activist for human rights and Marcuse's student (Mernissi 1996, 110). These biographical elements explain the secularist position expressed above and the Marxist feminist approach that characterised Mernissi's critique in the 1970s up until the beginning of the 1980s.

From the late 1980s, Mernissi's secularist stance towards Islam taken in *Beyond the Veil* easily lent itself to various criticisms. Her position was found guilty of a failure to distinguish between Islam as a divine message, and its patriarchal human interpretation, Islam and *fiqh*, Muslim jurisprudence, or Islam and the Moudawana (Majid 1998; Barlas 2005). The book was criticised as well for its selective, reductionist and ahistorical, literalist approach (Rhouni 2010). Also questioned was the solidity of the claim that purports to study "male-female dynamics in a *modern society*" (emphasis added), as the title announces, by referring to medieval interpretation of Islamic sources (Zayzafoon 2005).

It is important to note that in spite of her secularist position at this stage of her career, Mernissi does not single out Islam as the only explanatory factor behind women's oppression in Morocco. In writings of a little later period based on one of the first interviews with lower class women ever conducted in Morocco, Mernissi targets state capitalism and its exploitation of female labor. Mernissi's fieldwork studies written in the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s are among the first and the most invigorating feminist critiques of capitalism and the weakening of women's power with the integration of the various Third World countries into the capitalist world market. Her essays "The Degrading Effect of Capitalism on Female Labour in a Third World Economy" (1978-79), "Le Proletariat féminin au Maroc" (The Female Proletariat in Morocco, 1980), "Women and the Impact of Capitalist Development" (1982-3), "Zhor's World: A Moroccan Domestic Worker Speaks Out" (1982), and *Doing Daily Battle: Interviews with Moroccan Women* (1988) represent the first attempts in Morocco at the time, as well as elsewhere in the world, to make visible subaltern women's labor and its non-avowed importance for the economy.[6] For Mernissi, the concept of gender or gender roles in Islam which is reproduced in the Moudawana, is a boon for capitalism because it makes female labor invisible and thus allows its exploitation without accountability.

In 1991, Mernissi surprised her readers, especially in the Anglophone world, by publishing a book whose thesis is in complete opposition to her earlier positions regarding "the Muslim ideology of the sexes," to use her phrase. In *The Veil and the Male Elite: a Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*, Mernissi argues that Islam came to establish a society based on social justice and equality, yet the strong male resistance that it encountered caused it to retreat from its revolutionary impetus.

Shift to Islamic Feminism

Although Mernissi never explained the process by which she shifted her perspective on Islam, an examination of her intellectual trajectory allows us to see the change as mainly the result of a gradual intellectual development. A major moment in this transition is her encounter and collaboration with a few male progressive Islamic scholars, who advocated the reform of the Moudawana using Islamic arguments. This collaboration took place within the framework of a multidisciplinary research group Mernissi created in 1981 on 'Woman, Family and Child,' contributing to the emergence of an intellectual debate on women's rights and the amendment of the Moudawana, which would turn to a public debate in the beginning of the 1990s and would continue into the beginning of the twenty first century, ending in significant reform of the law in 2004. The most important of these

reformist male scholars of Islam with whom Mernissi collaborated was Ahmed Khamlichi, a member of the National Council of Ulama (male religious scholars), one of the roles of which is to guide and support the King's decision in a would-be modification of the family law. Khamlichi was one of the religious scholars, who took part in the committee that was in charge of drafting the new law in 2004. On Khamlichi, Mernissi writes:

Ulama, such as Professor Khamlichi maintain today that we can find in the Qur'an arguments to justify a more egalitarian legislation in which woman enjoys all her rights and her dignity. The very foundation of misogyny in Arab countries, which present themselves as "sacred," is far from having unanimous support among the fuqaha (specialists in jurisprudence) and ulama, either in the beginning of the [twentieth] century or nowadays. (Mernissi, 1987, 88).[7]

In his writings, Khamlichi makes a clear distinction between *sharia* and *fiqh*; while sharia is divine, fiqh is human. *Sharia* is often-- erroneously--translated or defined as Islamic law, while the word sharia is mentioned in the Qur'an to refer to 'the right path' or 'the law of God' as revealed in both the Qur'an and the Prophet's tradition. Fiqh, on the other hand, refers to the human interpretation of this sharia expressed in scholarship of Muslim jurists since the ninth century. Khamlichi explains that, since the Moudawana is inspired from one of the schools of fiqh (the Maliki School), it is not sacred and can be subject to change using *ijtihad*, independent reasoning. Khamlichi's insights no doubt served to shake Mernissi's secularist take on Islam. Significantly, Mernissi mentions his name in the acknowledgement page of *The Veil and the Male Elite* as her main source (Mernissi 1991, x).

Khamlichi's influence on Mernissi's feminist position vis-à-vis Islam would be felt from 1984, the year she published a series of articles in the magazine *Jeune Afrique*, which were collected and published in 1986 in a book entitled *L'Amour dans les pays musulmans* (Love in Muslim countries). With this book, Mernissi's feminist trajectory changed course. The book's thesis is in complete opposition to *Beyond the Veil*. Here Islam is not against heterosexual love as she once argued, but quite the contrary. The book sheds light on liberal theologians like the Andalusian scholar Ibn Hazm (born in 384 Hegira [994 AD]), who preached faithfulness in heterosexual relationships, in contrast to her earlier works which rely on androcentric interpretations of various orthodox male theologians. Mernissi also discovers how Sufi Islam grants women a more egalitarian status, allowing for the emergence of an important female mystic like Rabia al-Adawiya, considered one of the most important Sufi masters of all times.

***The Veil and the Male Elite:* A Cult Book**

It is *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* (the English translation of the 1987 *La Harem Politique* published in 1991 in the U.S. and in the U.K. under the title *Women and Islam: An Historical Inquiry*) that clearly marks Mernissi's shift to a position that many observers of feminism in the Arab world described as an example of Islamic feminism. In this book, Mernissi identifies the issue with women's rights in Islam as one of interpretation and male vested interests rather than Islam as a divine or prophetic project. She states in the introduction:
When I finished writing this book I had come to understand one thing; if women's rights are a problem for some modern Muslim men, it is neither because of the Koran nor the Prophet, nor the Islamic traditions. But simply because those rights conflict with the interest of a male elite. (Mernissi 1991, 8-9)

It is in these terms that she proposes to revisit the religious texts to disentangle them from misogynous interpretations. With *The Veil and the Male Elite*, Mernissi was one of the first scholars to take up the challenge of delving into the religious realm, usually closed to people of her training, going beyond the boundaries of her own formative discipline, sociology. *The Veil and the Male Elite* is the first book in a trilogy of books that strongly defend the idea that gender equality and democracy are not inconsistent with Islam as a social and political project. The trilogy includes *The Forgotten Queens of Islam* published in 1990, a historical investigation into Muslim queens and a critical analysis of the concept of power in Islam. For Mernissi, the existence of these queens attest to the idea that gender equality is not alien to Islam but that it represents its repressed memory. This book was followed in 1992 by *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World*, in which she distinguishes between what she refers to as "Islam-*rissala*" (Islam-message), that is, Islam as a divine revelation, and "political Islam," which is the outcome of a history of ideological and political manipulations. Mernissi argues that Islam has become hierarchical, elitist, and despotic because of the "political opportunism" of male elite groups and their vested interests (Mernissi 1992, 75). The originality of Mernissi's new scholarship on Islam greatly contributed to the theorisation and dissemination of this new feminist paradigm, inviting women to re-appropriate Islam and to challenge the monopoly of ulama on religious interpretation.

This new stance will reconcile Mernissi with the Islam of her childhood, which is not devoid of value for a Muslim woman who has been angry with one of the most important

components of her identity and psychological making. The weight of this internal conflict is clear in the following statement: "Throughout my childhood I had a very ambivalent relationship with the Koran. It was taught to us in a Koranic school in a particularly ferocious manner. But to my childish mind only the highly fanciful Islam of my illiterate grandmother, Lalla Yasmina, opened the door for me to a poetic religion." (Mernissi 1991, 62)The rest of the passage emphasises a central element of this reconciliation, her recognition of the importance of interpretation and the interpreter's worldview in the construction of meaning in Islam. She continues:

Depending on how it is used, the sacred text can be a threshold for escape or an insurmountable barrier. It can be that rare music that leads to dreaming or simply a dispiriting routine. It all depends on the person who invokes it. However, for me, the older I grew, the fainter the music became. In secondary school the history of religion course was studded with traditions. Many of them from appropriate pages of [Muhammad Ibn Ismail] al-Bukhari, which the teacher recited to us, made me feel extremely ill at ease. (64)

This statement in which she introduces her feminist revision of al-Bukhari's *al-Sahih*, further expresses her feeling of uneasiness toward Islam's androcentric side, common among many Muslim feminists. This enterprise is particularly audacious since al-Bukhari (810-870) is considered one of the most authoritative collectors of the Prophet's traditions and sayings, or hadiths, in Sunni Islam. Al-Bukhari is also the founder of the science of *isnad*, the chain of authorities attesting to the historical authenticity of a particular hadith, a methodology with remarkable precision that classifies the hadiths into *sahih* (sound), *hasan* (good), da'if (weak) and *maudu*' (forged). For Sunni Muslims, Al-Bukhari's collection significantly known as Al-Sahih, is considered to include only authentic hadiths, hence the originality and courage of Mernissi's endeavour in the history of Islamic thought.

In *The Veil and the Male Elite*, Mernissi re-reads the Prophet's hadith and the Qur'an using a contextual approach that highlights the way the egalitarian or feminist aspects of the religion as preached by the Prophet were compromised, distorted or simply forgotten. She foregrounds the important public roles played by women especially Muhammad's wives like Aisha or Umm Salama. She also highlights how the new religion granted them spiritual equality with men in addition to inheritance and property rights. However, she continues, the revolutionary social project of the Prophet was subject to a strong male opposition that stopped its impetus and brought about a resurgence of pre-Islamic misogynous norms and values. Mernissi's book sets out to restore the original egalitarian aspect of the religion through a corrective revision of some texts of questionable authenticity in the Hadith corpus which support women's inferior social status in Islam. She offers a compelling

contextual and historical reading of some verses in the Qur'an dealing with women, especially the verses related to the *hijab*, placing them in their historical context and suggesting their prescriptive impermanence.

Mernissi opens her book with a simple question: "Can a woman rule a Muslim state?" which she asks her grocer, because he, as all grocers, is a "barometer" of public opinion in Morocco. The grocer answers in negative terms quoting a hadith which states "Those who entrust their affairs to a woman will never know prosperity" (1-2). She decides to revisit this hadith considered *sahih*, or authentic, by al-Bukhari. Mernissi promotes this kind of revision by its relevance to contemporary politics and especially Moroccan women's political representation. Women's low political representation in 1980s Morocco or the Arab world, she argues, is not a sign of Arab Muslim societies' backwardness as much as a larger manifestation of the androcentrism of the male elite and their vested interests. Hence, she stresses the imperative of going back to Islam's founding period and to the founding texts to highlight the dark zones of resistance to women's access to power. She writes:

According to al-Bukhari, it is supposed to have been Abu Bakra who heard the Prophet say: "
Those who entrust their affairs to a woman will never know prosperity." Since this [h]adith is included in the *Sahih*—those thousands of authentic [h]adiths accepted by the meticulous alBukhari—it is a priori considered true and therefore unassailable without proof to the contrary, since we are here in scientific terrain.
So nothing bans me, as a Muslim woman, from making a double investigation—historical and methodological—of this hadith and its author, and especially of the conditions in which it was first put to use. Who uttered this hadith, where, when, why, and to whom? (49)

She thus inscribes her revisionist endeavor in conformity with alBukhari's tradition of verification and counter-verification rather than defying or disrespecting it.

One of the central ideas *The Veil and the Male Elite* stresses is the political and ideological manipulation of the religious: Not only have the sacred texts always been manipulated, but manipulation of them is a structural characteristic of the practice of power in Muslim societies. Since all power, from the seventh century on, was only legitimated by religion, political forces and economic interests pushed for the fabrication of false hadiths (8-9), verifying the accuracy of the hadith, "Those who entrust their affairs to a woman will never know prosperity," transmitted by a disciple, Abu Bakra, Mernissi asks new questions. She

questions, for example, the circumstances under which Abu Bakra remembered this statement, which al-Bukhari apparently did not pay attention to. Abu Bakra, she observes, remembered this saying twenty-five years after hearing it from the Prophet, which is suspicious to her. She first examines available biographical elements concerning this disciple. She finds out, for example, that Abu Bakra was an ex-slave, whom Islam had liberated and elevated to the rank of a notable, one of the dignitaries of the city of Basra, a position that he probably did not want to renounce. His position might explain the reason for his remembering such a hadith in the particular historical juncture that Mernissi unveils. According to Mernissi's discovery, Abu Bakra remembered this statement after Aisha's defeat in the Battle of the Camel against Ali Ibn Abi Talib, the Prophet's cousin. Ali tried to gain the sympathy of Aisha's supporters and gain potential allies in Basra including Abu Bakra, when the latter cited the hadith. Abu Bakra explained that he had refused to take part in Aisha's offensive act because he had heard the Prophet uttering this statement. Mernissi also reveals that Abu Bakra had already been accused of perjury and was flagellated during the rule of the second caliph, Umar Ibn al-Khattab. For Mernissi, these elements make Abu Bakra's reliability doubtful, according to the rules of isnad.

In the parts of her book devoted to the Qur'an, Mernissi focuses on the verses dealing with the hijab arguing that women's veiling was never meant to be mandatory but were dictated by forces of circumstances, and socio-military conditions more specifically. Mernissi first asks readers to "remember that the Koran (Qur'an) is a book rooted in the daily life of the Prophet and his community; it is often a response to a given situation." (Mernissi 1991, 87) One of the examples of this interactivity is Umm (mother of) Salama, one of the Prophet's wives, who dared to ask the Prophet a challenging question concerning women's status in the Qur'an, "Why are men mentioned in the Qur'an and why are we not?" God responded in verse 33:35 affirming that he equally addresses both men and women: "Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women, the obedient men and obedient women, the truthful men and truthful women, the patient men and patient women, the humble men and humble women, the charitable men and charitable women, the fasting men and fasting women, the men who guard their private parts and the women who do so, and the men who remember Allah often and the women who do so - for them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward."

Mernissi proposes to read the verse of the hijab taking into consideration the broad historical and social circumstances of the verse. Her methodology, here as well, is not alien to classical Islamic methodology of interpretation. She builds on the tradition of Muslim exegesis, *tafsir*, which itself relies on a historical approach known as *asbab al-nuzul*, the

circumstances of the revelation. But if classical Muslim exegetes stopped at looking at the immediate circumstances of the verse to reveal its meaning, Mernissi studies the historical, social, and psychological context of the whole period between year five and year eight after Hegira. Mernissi concludes that the Prophet was subject to harassment during these troubling years. At the end of his life, she explains, a growing opposition to his leadership by some people from his own community, whom the Qur'an calls "alMunafiqun" (hypocrites), saw light. The opposition was so tense that the Prophet's wives were subjected to sexual harassment. It is here that Umar Ibn al-Khattab, one of the closest companions to the Prophtet and who would become his first successor or Caliph, urged him to impose veiling on his women, which the Prophet opposed in the beginning. With growing dissension and opposition, faced with the difficult choice between the survival of Islam and its unity, or the survival of the egalitarian project, she continues, Muhammad was forced to yield to Umar's pressures. Verse 33:59, which "advised the wives of the Prophet to make themselves recognised by pulling their *jilbab* (mantles) over themselves" settled the issue (180). Mernissi concludes that "the hijab incarnates... this official retreat from the principle of equality" (179). She adds: "If the hijab is a response to sexual aggression to *ta`arrud* (sexual harassment), it is also its mirror image" (182). She also states that "the veil represents the triumph of the hypocrites" (187) and that Islamists who impose veiling on women are the heirs of the hypocrites.

Reactions to *The Veil and the Male Elite*

The book sparked a heated debate and provoked some mixed reactions from all sorts of detractors, ranging from the religious fundamentalists to the secular fundamentalists. One of the first reactions at the time of its release was a death fatwa which an extremist group in Morocco issued against Mernissi. Probably wishing to appease the tension, Moroccan authorities withdrew the book from the bookshops, avoiding issuing an official ban. Mernissi faced three sorts of critics: the religious fundamentalists, the Islamic modernists, and the secular feminists. In the first category was Abdelkébir Alaoui Mdaghri, the head of the Ministère des Habous et des Affaires Islamiques (Ministry of Habous [land property legislation] and Religious Affairs) at the time. Mdaghri published a book entitled *Al-Mar'a bayna ahkam al-fiqh wa al-da'wa ila al-taghyir* (Woman Between the Laws of Fiqh and the Call for Change), in which he devotes a whole chapter to *The Veil and the Male Elite*. He declares that Mernissi has no expertise in religious matters which makes her analysis devoid of value. He mockingly calls her a "faqiha biduni fiqh" (a female faqih [specialist in fiqh] without fiqh). The mere use of the female noun 'faqiha' already stirs mockery because of the prevalent belief that fiqh is a male domain. His comment is indicative of the

difficulty of accepting a feminist reading of religious texts and, more generally, readings from specialists in disciplines other than religion. The main objective behind his criticism of Mernissi is to argue that women are not entitled to "*al-wilaya al-amma*," leading the caliphate, or headship of the state. His main evidence is precisely the hadith "Those who entrust their affairs to women will never know prosperity," the validity of which Mernissi attacks in her book. Mdaghri contends that the hadith is considered by Muslim jurists as "*sharif*" (sound) not "*da'if*" (weak). He also argues that no woman has ever held the position of head of state in Islam. He mentions the late Pakistani Prime Minister Bhenazir Bhutto (presumably for him the exception that proves the rule) to prove that even when a woman is elected as the head of the state, it comes to a bad end. He adds that Islam bans women from leading the prayer, or the imamate. But as if realising the weakness of his claim, Mdaghri goes beyond religious argumentation to invoke 'scientific' arguments. He alludes to 'some medical views' in general terms, which, according to him, confirm the existence of an opposition between women's nature and political leadership. He mentions, for example, pregnancy, menstruation, breastfeeding, and emotions and the sensitivity of women.

A less androcentric and dogmatic criticism comes from the Moroccan-American Anouar Majid, a modernist scholar of Islam and the West who argues in his 1998 article, "The Politics of Feminism in Islam" for an "indigenous path" to women's emancipation based on what he calls "progressive Islam." Majid praises Mernissi's criticism of clerical Islam, yet opposes her methodology in *The Veil and the Male Elite* which for him "desacralises the Qur'an by reducing it to a mere historical document" (Majid 1998, 329–30). Majid continues, "with the exception of a few rules in the Qur'an, one can negotiate any ideology within the wide and amorphous parameters of the faith" (332), implying that Mernissi transgressed those exclusive rules. This perspective, of course, leaves unanswered such questions as: "Who decides and How one decides What these exceptional rules are?" as Suad Joseph rightly contends in her critical response to Majid's article (Joseph 1998, 367). She also writes: The solution he [Majid] offers, through the indigenous and progressive path charted by Mahmoud Mohamed Taha and his disciple Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im "based on Meccan Revelation" is, nevertheless, a recuperation of an earlier true version of Islam. His critique of "false Islamic orthodoxy," refreshing as it is, raises the question of who and how one knows the "true Islam." (366)

The tenets of a discourse like Majid's, which suppose the existence of permanent rules that cannot possibly be changed, assume a position of authority and an implicit claim of orthodoxy that discard other readings as unorthodox and even heretical.

On the other side of the spectrum is Naima Chikhaoui, a Moroccan secular feminist, who criticises Mernissi's *The Veil and the Male Elite* for its soft feminist politics. In an article entitled "La Question des femmes vue par Fatima Mernissi" [Women's issue as seen by Fatima Mernissi], Chikhaoui endeavoured to contrast Mernissi's two positions, dwelling most specifically on the flaws of Mernissi's second-stage feminism within a religious framework, which she perceives as lenient with respect to religion as opposed to her earlier intransigent secular feminist critique.

For Chikhaoui, the prominent role played by the first Muslim women in Islamic history, which Mernissi seeks to highlight in her book as an example of Islam's egalitarianism and as a model to be emulated by contemporary Muslim women, is not useful for feminists today since Mernissi is only dealing with a minority of women, the Prophet's wives, i.e. those close to power. Chikhaoui also criticises Mernissi's implicit argument for making religion a private matter in the beginning of her book. She wonders about the rationale behind claiming that religion should be a matter of personal choice while devoting an entire book to argue that a democratic and egalitarian religion had existed in early Islam (Chikhaoui 1997, 19-20). For Chikhaoui, the whole enterprise is contradictory in nature. However, Chikhaoui misses the point that what Mernissi aimed to do in this book is to argue that Islam is ideologically manipulated, that it is better protected under secular laws. However, since she realises that change is best attainable through gradual reform rather than abrupt revolution, or an overnight secularisation, she took upon herself to provide an example of a women-friendly interpretation of religious texts that is politically enabling for Muslim women and setting an example for future generations to engage in ijtihad and re-claim Islam, hijacked by misogynous men of religion. Mernissi thus succeeds in initiating an unprecedented national and transnational movement, which she herself celebrates in her *Islam and Democracy*:

What we are seeing today is a claim by women to their right to God and the historical tradition. This takes various forms. There are women who are active within the fundamentalist movements and those who work on a reinterpretation of the Muslim heritage as a necessary ingredient to our modernity. Our liberation will come through a rereading of our past and a reappropriation of all that has structured our civilisation. (Mernissi 1992, 160)

This movement has increasingly been referred to as 'Islamic feminism,' which since the 1990s, has evolved into a transnational movement that evolves within academic circles as well as transnational organisations such as Musawah for Equality in the Muslim Family

(Musawah), Sisters in Islam, and 'KARAMAH – Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights.'

The Legacy of Mernissi's Islamic Feminist Tradition

In Morocco, Mernissi's work has inspired a new generation of Islamic feminists. The most remarkable heir of Mernissi's legacy is Asma Lamrabet, who like Mernissi, is interestingly not trained in religious studies, yet dared to break the monopoly of male ulama over the interpretation of religious texts, producing refreshing women-friendly interpretations. A medical doctor by training, Lamrabet, nonetheless, authored six books and numerous articles on women's rights in Islam. On the influence of Mernissi's work on her career, Lamrabet writes:

Whenever I read her books, I was struck by her intellectual courage, her style, sometimes ironic but always deep and subtle, on a highly serious taboo topic, namely religion and women. Yet I have to say that I was touched mainly by three of her books: *Le harem politique (The Veil and the Male Elite), Sultanes oubliées (Forgotten Queens of Islam) and Islam et démocratie (Islam and Democracy). In Le harem politique* - a book that I consider Fatima (Mernissi)'s masterpiece - I remember being deeply touched by her sincerity, her intellectual honesty and above all by how she formulated problems in an open and direct way. It was undoubtedly she who broke through the first locks of religious interpretation concerning women. ... In this book, Fatima Mernissi started a work that has since been taken up by very many women academics and Muslim researchers, namely, deconstructing the patriarchal reading of Islam through a critical rereading of its commentaries (*tafassirs*); a work that distinguishes between the spiritual message (*elwahy/rissala*) and the normative and interpretative tradition resulting from human understanding. (Lamrabet 2016)

Lamrabet is undoubtedly one of the finest examples of this movement of women who endeavoured to reclaim Islam in Morocco. In 2008, she became the head of the International Research Group on Women and Islam, GIERFI, which aims to provide a platform for Muslim scholars and activists interested in promoting an alternative discourse on Muslim women, one based on the egalitarian spirit of Islam. In the tradition of Mernissi who sought the collaboration of male ulama, Lamrabet and her group partnered in the same year with Al-Rabita al-Muhammadiyya (the Muhammadian League), which groups liberal state theologians. Three years later, she accepted a position within the Rabita as director of the Center of Women studies in Islam, which seeks to revisit Islamic heritage with respect to women's issues from 'a Qur'anic vision that supports equality between the sexes.'[8] This engagement demonstrates that Lamrabet, like Mernissi, believes that change requires

"talking to the [Ideological State Apparatuses] ISAs," to borrow the phrase used by British scholar of Cultural Studies, Tony Bennett (Bennett 1992). Although Mernissi refrained from being part of any sort of institution, Lamrabet took it upon herself to work within the confines of a religious state institution, pushing back its limits a step further everyday. In the face of continually spreading religious fanaticism and its corollary, Islamophobia, as well as entrenched religious and cultural conservatism, Islamic feminism writ large represents Muslim women's highly needed voice today, a voice which Fatima Mernissi greatly contributed to liberate.

NOTES

[1] On her childhood, see her semi-autobiographical novel *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* (1994).

[2] In an interview, she declared that she got the idea to organise these workshops after a trip to India where she met Devaki Jain who worked for the United Nations and who organised a writing workshop in Bangalore. Mernissi recalled that to her surprise, the workshop was organised in a garage where Jain's sister was weaving carpets. Jain had explained, that in order to know India, the participants had to leave their hotel rooms and meet the people. Mernissi concluded that for organising a writing workshop, it is not necessary to have a lot of money but it is necessary that people come together around a common goal (Mernissi 2015).

[3] Many obituaries written in tribute to Mernissi emphasise her Islamic feminist profile and legacy. See for instance the article in The New York Times, entitled "Fatima Mernissi, a Founder of Islamic Feminism, Dies at 75," by Margalit Fox, Dec. 9, 2015. Avaliable at: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/10/ world/middleeast/fatema-mernissi-a-founder-of-islamic-feminism-dies-at-75. html?_r=2 (Accessed, 6 September 2016) See also the AMEWS E-Bulletin Special Issue March 2016, titled "Holding on to an Indispensable Part of our History: Recollections of Fatima Mernissi. Nancy Gallagher and Sondra Hale, Co-Editors, Available at: http://iwsaw.lau.edu.lb/publications/ amews/amews-ebulletin-2016March.pdf (Accessed, 6 September 2016) and the Musawah Vision Issue 20, March 2016, Special Issue, titled "Honouring a Fierce Feminist Foremother." Available at: http://www.musawah.org/ sites/default/files/MusawahVision20EN.pdf (Accessed, 6 September 2016)

[4] The Moudawana falls within the prerogatives of the king, who has the religious title of '*Amir al-Mu'minin*' (Commander of the Faithful). It was modified only twice, once in 1993, with very minor changes, and a second time in 2004, with a reform considered by many women's organisation as revolutionary.

[5] I am using the 1987 revised edition of *Beyond the Veil* (Mernissi 1987, 9).

[6] Mernissi's important work on women's labor was part of a growing literature on women and work, and women in development from the 70s and 80s onwards. She was certainly influenced by the pioneering work of Ester Boserup, especially her 1970 book *Woman's Role in Economic Development*, concerned with the fate and contribution of women in countries undergoing modernisation or development. The work of Maria Mies was also influential in this respect, especially her book The *Lace Makers of Narsapur: Indian Housewives Produce for the World Market* (1982). For other writing at this time on women and work see Margot Badran, "Islam, Patriarchy, and Feminism in the Middle East," *Trends in History*, 4. 1, (Fall 1985) 48-71. Reprinted in Women *Living under Muslim Laws*, Dossier 4, (1988) Montpellier, France; and Badran "Women and Production in the Middle East and North Africa," *Trends in History*, 2, 3, (Spring 1982), 59-88.

[7] My translation. See Rhouni, 2010, 207-208.

[8] See the mission statement of the center athttp://www.annisae.ma/Article.aspx?C=5583

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FATIMA MERNISSI: A COMPLEX TRAJECTORY

AMINA WADUD

Abstract: Combining memory and reflection, in this essay I speak of the complex trajectory of Fatima Mernissi. I do this through evoking the parallel, yet distinctive, trajectories of Fatima and myself on the path of gender jihad from the late twentieth century into the twenty-first century in our different global locations. Though coming from different starting points, our visions for gender justice and equality merged.

Keywords: gender jihad, gender justice, Muslim women, human rights, Islamic feminism

I arrived in Rabat after work travel in Europe. I would return to Europe, so this break in a predominantly Muslim context in North Africa was much welcomed. First order of the day was a lunch date to finally meet Fatima Mernissi as arranged by our mutual friend Dr. Asma Lamrabet.

I could say I had waited over thirty years for this meeting but that would not be all together accurate. Perhaps it was more like Fatima and I had been on a path leading us to this moment. I was excited and Asma communicated similar sentiments from Fatima. Then her health took a turn for the worst. Because she could not breath without oxygen she had to send her regrets for not being able to join us for lunch. Four days later, she was gone. I never got to meet her in this lifetime.

The culmination of our life work and this just missed opportunity highlights the fragility of the women's movements in Islam. We are rarely presented with opportunities to form meaningful alliances across differences in this gender jihad. Jihad means struggle. In this case, it refers to the struggle for Muslim women to gain agency and transformation in their own lives, however diverse.

Looking back over four decades in my personal engagement for gender justice, I have seen Muslim women enter the new millennium at a new high. Still some might believe this has been one seamless journey. This is an illusion of past reflection. There were many bumps, false starts and wicked turns on the road alongside victories and scaled mountain tops. I often lived through changes without discernment. I never counted on my own life work having the impact it now seems to be allocated. I have also been impacted by the company and work of others along this road so well-traveled. Most of the names of gender justice advocates that I carried with me belong to women I have met. We have exchanged ideas and formed alliances even across vast differences. How could Fatima and I miss such an opportunity?

My participation in the gender justice movement is a faith journey. I entered Islam voluntarily in 1972 at the age of twenty. Two decades later, the dust would settle. On the way, I completed my Masters and Ph.D with a focus on hermeneutics: reading for gender in the Islamic primary sacred text, the Qur'an. I would also live in Muslim majority Arabic-speaking North Africa, twice.

My dissertation would be edited to become a small book *Qur'an and Woman*, first published in Malaysia, 1992. Its publication would coincide with the completion of my teaching contract at the International Islamic University (IIU) in Malaysia. Malaysia is another Muslim majority country but it is not Arabic-speaking. Here I would begin my second career as an activist for reform and justice. I spent three prosperous years in Malaysia forming life-time friendships in the gender jihad. However, the conservative faux-liberal institution of higher learning IIU did not provide any opportunity to share my intellectual work. It was my first real experience in living with the contradictions. Meanwhile, I enjoyed a high demand from the larger civil society and became a founding member of Sisters in Islam (SIS), a pro faith, pro-rights non-governmental organization. The relationship between my work and the development of SIS was mutually transformative. The scholarship behind *Qur'an and Woman* would be instrumental in building the confidence, agency and legitimacy of the SIS members. Working with SIS provided me with opportunities to move outside academic elitism to address the lived realities of Muslim women worldwide.

At IIU, I won a small grant for the project Search for Pro-faith Feminism in Islam. It was partially inspired by my encounter with Mernissi's work. When one is born a Muslim how much of what is understood as Islam was based on culture and ethnicity? How much of it could be methodologically linked to Islam's primary and sacred sources? However much

these sources were debated for their meaning and importance, gender asymmetry would prevail and remain largely uncontested.

In Fatima Mernissi's work, we encounter one of the most comprehensive challenges to the gender asymmetry in its time. Still, I would take issue with what seemed to be a collapse of Islam in Arab culture. I noticed Fatima's affirmation of her identity as an Arab went in tandem with the affirmation of her identity as Muslim. When I read her works, I could find no real distinction. The distinction between culture and Islam is an on-going concern and not just Arab culture.

In the Malay language, to convert to Islam was termed "*masuk Malayu*", literally: "enter (into being) Malay". I had spent two decades searching to find myself as a US born African slave-descendent who voluntarily entered Islam by living in Muslim cultures across Africa and Asia. It would take some time to unravel how Muslim cultures of long standing practiced many things that were simply a product of their cultural context and had no specific bearing on Islam, if we searched for some kind of a reference within the sacred sources. As a Muslim by choice, I had to determine if I was entering Islam or entering one or more of the various Muslim cultures. The tendency to collapse the two was problematic. Furthermore, to have "western" cultural origins would forever mean to be estranged from such cultural definitions.

In no small way, this would lead to a lifetime preoccupation with the power to define what is Islam. Taking agency to define what is meant by "Islam" also distinguishes the work of Sisters in Islam and the launching of a global movement for reform in Muslim personal status laws, called Musawah. Musawah identifies itself as a knowledge building project with paramount attention to defining key terms in the debates, including "Islam", "justice, "feminism" and "human rights".

My engagement with Sisters in Islam would lead me to the Beijing Conference on women in 1995. From that moment, SIS and I would work to forge a third voice of Islam and gender reform distinct

from the two dominant voices at that forum. Could we effectively participate in a larger, more global consideration or would it simply be the Malaysian version of the extended debates?

The two voices that dominated were telling. One voice I consider came from secular Muslim feminists. They advocated keeping religion, particularly, Islam out of the debates over gender justice. Religion/ Islam was irrevocably anti-women. The other voice followed the growing Islamist perspective. It opposed any strategy or program of action unless it confirmed or originated in a very patriarchal definition of Islam. Both sides agreed on one thing: one could not have both Islam and Human Rights, or identify as a feminist and be pro-faith. From the days of my research project in search of pro-faith feminism I found these locations indefensible.

The way to forge a third voice was becoming more coherent. In the end, it would wed both religion and feminism which is now known as Islamic feminism. If the women's movement was only subject to existing articulations of the major paradigms of the debate there would be no way forward. Islamic feminism took full agency in defining not only matters like feminism and human rights, but more importantly in constructing its own knowledge about what is Islam and taking it into the next millennium, Sisters in Islam would be one of the strongest global voices to advocate gender reform that affirmed both Islam and Human Rights. We were considered an oxymoron. In truth, we were at the forefront of the meeting between Islam and feminism in the formation of Islamic feminism.

In 2009, when Musawah, a global movement for equality and justice in the Muslim family was launched, I came out as an Islamic feminist. Meanwhile Musawah and SIS joined others to articulate more agency not only in how human rights were discussed and sought after but also how to take authority in defining Islam. In fact, an important component of this authority is constructing new knowledge in Islam; knowledge that was informed by women's lived realities. My research contributed to establishing gender as a category of thought in all Islamic intellectual traditions. These articulations would only then be put before us in the contexts of various Muslim cultures and in the rights of citizens under the nation-state.

Eventually, because of this critical engagement, we were no longer forced to choose between Islam and human dignity for women. Thus, Islamic feminism would become the basis for many Muslim women to reconcile anxiety from being made to choose. Some who previously had deferred to the more dominant western ideas of feminism would embrace this nuanced articulation and find solace in it. Meanwhile, as a theologian engaging law, policies and cultural reform I could better understand the journey of someone like Fatima Mernissi. With Musawah we continually forge networks with other women no matter their

perspective even as we provide the methodological means for creating and sustaining a complex circle of alliances.

Male dominance was happy to keep women divided in endless constructs of 'us and them': be it those of us who chose to wear the hijab or found solace in its practice against those who had struggled to get out from under the hijab or those who could find solace in embracing UN human rights agendas and those who could speak of liberation only within Islamic rhetorical means. All of us, are equally subject to the mandate for full human dignity and can come together across our differences to achieve greater dignity.

When the Musawah secretariat planned a move to Morocco, Fatima Mernissi in one of her last public events came out to greet them. I'd like to think this meeting was also for her a culmination of decades of work, sometime alone and in the trenches. I know she stayed longer than she had planned and that the Musawah members were thrilled to have her company. By the time I arrived a few days later, she was no longer mobile.

It is difficult for me even now to express how heartbroken I was to lose our only opportunity to meet. No single name do I recall in the duration of my work more than Fatima Mernissi's. I have come to appreciate that the formation of Islamic feminism owes some debt to secular feminists who began the difficult focus on women's issues as not necessarily resolved by nation-states that had fought for the end of empire. I better understand the complexity of coming up against a religion that has been dominated by male authority for so long. I still understand how Muslim identity is forged through culture, experience and interpretation. More importantly, I appreciate how much the previous generation was shaped by an unnecessary divide. Into this new millennium, we are forging more critically intersectional alliances to achieve the collective goal of social justice wedded to well-being.

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THE FEMINIST ENCOUNTER WITH MUSLIM LEGAL TRADITION

ZIBA MIR-HOSSEINI

Abstract: The religious legitimation of patriarchy has been the subject of heated debates among Muslims since the 19th century, debates tainted with the legacy of colonialism and orientalism. For long, Islam and feminism have been perceived and portrayed as incompatible, and there is a plethora of literature and a host of arguments seeking to demonstrate this, both in the media and in academia. In the late 20th century, however, new forms of gender consciousness, activism, and scholarship have emerged that challenge patriarchy from within Muslim tradition have emerged, and have acquired the label 'Islamic feminism'. Here I sketch the origins and development of this phenomenon, of which there are inevitably diverging accounts; and I shall argue that the struggle for gender equality in Muslim contexts is part of the larger struggle for social justice and democracy, intimately linked to a growing democratisation in the production of religious knowledge. I explore the potential of feminist voices and scholarship in Islam to bring about this rethinking, with reference to a project recently undertaken by Musawah (www.musawah.org), a global movement for justice and equality in the Muslim family.

Keywords: Muslim legal tradition, gender equality, Muslim family, Islamic law, international human rights

In mid-February 2009, several hundred scholars, activists, legal practitioners and policy-makers from 47 countries gathered for five days in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, to participate in the launch of Musawah, as a global movement for equality and justice in the Muslim family. The gathering was hosted by Sisters in Islam, the Malaysia-based women's group, which since its formation in 1988 has argued for Muslim women'srights and equality within an Islamic framework. Musawah ('equality' in Arabic) was planned over the course of two years, at workshops in Istanbul, Cairo and London, and through constant electronic communication. The planning committee, with members from eleven countries, consulted

a wide range of other Muslim activists and academics, and produced a *Framework for Action*, a programme for bringing together Islamic and feminist approaches to argue for an egalitarian construction of Muslim family laws.

As a member of the planning committee, here I want to tell something of the story behind the formation of Musawah. It is the story of the shaping of a new phase in the politics of religion and gender in Muslim contexts. One salient feature of this phase is women, rather than the abstract notion of gender equality, have taken centre stage. Another is the unmasking of the global and local power relations and structures within which Muslim women have to struggle for justice and equality. What initiated this phase was the growing opposition, in the last two decades of the twentieth century, between two powerful global movements: feminism and political Islam. The new century, which opened with the rhetoric and politics of the 'war on terror', has added a new dimension to this politics.

I begin by outlining the twentieth-century shifts in the politics of religion, law and gender that gave rise to new forms of activism that are feminist in their aspiration and demands, and Islamic in their source of source of legitimacy. I then discuss the foundation of Musawah as a knowledge-building movement, outlining its conceptual framework and the project that I have been leading, on rethinking the notion of male authority. I end by considering how new feminist voices and scholarship in Islam are bringing about a much-needed paradigm shift in the politics of gender in Muslim contexts.

As a founding member of Musawah, I describe the formation of the movement, conveying some of our thinking and our internal discussions. I write as an anthropologist – as participant-observer in these discussions. Two themes run through my narrative and link its different parts. First, gender equality is a modern ideal, which has only recently, with the expansion of human rights and feminist discourses, become inherent to generally accepted conceptions of justice. In Islam, as in other religious traditions, the idea of equality between men and women in the past was neither relevant to notions of justice nor part of the juristic landscapeThe second theme is that the struggle for justice and equality in Muslim contexts is enmeshed in an intricate dialectic between theology and politics, in which it is hard and sometimes futile to ask when theology ends and politics begin. For a feminist project to bring sustainable change, I contend, it must recognise this fact and develop arguments and strategies that can effectively rupture the tenacious link between patriarchy and despotic politics, which sustains unjust laws and structures, whether in religious or secular contexts.

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In the first part of the twentieth century, many of the new nation-states with Muslim majority populations adopted new legal codes that incorporated classical jurisprudential rulings—partially reformed—relating to marriage and family. The best-known exceptions were Saudi Arabia, which preserved classical jurisprudence as fundamental law and attempted to apply it in all spheres of law; Turkey, which abandoned Islamic jurisprudence in all areas of law; and Muslim populations that came under communist rule. In other countries, where Islamic jurisprudence remained the main source of family law, the impetus and extent of reform varied, but, with the exception of Tunisia, which banned polygamy, the classical construction of the marital relationship was retained more or less intact.

Reforms were introduced from within the framework of Muslim legal tradition, by mixing principles and rulings from different schools of Islamic law and by procedural devices, without directly confronting the patriarchal construction of marriage and the family. They focused on increasing the age of marriage, expanding women's access to judicial divorce, and restricting men's right to polygamy. This involved requiring the state registration of marriage and divorce, or the creation of new courts to deal with marital disputes. The state now had the power to deny legal support to those marriages and divorces that did not comply with official, state-sanctioned procedures. Classical conceptions of marriage and gender rights remained unchallenged.[2]

In the last two decades of the 20th century, with the intensification of Islam as both a spiritual and a political force, Islamist political movements tried to reverse the earlier process of secularisation and reform of laws and systems. Political Islam had its biggest triumph in 1979 when a popular revolution in Iran brought an end to the US-backed monarchyand introduced an Islamic Republic. This year also saw the dismantling of some of the reforms introduced earlier in the century by modernist governments – for instance in Iran and Egypt – and the introduction of the Hudood Ordinances in Pakistan that extended the ambit of Islamic jurisprudence to certain aspects of criminal law. Yet this was also the year when the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which gave a clear international legal mandate for advocating and enacting equality between men and women, and to the notion of women's rights as human rights.

The decades that followed saw the concomitant growth, globally and locally, of two powerful but seemingly opposed forces. On the one hand, with the encouragement of CEDAW (and the UN Decade of Women 1975-85), in the 1980s the international women's

movement expanded. CEDAW gave women's rights activists what they needed most: a point of reference, a language and the tools to resist and challenge patriarchy. On the other hand, Islamists – whether in power or in opposition – started to invoke 'Shari'a' in order to dismantle earlier efforts at reforming and/ or secularising laws and legal systems. Tapping into popular demands for social justice, they presented this dismantling as 'Islamisation' and as the first step to bringing about their vision of a moral and just society; yet the (re- introduction) of laws that conformed with traditionalist Islamic jurisprudence, notably regressive gender policies, had devastating consequences for women: compulsory dress codes, gender segregation, and the revival of cruel punishments and out-dated patriarchal and tribal models of social relations.

Political Islam's drive for 'Islamisation', however, had some unintended consequences; the most important was that, in several countries, they brought the classical jurisprudential texts out of the closet, exposing them to unprecedented critical scrutiny and public debate. At the same time, a new wave of Muslim reform thinkers started to respond to the Islamist challenge and to take Islamic legal thought onto a new ground. Unlike earlier twentieth-century reformists, these new thinkers no longer sought an Islamic genealogy for modern concepts like gender equality, human rights and democracy. Instead, they placed the emphasis on how religion is understood, how religious knowledge is produced, and how rights are constructed in Islamic legal tradition. Using the conceptual tools and theories of other branches of knowledge these thinkers expandedon the work of previous reformers and developed further interpretive-epistemological theories.[3]

Meanwhile, attempts by Islamists in Iran and elsewhere to translate anachronistic patriarchal interpretations of the shari'a into policy provoked many women to increasing criticism of these notions, and drove them to greater activism. Increasingly, women came to see no necessary or logical link between Islamic ideals and patriarchy, nor any contradiction between their faith and their struggle for equality. Political Islam enabled them to shape and sustain an unprecedented critique of the gender biases of the pre-modern Islamic jurisprudential texts. In doing so, women were not only articulating the egalitarian demands of the first wave of Muslim feminists,[4] they were also finding the language, the legitimacy, that they needed to overcome prevailing discourses that construed demands for gender equality as a Western agenda.

By the early 1990s, there were signs of new ways of thinking about gender that are feminist in aspiration and demands, yet Islamic in language and sources of legitimacy. Some versions of this new discourse came to be labelled 'Islamic feminism'—a conjunction that

was unsettling to many Islamists and some feminists. The term ‘Islamic feminism’ remains contested; I was among the first to use it for the new gender consciousness emerging in Iran a decade after the 1979 revolution.[5] This new discourse has been nurtured by feminist scholars who are developing a critique, from within, of the patriarchal ethics of the shari‘a. They have produced substantial body of scholarship that is uncovering a hidden history and re-reading textual sources to reclaim the egalitarian message of the Qur’an and contribute to an egalitarian construction of Muslim family laws.[6]

In short, these developments have brought women onto centre stage; from being the subjects of family law reforms they have become active participants in the production of religious knowledge and in the process of law making. At the same time, gender equality has become inherent to global conceptions of justice, acquiring a clear legal mandate through CEDAW, which every Muslim majority state (except Iran, Somalia and Sudan) has ratified — though in most cases subject to ‘Islamic reservations’.

In the new century, in the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 attacks in the USA, the politics and rhetoric of the ‘war on terror’ added another level of complexity to the politics of gender and Islam. Theinvasions of Afghanistan and Iraq—both partially justified as promoting ‘freedom’ and ‘women’s rights’ — combined with double standards in promoting UN sanctions, showed that international human rights and feminist ideals, like the shari‘a and Islamic ideals, were open to manipulation. They also revealed the wide gap between the ideals and the practices of their respective proponents.

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Many Muslim women scholars and activists now found themselves in the crossfire. On the one hand, Islamists were denying them equality in the name of shari‘a, and on the other, hegemonic global powers were pursuing a neo-colonial agenda in the name of feminism and human rights. The way out of this predicament, for some of us, was to bring Islamic and feminist frameworks together. In doing so, we were building on decades of tireless effort by scholars and activists in Muslim countries to reform discriminatory laws enacted in the name of Islam. The vast majority of women whose rights we championed were believers and wanted to live according to the teachings of Islam, thus effective change, we believed, could come only through a meaningful and constructive engagement with those teachings.

To do this, we needed firmly to reclaim the egalitarian ethics of Islam and to create a public voice for our vision of Islam. We faced two different forms of resistance. One is from religious establishments, leaders and groups who claim to know and speak for ‘authentic’

Islam. They view both international human rights law and feminism with suspicion, and refuse to engage meaningfully with their advocates. Their vision of Islam, not ours, is the one that reaches most women, who consequently do not share our quest for legal equality. The other form of resistance is from the vast majority of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and activists promoting women's rights, who are reluctant to address religious perspectives on women's issues. For many of them, 'Islam' itself is the main obstacle in their struggle for equality; they work only within the human rights framework.

One of the few women's NGOs that are happy to identify as both Islamic and feminist is Sisters in Islam (SIS), which has since 1988 engaged Malaysian scholars and the media in a public debate on religion, women's rights and gender equality. In February 2007, Zainah Anwar, founder and director of SIS, took the initiative to organise a workshop in Istanbul that brought together a diverse group of women's activists and scholars from different countries.[7] The meeting led to the formation of a planning committee, charged with the task of setting out the vision, principles and conceptual framework of the movement that we called Musawah, with the aim of forging a new strategy for reform. Inspired by the activism of Moroccan women, and their success in bringing radical reforms in Moroccan family law in 2004, we adopted their slogan 'Change is necessary and change is possible'. We sought to link research with activism, to develop a holistic framework integrating Islamic teachings, universal human rights law, national constitutional guarantees of equality, and the lived realities of women and men.

We commissioned a number of concept papers by reformist thinkers such as aminawadud, Khaled Abou El Fadl and Muhammad Khalid Masud. We used them as a way of opening new horizons for thinking, to show how the wealth of resources within Islamic tradition, and in the Qur'anic verses on justice, compassion and equality, can support the promotion of human rights and a process of reform toward more egalitarian family relations. These papers were published as the book *Wanted: Equality and Justice in the Muslim Family*, available in print and online, in Arabic, English, and French, and became the basis of a wider discussion with a larger group of scholars and activists.[8] After two years of discussion and consultation, including further workshops in Cairo and London, followed by constant electronic communication among the members of the committee, we produced the *Musawah Framework for Action*.[9]

Drawing on the new wave of reformist thought and feminist scholarship in Islam, in *Framework for Action* we grounded our claim to equality and arguments for reform simultaneously in Islamic and human rights frameworks. Taking a critical feminist

perspective, but most importantly working within the tradition of Islamic legal thought, we invoked two of its main distinctions.

The first distinction – which underlies the emergence of various schools of Islamic law and within them a multiplicity of positions and opinions – is between shari'a and *fiqh* (the science of Islamic jurisprudence). Shari'a, literally 'the way', is the ideal divine way, which in Muslim belief was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. *Fiqh*, literally 'understanding', is the science of Islamic jurisprudence as developed by Muslim jurists to discern the shari'a, through extracting legal rules from the sacred sources of Islam: that is, the Qur'an and the Sunna (the practice of the Prophet, as contained in *hadith*, Traditions); *fiqh* also denotes the 'laws' that result from this process. What we 'know' of 'shari'a' is only an interpretation, an understanding. *Fiqh*, on the other hand, like any other system of jurisprudence and law, is human and mundane, temporal and local. Any claim that a specific law or legal rule is 'God's law' is a claim to divine authority for something that is in fact a human interpretation.

The second distinction that we took from Islamic legal tradition is that between the two main categories of legal rulings (*ahkam*): between '*ibadat* (ritual/spiritual acts) and *mu'amalat* (social/contractual acts). Rulings in the first category, '*ibadat*, regulate relations between God and the believer, where jurists contend there is limited scope for rationalisation, explanation and change, since they pertain to the spiritual realm and divine mysteries. This is not the case with *mu'amalat*rulings, which regulate relations among humans and remain open to rational considerations and social forces, and to which most rulings concerning women and gender relations belong.

These distinctions gave us the language, the conceptual tools, to challenge patriarchy from within Muslim legal tradition. The genesis of the gender inequality that is integral to Islamic legal tradition, we argued, lies in a contradiction between the ideals of the shari'a and the patriarchal structures in which these ideals unfolded and were translated into legal norms. Islam's call for freedom, justice and equality was submerged in the norms and practices of Arab society and culture in the seventh century and the formative years of Islamic law. Patriarchal norms were assimilated into *fiqh* rulings through a set of theological, legal and social theories and assumptions that reflected the state of knowledge of the time, and were part of the fabric of society. This was done by the sanctification of existing marriage practices and gender ideologies and the exclusion of women from the production of religious knowledge.

In February 2009 Musawah went public with the *Framework for Action* at a launch in Kuala Lumpur. Since then, Musawah's work has focused on three interrelated areas: knowledge building, international activity, and outreach.[10] Our main objective is to re-insert women's concerns and voices into the processes of the production of religious knowledge and law making. In 2010, under my direction, Musawah initiated a multifaceted project to rethink the notion of authority in Muslim tradition, focusing on two central concepts that – we argue – lie at the basis of the unequal construction of gender rights in Muslim family laws. These are q*iwamah*and *wilayah*, which, as understood and translated into legal rulings by Muslim scholars, place women under male control. *Qiwamah* denotes a husband's authority over his wife; *wilayah* denotes the right and duty of male family members to exercise guardianship over female members (e.g. fathers over daughters when entering into marriage contracts). These two concepts underlie the logic of most contemporaryMuslim family laws and are manifested in legal provisions that regulate spousal and parental duties and rights.[11]

The project has two interconnected elements. The first is the production of new feminist knowledge that critically engages with these two legal concepts and redefines them in line with contemporary notions of justice. The second element of the project involves documenting the life stories of Muslim women and men in different countries with the aim of revealing how they experience, understand, and contest these two concepts in their lived realities.

For the first element, we invited scholars from different disciplines to write background papers that expound and interrogate the construction of *qiwamah* and *wilayah*, their associated religious and legal doctrines, and their place and working in contemporary laws and practices. Then, in the course of several intensive workshops we discussed these background papers and shared their insights with our advocates and those involved in the life stories element.
This took us to Qur'an Verse 4:34, which constitutes the main textual evidence in support of men's authority over women, and is often the only verse that ordinary Muslims know in relation to gender relations and family law; it reads:
Men are *qawwamun* (protectors/maintainers) in relation to women, according to what God has favored some over others and according to what they spend from their wealth. Righteous women are *qanitat* (obedient) guarding the unseen according to what God has guarded. Those [women] whose *nushuz* (rebellion) you fear, admonish them, and abandon them in bed, and *adribuhunna* (strike them). If they obey you, do not pursue a strategy against them. Indeed, God is Exalted, Great.

This verse has been the focus of intense contestation and debate among Muslims for over a century. There is now a substantial body of literature that attempts to contest and reconstruct the meanings andconnotations of the four terms that I have highlighted; Kecia Ali, from whom I have taken the translation of the verse, leaves these key terms untranslated, pointing out that any translation amounts to an interpretation.[12] I have inserted translations that approximate the consensus of classical Muslim jurists and are reflected in the rulings (*ahkam*) that they devised to define marriage and marital relations. These rulings rest on a single postulate: that God placed women under male authority. For these jurists, men's superiority and authority over women was a given, legally inviolable; it was in accordance with a conception of justice that accepted slavery and patriarchy, as long as slaves and women were treated fairly. They naturally understood the verse in this light; they used the four key terms in the verse to define relations between spouses, and notions of justice and equity.

This is what in our project we refer to as the *qiwamah* postulate – using 'postulate' in the sense defined by Japanese legal scholar MasajiChiba: 'A value system that simply exists in its own right'.[13] It operatesin all areas of Muslim law relating to gender rights, but its impact is most evident in the laws that classical jurists devised for the regulation of marriage and divorce. They defined marriage as a contract that automatically places a wife under her husband's *qiwamah* (authority), and presumes an exchange: the wife's obedience and submission (*tamkin*) in return for maintenance (*nafaqah*) by the husband.[14]

Yet the term *qawwamun*, from which the jurists derived the concept of *qiwamah*, appears only once in the Qur'an in reference to marital relations.[15] The closely related term *wilayah* does occur in the Qur'an, but never in a sense that specifically endorses men's guardianship over women, which is the interpretation of the term that is enshrined in classical *fiqh*.[16] Many other verses speak of the essential equality of men and women in the eyes of God and the world; in relation to marriage, two terms appear numerous times: *ma'ruf* (that which is commonly known to be right) and *rahmahwamuwadah* (compassion and love) – terms that enable us to challenge and rethink the assumptions of the classical jurists.

One of our objectives is to bring insights from feminist theory and gender studies into the debates around Muslim family law, and to ask new questions. Why and how did verse 4:34, rather than other relevant Qur'anic verses, become the foundation for the legal construction of marriage? What does male guardianship, as translated in the concepts *qiwamah*and *wilayah*, entail in practice? How can we rethink and reconstructthem in line with

contemporary notions of justice? How do we achieve equality and justice in the family? What kind of laws and legal reforms are needed to promote them? Do they entail identical rights and duties for spouses? How can we deal justly with differences between men and women? These questions are central to the ongoing struggle for equality and justice in Muslim families, and our project seeks to clarify them and suggest some answers.

The first product of our research is the recent collected volume: *Men in Charge? Rethinking Authority in Muslim Legal Tradition*.[17] Its main thesis is that the concepts of *qiwamah*and *wilayah* have mistakenly been understood as a divine sanction for men's authority over women, with the result that they have become the building blocks of patriarchy within Muslim legal tradition. The contributors to the book, who are scholars from different disciplines and backgrounds, use their expertise to demystify these terms and re-interpret them from within what they assert are the core theological and ethical principles of the Islamic tradition. The different chapters of the book provide alternative understandings of *qiwamah*and *wilayah*, drawing on Qur'anic concepts that are central to the theological principles guiding God-human relations, and a holistic feminist approach that links Muslim tradition to modern forms of learning, such as theories of knowledge, justice and equality. Above all, they ground these understandings in lived realities and women's experiences.

Two other outcomes of the project appeared in 2016. "Women's Stories, Women's Lives: Male Authority in Muslim Contexts," a report (300 pages) outlines the findings and selected stories from the second component of the project, in which researchers and activists documented the life stories of fifty-five Muslim Women in nine countries (Bangladesh, Canada, Egypt, Gambia, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, and the United Kingdom).[18] "Musawah Vision for the Family," a position paper proposes a model of Muslim family relations that upholds equality and justice for all family members and promotes the well-being of families and society.[19]

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Let me summarise my argument. First, one of the key issues that Muslim women have confronted in their struggle for equality is the linkage between the religious and political dimensions of identity in Muslim contexts. This linkage is not new—it has its roots in the colonial era—but it took on a more aggressive expression in the 1970s with theresurgence of Islam as a combined political and spiritual force. With the end of the colonial era, the rise of despotic regimes in Muslim countries, and their suppression of progressive forces left a vacuum that was filled by Islamist movements. Strengthened dramatically by the success of the Iranian Revolution of 1979, Islamists gained momentum with the subsequent perceived defeat of communism. With the US response to the events of 9/11—in particular

the invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003—Muslim women found themselves in the crossfire.

A second strand of my argument is that the rise of political Islam had certain unintended—yet, in my view, positive—consequences: notably, the demystification of power games conducted in a religious language. This, in turn, led to the emergence, by the 1990s, of new reformist and feminist voices and scholarship in Islam that began to offer an internal critique of pre-modern interpretations of the shari'a. Musawah is only one among many Muslim groups and voices that are active in meetings as well as through lively online and social media, challenging patriarchy from within. In doing so, they are changing the terms of many debates among Muslims, and above all paving the way for the democratisation of religious knowledge and for an egalitarian interpretation of the shari'a. Their very existence is a clear proof that a 'paradigm shift' in the politics of Islam and gender is well underway – the old rationale and logic for patriarchal laws, previously undisputed, have lost their power to convince and cannot be defended on ethical grounds. The new internal critique is giving increasing legitimacy among Muslims to the idea of gender equality—an idea that until recently was considered alien to Muslim tradition.

NOTES

[1] An earlier version of this article appeared in *Tempo Brasileiro*, 204, Jameiro Março 2016, pp. 93-107

[2] For an analysis, see Mir-Hosseini (2009).

[3] For an engaging and accessible account of this trend of reform thought, see Amirpur (2015).

[4] See, for instance Badran (1995), Afary (1996).

[5] Mir-Hosseini (1996). For a discussion, Badran (2002), Abou-Bakr (2001).

[6] For example, Al-Hibri (1985), Hassan (1987), Mernissi (1991), Ahmed (1992), Wadud (1999), Webb (2000), Barlas (2002), Mir-Hosseini (2003), Shaikh (2004), Lamrabet (2007), Z. Ali (2012), Abou-Bakr (2013).

[7] See Anwar (2013) for her own journey from the local politics of Islam and women in Malaysia to global politics.

[8] Anwar, 2009; it is also available online http://www.musawah.org/wantedequality-and-justice-muslim-family-english

[9] See *Framework for Action*, available in five languages at http://www.musawah.org/about-musawah/framework-action

[10] For these areas of activities, see http://www.musawah.org/what-we-do

[11] The project builds on an earlier one, 'New Directions in Islamic Thought', hosted by the Oslo Coalition for Freedom of Religion or Belief, in which some of us were involved. See Mir-Hosseini et al. (2013).

[12] Kecia Ali, n.d.

[13] Chiba (1986: 7).

[14] For a discussion of construction of marriage in classical fiqh, see Mir-Hosseini 2003, 2009); Ali (2010).

[15] *Qawwamun* appears in two other verses (4:135 and 5:8), where it has a very different, positive and gender-inclusive meaning. See Lamrabet (2015: 77-8).

[16] *Wilayah* appears in Verse 18:44, where it refers to God's protection of humans. However, words derived from it, such as *wali*, appear in many verses as an attribute of God or to describe human beings in particular contexts and stories in the Qur'an. More importantly, none of the verses on which the jurists based the doctrine of *wilayah* in regard to marriage guardianship (2:221, 2:232, 2:234, 2:237, 4:2, 4:3, 4:6, 4:25, 24:32, 60:10, 65:4) use the term wali or *wilayah* (Masud 2013: 132–3).

[17] Mir-Hosseini et al. (2015).

[18] http://www.musawah.org/knowledge-building/global-life-stories-project

[19] http://www.musawah.org/musawah-vision-family-0

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HOW ULAMA IN INDIA PERPETUATE MALE HEGEMONY IN THE NAME OF ISLAM

ZAKIA SOMAN AND NOORJEHAN NIAZ

Abstract: This article attacks the perpetuation of patriarchal controls over women in the name of Islam by ulama and men at large, showing how women who are organising through the Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan are fighting back. The article appeared in Counter Currents on 2 March 2016.

Keywords: Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan, triple talaq, muslim women, citizenship rights, muslim personal law,

In our understanding the values of kindness, compassion and justice are the core values enshrined in the Qur'an. Clearly, hegemony is not an Islamic value and yet the experiences we have undergone in the course of our work in the last ten years give rise to certain fundamental questions. Why are so many Muslims, particularly men, so hegemonic in their thinking? Why do most of them seem to think that reading, understanding and interpreting of the Qur'an is a sole male prerogative? They seem to think that Allah created men and women as unequal. This view of an unjust Allah is not acceptable to us and therein lies the crux of the Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan's (BMMA) existence.

Globally, eminent scholars such as the late professor Fatima Mernissi, Dr. amina wadud, Dr. Khalid Masood, Dr. Ziba Mir-Hosseini and several more have dedicated their lives to reading and interpreting the Qur'an to highlight that Allah is just and fair. Volumes have been written on the tawhidic framework about Allah as a uniting, harmonising force. But the fact remains that these scholarly works that bring out the essence of Islam as a religion of peace and justice remain unheeded and are not referred to by the large mass of people in Muslim societies.

Unfortunately, the dominant thought processes that control Muslim societies remain patriarchal. The traditions and practices followed are often in direct violation of the Qur'anic spirit of justice. The stranglehold of patriarchal hegemony in India and in South Asia has got exacerbated by the arrival of Salafi-Wahhabi ideologies that now threaten to become the mainstream in Muslim society. This ideology has led to further strengthening of the hegemony of patriarchal mindsets in our community. Practices such as triple talaq [declaration of divorce three times at once making it irrevocable] and halala (meaning, marry and consummate marriage with another man, divorce him, only then remarry your former husband) are manifestations of this trend. But at the core of this thinking is a patriarchal mindset of male superiority and domination. We want to refer here to the dominant common sense prevalent in the Indian Muslim community about men being superior to women. Islam gave equal rights to women over 1400 years ago; but have they been translated into reality? So long as the dominant common sense about male superiority dictates the mindsets and behavior of Muslims these rights will remain on paper.

In what has been a masterstroke the patriarchal forces have succeeded in attributing this subjugation and injustice to Islam through misinterpretations, distortions and lies. They have invented fiction, half-truths and references that equate women with cattle and allow the men to get away with the worst kind of atrocities against them. In the process they not only violate the basic tenets of Islam, they also help demonisation and stereotyping of the whole community. They treat their wives, sisters, mothers and daughters unjustly and, even if unwittingly, help the Hindutva campaigns. The self-appointed custodians of Islam do greatest disservice to Muslims and to Islam. It is a pity that even some so-called educated Muslims blindly support these custodians thanks to the common sense about male superiority in Islam that they suffer from.

Why has there been no concerted effort so far to challenge these patriarchal custodians? Why is it that the Muslim women themselves had to initiate a challenge to these hegemonic elements? Why are the wise Muslim men not supporting Muslim women's' struggle for Qur'anic rights of justice and equality? Or are they forever going to allow the conservative clerics to keep deciding for all seventeen crore [one crore is ten million] of us? Are they not aware that Islam has no place for intermediaries between Allah and believers? And lastly, what legitimacy do they have to question Muslim women who stand up and fight for their Qur'anic rights? We will recount here some direct evidence about the dominant Indian Muslim male thinking being hegemonic and in violation of Islamic values of justice and fairness. This is not to say that there are no exceptional and courageous Muslim men; all of us know values. We set forth to work on attaining our Qur'anic as well as citizenship

rights. We clearly stated our solidarity with all those who are working for justice and equality in the country and the world. We stated that we believe in secularism, religious harmony and peaceful co-existence as opposed to communalism and intolerance. We wanted to develop an alternative voice of the Muslim community that was rooted in pluralism and mutual respect between communities. And we were clear that it should be a feminine voice as the regressive male voices had failed to achieve anything for Indian Muslims in sixty years after 1947.

We embarked on a journey towards our mission focusing on the citizenship rights of our excluded community. A campaign on the Sachar Committee's findings and implementation of the recommendations was taken up in the initial years nationally and in various states. [1] As soon as we found some bearings and women started becoming our members in large numbers we were faced with the reality of legal discrimination against Muslim women. Across all states women began coming to us saying: I was divorced orally; I was thrown out after triple talaq, where do I go with my children; I received a post card from my husband divorcing me; I was away at my parents' home for two months and learnt that my husband has married another woman; my husband divorced me and now wants me back; the qazi [judge] is asking me to undergo halala, etc.

The sad reality of male hegemony that rules the roost in our community ostensibly in the name of Islam dawned on us! We could not have asked the women to just go away! We realised that the longterm solution lay in the codification of the Muslim personal law based on the Qur'anic tenets. And this brought us into direct confrontation with the established patriarchal forces who had always spoken in the name of religion. We are not attempting here to give a summary of our work; anyone interested reader can visit our website (www.bmmaindia. com). Every public meeting, every seminar, every program of ours takes us on a familiar pattern of responses from Muslim males. We have women participating in large numbers, giving their testimonies, their inputs on a range of issues such as Muslim personal law, government schemes, communal harmony, different happenings in society etc. Above all, they give us their trust. But invariably at the end of the program a Muslim male stands up and begins teaching us about Islam as he perceives it. He takes it upon himself, in spite of his apparent ignorance of the issue, to teach us about Islamic tenets. He thinks it is his prerogative since he represents the male species in a room full of women! Often such wise men beat a retreat when ordinary women start retorting with evidence and confidence. We see another interesting response pattern at different public hearings across the country of women who have been orally divorced. After hearing heart-rending testimonies of their suffering, when there is an open discussion, towards the

end a male would stand up. He would say in a satiric, authoritative or sometimes angry tone that all this talk about triple talaq is uncalled for since triple talaq is un-Islamic! Then, some of us would ask: why then does it take place in our society? Why do we not have a law against it? To this he would have no answers. Our women leaders regularly get invited to speak at various fora. It is a common occurrence, especially if the gathering has large numbers of Muslim male participants, to be told that your views are ok but we need to consult scholars. Obviously, in their opinion a scholar is someone with grey hair and maybe a beard!

Nobody asks where these scholars are when a triple talaq takes place in their respective cities or mohallas! Nobody talks about the scholars' moral obligation to act when practices like halala are found rampant in our society! Another common experience is being told by a male member of a largely Muslim audience: your views are ok but why are you not dressed in Islamic way? Pray what is the Islamic way, we ask, only to receive stock replies. Again we see male hegemony at play trying to hide behind Islamic dress this time! The problem seems to be that these men are not used to the presence of empowered women in their midst, leave alone their opinions. And they take refuge behind an imagined version of Islam for they have no real arguments. Sometimes some well-educated persons who are sympathetic to our work end up saying: your draft law on Muslim Personal Law is very good. Why don't you send it to some ulema for their approval? This is gross ignorance to say the least and in the ultimate analysis only strengthens the stranglehold of patriarchy.

In recent days when the Supreme Court took suomotu cognisance of our demands for reform of Muslim Personal Law, a well-known Muslim lawyer pleaded with the court to allow the male clerics to be party to the petition. We wonder why a Muslim lawyer of such eminence would think it fit to rope in the clerics for this. After all, is he not aware that the conservative clerics are the impediment to any solution? In fact, they are not just part of the problem; they are the problem! This section has stonewalled any talk of reform in Muslim Personal Law since 1947. In1986, they raised a hue and cry over a pittance of 125 rupees being provided to 65-year-old Shah Bano as maintenance post-divorce on the ground that this would put Islam and Muslims in danger! And yet if large sections of educated Muslims think that the male orthodoxy is the sole custodian of Islam there is something wrong here. This is rank patriarchal hegemony being passed off as Islam.

The authors are co-founders of Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan which has over 1 lakh members spread across 15 states. The BMMA believes in the values of justice, equality, pluralism and democracy. It strives for equal citizenship of women as guaranteed by the

Constitution of India. It works for the Qur'anic rights of Muslim women and has been campaigning for reform in personal law. It believes in religious harmony and mutual respect between communities and works towards holding the state accountable towards its Constitutional obligations including secularism. More info at www.bmmaindia.com

NOTES

[1] The Sachar Committee was commission by the Government in 2005 to report on the social, economic and education conditions of the Muslims in India.

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TRIPLE TALAQ ROW

ZAKIA SOMAN AND NOORJEHAN NIAZ

Abstract: This article points to women's calls for a law abolishing triple talaq, or instant divorce of a wife pronounced three time by a husband and denounces the inability of the male AIMPLB [All India Muslim Personal Law Board] to deal with this issue. The article was originally published as "Triple Talaq Row, AIMPLB Should Understand that Gender Justice Can't Come from 'Guidelines.'" The title here has been shortened to "Triple Talaq Row."

Keywords:triple talaq,muslim personal law, gender justice, muslim women, social boycott

Abolition of triple talaq and reform in Muslim personal law are quintessential to justice and equality for Muslim women. No doubt, this is imperative as well as being necessary for education, economic independence, freedom to make life choices, safety and security. The Muslim women's movement that has come about in the last five years or so is historic in that the most marginalised and ignored voices are now being raised. Ordinary Muslim women are valiantly fighting the legal discrimination they have been subjected to despite our constitutional democratic values of justice, equality and non-discrimination. The women have approached the apex court [the Supreme Court]. They are questioning the patriarchal hegemony of the religious leadership signified in the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPL). Muslim women are no longer in the mood to allow clerics to speak on their behalf. They are reminding the clerics of the Qur'anic injunctions for a just and fair divorce. They are refusing to abide by triple talaq and are vocal that the Qur'an doesn't permit it. Several women are speaking out after being divorced unilaterally and instantly, and they are demanding justice through democratic means.

Contrast this with the stone age mindset of patriarchs and conservatives which is seen in the recent announcements made by the personal law board. In fact, they have said nothing fundamentally new. As reported by the media, they have just come out with a new ploy in

the name of code of conduct. Although the code is yet to be announced, they have tried to pass off the old concoction of their male-dominated worldview in a new avatar. Let us take a look at the hypocrisy and misogyny that clearly stands out in the announcements. They have insisted that the shariat [the path or principles; also used to signify "Islamic law"] gives equal rights to men and women. But man can still instantly divorce his wife. The law board has also stated that the triple talaq protects women from danger. Danger from whom?

The law board has said they would want the Supreme Court to decide on the Babri Masjid matter but can't the same court decide on the triple talaq? It is horrible that the supposed code of conduct is based on social boycott. Social boycott is an abhorrent and repugnant notion as signified in the caste system and untouchability. The Constitution has enabled several legal measures against this practice. It is astounding that in 2017, the board in its wisdom thinks social boycott can be a solution to injustice to women. This shows the utter lack of understanding and/ or disregard for basic concepts of justice, equality and democracy. It also indicates a total lack of awareness about the core values of the Qur'an– justice, kindness, compassion, wisdom. And the board did not elaborate on how this social boycott, repugnant as it is, can result in recourse can offer help and support for women whose lives are affected. It is clearly not an idea based on application of mind or thought. Or perhaps, it is a desperate move to remain relevant.

The board is clearly under a lot of pressure as it was caught napping by the Muslim women's movement. To put the record straight, the board has never deliberated on the woman question in all the decades of its existence. On the contrary, they have always come in the way of women's equality and gender justice. Take for example, the Shah Bano campaign, Imrana and Gudia case, fatwas against working women, opposition to gay rights, clamour for the preservation of triple talaq, justification for nikah halala. The evidence is there for all to see. The law board is not in touch with the ground realities. Scores of Muslim women being victims of triple talaq, being thrown out of homes, being rendered destitute, women running pillar to post for help (for themselves and their children), clerics abusing women in the name of halala. All of this suffering and pain has been noticed, documented and opposed by the Bharatiya MuslimMahilaAndolan, and other women's groups and the cause has been taken up by some lawyers in the last five-six years.

The first national public hearing against triple talaq was held in December 2012 in Mumbai where survivors from fifteen states narrated their harrowing plight in their own words. We (Bharatiya Muslim MahilaAndolan) have been demanding abolition of triple talaq and reform in personal law but the board has acted unconcerned. In 2015, we submitted a

memorandum to the National Commission for Women signed by 50,000 women calling for an end to triple talaq. The board ran a signature campaign taking a cue from us although democratic methods have so far never been part of their worldview and tactics.

A modern secular democracy should be guided by the Constitution. Besides, gender justice is a fundamental principle in the Qur'an. Our society should have no place for patriarchal and regressive bodies to call the shots. Bodies such as khap panchayats [traditional unelected all-male village councils] and personal law boards are all self-appointed and self-anointed dispensations meant for preservation of the male patriarchal order. The community has rejected them and so must the law of the land. We are confident that we will get justice from the Supreme Court.

Editor's note: *This article appeared on First Post (www.firstpost.com) 18 April, 2017. It was republished on August 22, 2017 in light of the affidavit filed by the AIMPLB before the Supreme Court laying out guidelines for couples regarding the practice of triple talaq.*

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ROOTS AND ROUTES OF SECULAR & ISLAMIC FEMINISMS IN INDONESIA

GADIS ARIVIA

Abstract: With the words quoted below, Gadis Arivia recalled the start of her own and other women's feminist activism in Indonesia two decades ago, opening an interview on August 5, 2016 with Margot Badran on women's activism broadly and on secular and Islamic feminisms in Indonesia and the spirit of mutuality and inclusivity.

Keywords: islamic feminism, islamic feminist discourse, gender equality, gender justice, indonesian islamic feminism

"On February 23, 1998 at the Hotel Indonesia roundabout in Jakarta a group of women gathered chanting, carrying posters, and reading poems while clutching flowers in their hands. There were at least twenty women. They belonged to a group calling themselves Suara Ibu Peduli (SIP), the Voice of Concerned Mothers. They were surveilled by the police and surrounded by journalists. The atmosphere was tense. It was at the end of Suharto's New Order when demonstrations were strictly forbidden. The women activists who came out in the demonstration remained calm despite the announced shoot on-site order directed at those who dared to stage a demonstration. The demonstrators tried to attract the sympathy of motorists in the crowded streets to persuade them to respond to the needs of mothers, children, and the nation. I was one of the demonstrators. I was arrested that day along with Karlina Supelli and Wilasih".

Margot Badran (MB) *Can you tell us more about the 1998 women's demonstration? Why did you identify as mothers? What role did the women's demonstration and other forms of activism play in igniting the Reformasi, the Reform Era, that began in 1998?*

Gadis Arivia (GA) We were demonstrating for the cause of democracy and bringing down a dictator who had been ruling Indonesia for thirty-two years. As scholars and activists, we

understood the consequences of protesting against the Suharto regime (the New Order 1966 - 1998). Suharto was ruthless and had jailed countless politicians and protesters who criticized him. We had to find a way to gain the sympathy of the public and break the silence. The group of us who had started the *Jurnal Perempuan* (The Women's Journal) in 1996 came up with the idea of exploiting the term "ibu' or mother which the New Order regime had made an icon of the nation's foundation (*Pillar Bangsa*). We used the word "ibu" strategically in the demonstration because we thought that by using that word our women's political activism could deflect suspicion. It worked. Calling ourselves the Voice of Concerned Mothers, the demonstration we led on the 23rd of February 1998 broke the silence against the authoritarian regime. Students later poured into the streets in protest against Suharto. The dictator was forced to resign in May of 1998.

MB *Can you give us a brief background of the history of the women's movement in Indonesia?*

GA The history of Indonesian feminism can be divided into four phases. The initial phase started in 1928 with the founding of the first Indonesian Women Congress in Yogyakarta. The word "feminism" as such was not used in the Congress but the discussions brought to the fore questions of women's rights, especially women's right to education. In the early 20th century, during the Dutch colonial period, several Indonesian women's organizations were founded promoting female education. A prominent figure in the struggle for women's rights was Kartini (1879-1904), the daughter of a Javanese nobleman who expressed her thoughts in letters sent to her Dutch friend, Stella Zeehandelaar. The letters were later published in her highly popular book entitled "Habis Gelap Terbitlah Terang" or *After Darkness, Light is lay Born*.[1]

Another figure was Siti Rohana Kudus (1884-1972), an ordinary woman from West Sumatra who published the first women's newspaper called *Sunting Melayu*.[2] In her newspaper she wrote about women's freedom and right to education, and spoke out against polygamy. The second phase of the women's movement occurred during the time of Sukarno in the 1950s and 60s following Indonesian independence. It was marked by the rise and spread of a women's grassroots organization called Gerwani (Gerakan Wanita Indonesia) or the Indonesian Women's Movement.[3] It had a close relationship with the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). Hundreds of thousands joined Gerwani which empowered women in the villages. Gerwani was later banned by Suharto regime and its members were arrested, imprisoned and some were murdered because of the avowed links of Gerwani with Indonesian Communist Party. During the third phase of the women's

movement with the coming to power of Suharto feminism was frozen from on high as the state ushered in what has been called state ibuism (state maternalism). Women were seen solely as wives and mothers. However, prominent women's organizations such as Kalyanamitra (Friendship) were discreetly active behind the scene. Kalyanamitra, for example, organized discussions on feminism for a closed study group. The fourth phase of the women's movement came out into the open again in 1998 with the start of the Reformasi when unshackled feminism discourse skyrocketed. The *Jurnal Perempuan* founded two years before the start of the Reformasi, as I have noted, became a powerful locus of feminist discourse. During the Reformasi many women's organizations were created focusing on such issues as domestic violence and trafficking of women, and on matters related to religious pressures like controls on women's body and sexuality, the promotion of child marriage, and the defamation of LGBT. At the same time, the fourth phase was marked by expanding sexual freedom triggered by a growing number of women writers and novelists dealing with sexuality and the body such as Ayu Utami and Djenar Maesa Ayu.[4] During the fourth phase a strong alliance developed between secular and religious women's organizations which worked together, especially in fighting religious narrow-mindedness.

MB *How and when did you become a feminist? Did you call yourself a feminist from the start of your active involvement on behalf of women or did you simply let your actions speak for themselves?*

GA I started my feminist journey in two ways: I published the first feminist journal in Indonesia in 1996, which I have just mentioned, and by teaching on feminism in a women's studies course. "Women's studies" was the only rubric allowed then at the University of Indonesia in the early 1990's. I wanted to raise awareness about feminism and spur a discourse on Indonesian feminism. I was not happy with the university environment where feminism was rarely discussed at the time and if it was raised it was dismissed as a Western ideology. Academics constituted the majority of the activists in the *Jurnal Perempuan*. Since our voices were suppressed by the university we thought that NGOs could offer safe space to engage in feminist debate. It was discontent with the situation at the University that pushed me to start the NGO called Yayasan Jurnal Perempuan, The Women's Journal Foundation in 1995 which brought out the *Jurnal Perempuan* the following year. Within the NGO, I was able to freely express my views. I called myself a feminist from the start of my work on women's rights and issues. I was constantly criticized for calling myself a feminist and sometimes attacked just for using the term feminism itself. My feminism is

what led me to plan a demonstration against Suharto. For me, being a feminist means believing in democracy and human rights.

MB *Tell us more about the Jurnal Perempuan that appeared two years before the start of Suharto's New Order. Did you have difficulty creating a feminist journal at that time? Did you and the others with you in the start-up see it then as a vehicle for a feminist movement in the making? When the Reformasi era began, the Jurnal Perempuan was already two years old and well-poised to be a mouthpiece for feminism in the new reform period. Can you tell us about this?*

GA It was difficult to publish *Jurnal Perempuan* under Suharto's New Order because his highly authoritarian regime made it hard to obtain a permit to publish a journal. I requested a permit to publish a journal for women. The government, assuming it would be about cooking, dress making, and such, granted me a permit. There was no model for a serious women's journal at the time. There were only glamour magazines for women. The general journals then usually focused on economics or politics and were heavily monitored by the state. It never occurred to the state that a women's journal would talk about economics and politics. So, on the one hand we were "safe" in the sense that the government never suspected a women's journal could be dangerous (how would cooking be dangerous?). On the other hand, we were ignored. We were fortunate that during the second year of the *Jurnal Perempuan* the Ford Foundation gave us support which enabled us to continue to engage in research and to publish articles. Because feminism was still a new subject in Indonesia there were very few scholars or women activists. So we had to translate articles from foreign journals and write many pieces ourselves. The first print-run of *Jurnal Perempuan* was less than fifty copies which we mainly distributed for free. I also used to give copies to my students to read. Now we have over seven hundred subscribers including professionals and homemakers. The journal is broadly distributed throughout government agencies, universities, and NGOs, and our articles, also circulate widely in the Internet.

MB *The fourth phase of the women's movement which began with the start of the Reformasi period you said saw the proliferation of feminist discourses. At that moment women intellectuals and activists, often one and the same, began to articulate an Islamic feminist discourse. Tell us about some of the pioneering voices of Islamic feminism in Indonesia. From where did they emerge and what were their concerns? In what way might their expression of Islamic feminism be seen to have an Indonesian stamp? How has Indonesian Islamic feminism intersected with global Islamic feminist discourse?*

GA For Indonesian feminists, Islam is a feminist issue, because we are constantly attacked on how we dress, act, or choose to conduct our lives. Fundamentalist Islamic groups in different regions succeeded in imposing local regulations concerning *purda*, the covering of women's head and body, that are discriminatory against females. Purda regulations are issued by local governments but it is clear that radical religious elements play a strong role in supporting them. Secular and Islamic feminists in Indonesia work together in countering religious fundamentalism on many fronts. Secular feminists, for example, work closely with Musdah Mulia, a widely acclaimed Islamic religious scholar, who lectures on Islamic political thought at Syarif Hidayutullah State Islamic University in Jakarta, and was a former advisor to the Ministry of Religious Affairs, who also calls herself an Islamic feminist. Musda Mulia is highly outspoken about LGBT. She confesses that her courage to defend the LGBT community in Indonesia derives from Islam's strong sense of *rahmatan lil alamin* or mercy in the world(s). LGBT became a contentious issue in 2016 when not only Islamic fundamentalist groups but also the government was menacing to NGOs. International funding organizations stood up for the LGBT community by supporting advocacy and research. Secular feminists also work closely with Kyai Hussein Muhammad, an Islamic religious scholar, pesantren (religious boarding school) educator, and an NGO activist, a former member of the National Commission for Women, 2007-2014, and long self-acclaimed Islamic feminist. Kyai Hussein sharply criticizes the notion that the jilbab (a body cloak) and hijab, pieces of clothing which came to Indonesia from parts of the Arab world, are ordained Islamic dress. KOMNAS Perempuan, the National Commission on Violence against Women, has remarked on the link between insisting on so-called Islamicly prescribed dress for women and political authority. The Commission declared that in the year 2015 alone there were 389 local laws that discriminated against women. The jilbab and hijab have become flash-points in all the political parties. The sermonizing on the jilbab and the hijab has also sparked debate about Indonesian identity as distinct from Arab identity, and has strengthened the determination of Indonesians to hold fast to their own identity. Indonesian Islamic feminism is in line with global Islamic feminist discourse. This is evident at my university where the works of amina wadud and Ziba Mir-Hosseinion Qur'anic interpretation and Islamic jurisprudence on issues of women and gender are widely discussed as well as your historical and analytical work on the rise and spread of the phenomenon of Islamic feminism.

MB *It seems from the initial appearance of Islamic feminist discourse in Indonesia that secular feminism, often called simply feminism, and Islamic feminism have been on the same page seeking equality, social and gender justice, human dignity, and freedom of*

expression. These feminisms do not appear to have had an antagonistic relationship. Can you speak to this? Is there a special, or specific, Indonesian Islamic feminism?

GA Yes, in Indonesia secular and Islamic feminists work together closely. Being a feminist means striving for equality and social and gender justice. Whether we work on issues related to public policy, politics, economics, or issues relating to culture and religion we apply feminist arguments. These arguments which call for the implementation of gender equality and gender justice may be expressed in the abstract language of shared principles, they may use the language of state constitutions or international covenants, and they may reference Islamic ideals and religious sources. In Indonesia when fighting for justice and equality for women as part of fighting for justice and equality for all, we use multiple feminist languages, we claim ownership of our diverse but mutually supportive feminist discourses. This is integral to who we are and what we do in Indonesia.

MB *You are a feminist who may be seen as a secular feminist. From the rise of Islamic feminist discourse and activism in Indonesia you seem to have welcomed it and incorporated its ideals and aspirations into your own feminist projects and practice. Can you tell us about this?*

GA Yes, I consider myself a secular feminist. I also welcome Islamic arguments which I use in supporting gender equality. Therefore, I consider myself to be an Islamic feminist as well. Islam is open to everyone. People can have their own interpretations. I support a feminist interpretation of Islam and try to contribute as much as I can to advancing it. I cooperate closely with Musdah Mulia. We work together combining mutually supportive secular and Islamic feminist arguments in promoting the cause of gender equality and gender justice. In terms of Islam we uphold an Indonesian Islamic identity within the vast and diverse umma (community) or world of global Islam. Indonesian Islam has its own culture and language. Indonesian Muslim women are very proud of their culture, their ways of expressing it in their dress, hair and body. However, over the past two decades or so Indonesian practices of Islam are being challenged by cultural and political Islamic forces bearing an Arab stamp. Indonesian Muslim secular feminist and Islamic feminist women in Indonesia uphold their own local religious culture and practices while there are other Muslim women who capitulate to invasive Arab patriarchal structures and behaviors.

MB *Jurnal Perempuan celebrated its twentieth anniversary with a conference in September 2016 in Jakarta. What were the highlights of the conference? Where are secular feminism and Islamic feminism in Indonesia today? Is it perhaps more pertinent now to*

speak of a confluence of secular feminism and Islamic feminism in Indonesia? Or of a new Indonesian feminism? Youth seem to have played an important part in celebrating the last two decades of feminism in Indonesia. Is their feminism different from the feminisms of their elders and predecessors? Are they expressing a "millennial feminism" of their own? What do you see as the most salient contributions of the Jurnal Perempuan over its past two decades of existence? What are the most pressing feminist concerns in Indonesia today?

GA Jurnal Perempuan, the first feminist journal to appear in the world's largest Muslim majority country and a secular state, has reached a milestone with its twentieth anniversary. Where do we go from here? There is still a lot to be done. When we started Jurnal Perempuan, as I said, we were facing an authoritarian regime. We thought that taking down the regime would bring about democracy and gender justice. But democracy opens up space to all sorts of groups and projects including patriarchal political Islam. In Indonesia we are now facing fundamentalist groups who are hostile to gender equality. They are even against the word equality. Interestingly today these fundamentalist groups are using women preachers and academics to criticize gender equality such as the group AILA (The Family Love Alliance) [*aila* in Arabic means family]. This group aspires to make the country more "civilized" and to "protect" Indonesian families by strengthening family values, that is, their interpretation of Islamic family values. The group has requested that the Constitutional Court change the definitions of adultery, rape and sodomy in the Criminal Code. The purpose is to outlaw consensual sexual relationship outside of marriage and to discriminate against LGBT. Twenty years ago the common enemy was the state. Today, it is more challenging because if you criticize these religious extremists you are labelled anti-religious or anti-Islam. Many Islamic feminists are accused of being against Islam because they speak their minds about gender equality and justice in the language of Islam. Islamic feminists and secular feminists share the same experience of rejection by the central state as well as by local governments who are often in bed with right-wing religious forces. The twentieth anniversary of *Jurnal Perempuan* revealed to its readers the existence of an even more robust feminism, or feminisms, in Indonesia because we are faced here with an enormous challenge not only against patriarchy embedded in the secular state and society but also the patriarchy of Islamism. It is especially encouraging, after twenty years of feminism in Indonesia to see millennials joining our cause. The age of social media is the age of promoting feminist empowerment by and among the millennials. We are proud that the *Jurnal Perempuan* continues to empower feminist voices on behalf of all whatever their ages, ethnicities, gender, sexualities, and religious affiliations. We are also aware of the

hard work ahead and that the forces of inclusivity must triumph over the forces of division and exclusion.

NOTES

[1] *Habis Gelap, Terbitlah Terang* (After Dark, Comes Light), was written by Armijn Pane based on the compilation of Kartini's letters (Balai Pustaka: Jakarta, 1911).
[2] "Sunting Melayu" is a term for Malay woman's hair pin, a symbol of Malay women.
[3] See Saskia Wieringa, *Sexual Politics in Indonesia* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.
[4] See Ayu Utami's famous novel *Saman* (Gramedia Pustaka Utama: Jakarta, 1998) and Ayu's collection of short stories, *Djenar Maesa* [They Say I'm a Monkey] (Metaphor: Jakarta, 2008) Both considered prominent Indonesian feminist writers. They write about controversial issues such as politics, religion and sexuality.

Contributor:

GADIS ARIVIA. Is a recently retired lecturer in philosophy and gender studies at the University of Indonesia at the Faculty of Humanities in the Philosophy Department where she has taught for more than 20 years. Her courses include feminist theory, ecofeminism, and ethics. She founded the first feminist journal in Indonesia, *Jurnal Perempuan,* in 1996. *Her books include Filsafat Berperspektif Feminis* (Philosophy with a Feminist Perspective) 2003 and *Feminisme Sebuah Kata Hati* (Feminism from the Heart) 2006. She published poetry in *Antologi Puisi, Yang Sakral dan Sekuler* which also appeared in English: *Poetry Anthology, The Sacred and The Secular*, 2011. She lives in Bethesda, Maryland with her family.

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SPREADING GENDER EGALITARIAN ISLAM IN INDONESIA

HUSEIN MUHAMMAD

Abstract: This narrative draws on conversations between Kyai Husein Muhammad and Margot Badran reconstructed by the latter upon careful review of recorded discussions that began in the Netherlands at the Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM) in Leiden in 2003 and continued in Jakarta in 2004. Kyai Husein, as he is usually called, is religious scholar and self-identified Islamic feminist. In recounting his life trajectory Kyai Husein reveals a journey from Islamic modernism to Islamic feminism in Indonesia. His story demonstrates how Islamic feminism is practiced as it is being constructed. It shows the rise and spread of Islamic feminism in the hinterland dispelling the notion that egalitarian Islam cannot flourish in a rural environment. Kyai Husein points out that Islamic feminists and Islamic radicalists (to use his word) are both concerned with women and gender but in diametrically opposed ways. The narrative published below captures conversations that occurred nearly a decade and a half ago and thus must be read as part of the historical record and a prelude to the present.

Keywords: study of Islam, Islamic feminism, Islamic boarding school, self identity, Islamic modernism

In 2003 when I was a visiting fellow at the Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM) in Leiden, I was told that an Islamic feminist had recently arrived from Indonesia. I hadn't seen anyone who seemed to be our new colleague when suddenly one day a man appeared at the door of my office. He introduced himself as Husein Muhammad. He was the Islamic feminist from Indonesia. From that first moment, we plunged into what would be the first of many conversations on Islamic feminism in Indonesia, a country of over two million Muslims, the largest number in any single nation. Our conversations continued the following year in Jakarta when Kyai Husein had just published his latest book *Islam Agrama Ramah Perempuan: Pambelaan Kyai Pesantrun* (Islam a Woman Friendly Religion: A Kyai's Support for Women).

It might come as a surprise for many to find a Kyai, a religious scholar who teaches at a *pesantran*, an Islamic boarding school, to be an Islamic feminist, and, moreover, who publicly acknowledges this identity. Kyai Husein started his schooling at the *pesantren* his grandfather had founded in Cirebon in West Java where he was born in 1953. His father and mother were teachers in the *pesantren* where both boys and girls were educated. Women religious scholars or nyais taught the girls. Husein did his secondary school studies at a *pesantren* in Lirboyo in East Java graduating in 1973.

Lacing the sprawling Indonesian archipelago, *pesantrens* were created, and have been sustained, by local communities. These Islamic boarding schools serving the vast hinterland have not only survived over the centuries but continue to multiply. In the mid-1990s there were estimated to be 6,000 *pesantrens*. Now in 2004 there are some 14,000 Islamic boarding schools educating a million santris (male) and santriwatis (female) as *pesantren* students are called. Females are among the increasing numbers of those both receiving and imparting this religious schooling.

Kyai Husein describes the *pesantrens* as typically conservative. Teachers use traditional religious textbooks known as *kitbab kuning* (literally, yellow books) written in Arabic. Kyai Husein acknowledges that this conservative schooling left a mark on him. Years later he would revise the school books used in his family's *pesantren*.

In 1980, after earning a diploma from the Higher Institute of Qur'anic Studies in Jakarta, Husein Muhammad followed in the foot-steps of many compatriots who journeyed to Egypt for further religious studies. There has been a long tradition of Indonesians seeking higher Islamic learning at the renowned university of Al-Azhar in Cairo. When Husein's diplomas from Indonesia were not recognised by Al-Azhar preventing his enrollment he turned to *dirasa khassa* or private study during his stay from 1980 to 1983. He joined various study-circles, or *halaqas*, as he explained "to deepen my horizon of knowledge about contemporary Islamic issues." In Egypt, he became acquainted with the works of religious thinkers such as 'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq and Sayyid Qutb and secular scholars and writers like Taha Husain and 'Abbas al-'Aqqad. He had already been introduced to the thought of the influential Islamic modernist Muhammad 'Abduh back in Indonesia.

I asked Kyai Husein about Muhammad 'Abduh's influence in Indonesia. He explained that 'Abduh's thought--which was first introduced in Indonesia early last century by students returning from Al-Azhar - has left a dual mark. Progressives, valuing his modernist

thinking call for *ijtihad* (independent investigation of religious texts), while conservatives, by far the majority, have been critical of 'Abduh's thinking as propagated by the disciples of Ahmad Dahlan who formed the Muhammadiya in 1912 which created a women's section called Aisiyiyah. Men upholding a more traditionalist approach established the Nahdataul Ulama in 1926 which also formed a women's section called Muslimat. While the Nahadadul Ulama continues overall to be the more traditionalist network it also displayed a liberal strand according to the daughter of one of its founders Lily Munir who identified herself as an Islamic feminist activist. Although Indonesian *pesantren* culture remains largely conservative, Kyai Husein says 'Abduh's legacy can be found in the more modern *pesantrens*. He points out that Islamic modernist thought has been propagated more generally in recent decades not so much by Indonesians who have graduated from universities in Arab countries but by those who have studied in western universities. Kyai Husein notes that many Indonesian women study at Al-Azhar. When these women return to Indonesia they often become *pesantren* teachers and women religious leaders in their hometowns. Those who settle in Jakarta are often found leading *majalis ta'lim* or women's weekly or monthly study sessions.

Upon his return to Indonesia from Egypt, Kyai Husein continued to teach in the *pesantren* system that had nurtured him. At the beginning of the 1990s, about ten years after he was back in Indonesia, his understanding of religion began to change. He recalls this as a moment of coming into a new consciousness of religion, of becoming a "new version" of his former self. Until then he admitted: "I represented the traditional *pesantren* point of view that saw religious knowledge as merely a textual truth. The truth in the *pesantren* culture in general was a truth that came from the yellow books not from life itself and social realities."

At the core of his change in outlook was a different perspective on gender. A new awareness began to surface after Kyai Husein attended a seminar in Jakarta on gender and religion. His first reaction to the liberal thought he heard expressed was skepticism. But, he said, "I started to think about it and began to realise that what was being said about gender was in line with the spirit of the Qur'an. I began to explore further." Kyai Husein said he was especially influenced by the work of Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, the Egyptian professor of Islamic thought at Cairo University "who was driven into exile for his enlightened views." Abu Zaid spent the final decades of his life at the University of Leiden in Netherlands. Kyai Husein said: "I have read almost all of Abu Zaid's works," (Abu Zaid is well-known for his seminal contributions to Islamic feminist discourse.) Kyai Husein started being asked to speak on Islam and gender in open seminars and other public events.

I asked Kyai Husein how his new thinking about Islam and public identity as an avowed Islamic feminist was received by his family, the *pesantrens*, and the broader society. "My new thinking was not at first well received by the *pesantren* world and the community in general," but "the initial criticism has evolved into widening acceptance. My family accepts my thinking and supports me in my advocacy of women's rights. Members of my own *pesantren* now welcome my approach. There is a younger generation today which has been socialised in my new thinking. I have been criticised but I am also listened to." He continues: "Overall, I am optimistic that the discourse I am promoting will be widely received. Women's participation in the public arena has been seen by some as violating women's values, but nowadays we have many women legislators, judges, and ministers of state, and we even have had a woman head of state. These facts speak for themselves."

Kyai Husein is a compelling example of the scholar-activist. In 1999, he helped create the Puan Amal Hayati Foundation in Jakarta where he serves as vice chair. In 2000 he became the founding director of the Rahima Foundation, the Center for Education and Information on Islam and Women's Rights Issues, and acts as editor-in-chief of its journal *Swara Rahima*. He also created the Fahima Foundation. These NGOs serve as bridges between the *pesantrens* and the activist communities. Ciciek Farah, who along with Kyai Husein, is one of three directors of Rahima, spoke to me in Jakarta about the gender training the organisation conducts to develop women teachers, scholars, and trainers who can act as authorities. As it becomes harder to refute the message, Cicek points out, people attack the messenger. Rahima's directors, she says, are well aware of the importance of the locations of knowledge re/production and the mechanisms for imparting knowledge. "We see," she tells me, "*pesantrens* that reproduce new discourses on gender becoming important references for the community." Kyai Husein's position in society and his widened authority help promote the spread of new gender interpretations and practices.

Kyai Husein thrives being at the intersection of the activist and the academic worlds. "I enjoy being in both worlds. However, I must admit that activists are more tolerant and possess a better understanding of current problems. This is because they see the immediate impacts of acts stemming from inequality such as sexual abuse and violence against women. I see that the activists' views are richer than those of the academicians. Maybe this is because they use participatory methods to investigate unlike the more aloof and abstract approaches of academicians."

Kyai Husein asserts that: “Islamic feminists are on the rise in Indonesia. Their thought and activism is making itself felt more and more.” He goes on to say that: “Islamic radicalism is also concerned with women. Women are at the center of both the feminist and radicalist movements.” The radicalists, as he calls them, denounce, as he puts it, “the (liberal) gender movement.” He explains, “they use women as a lynchpin of their radicalism anchored in their reactionary view of Islam. In some regions of the country they are fighting for the implementation of the *shar'iah*, as they see it. Wherever there is *shar'iah* enforcement women become the prime targets. Compulsory veiling, forbidding women to go out at night without a *mahram* (male guardian), and other restrictive measures are imposed. The feminists promote the idea of justice and its implementation and support women in taking up whatever work or positions they aspire to including that of the head of state. The radicalists' notion of justice is allocating to each sex its own place. For them, justice for women is to stay at home or to go out only in the company of a *mahram*. I see that the Islamic radical movement in Indonesia is out to destroy the feminist movement.”

Kyai Husein notes “Outside the gender movement itself, most who promote Islamic feminism are men.” “I think the main problem Muslims face in Indonesia is that we lack a sufficient number of Muslim women activists. Most of the activists we have come from the *pesantrens*. Having *pesantren* graduates as activists is a big advantage (in the wider scene) as they are more highly regarded by society than those without a *pesantren* background.”

Contributor:

HUSEIN MUHAMMAD. Is known in Indonesia as the” feminist kyai (venerated scholar)”. He began his education at his parents' pesantren (a religious boarding school) in Cirebo in West Java and continued his schooling at in pesantren in Lirboyo in East Java. He did his undergraduate studies at Al-Quran Higher Education Institute (PTIQ), Jakarta and studied briefly at Al-Azhar University in Cairo. He established the Fahmina Institute. With former first lady, Sinta Nuriyah Wahid he founded the Puan Amal Hayati, an NGO dealing with Islam and women. Kyai Husein served on the National Commission on Violence Against Women. He is the author of numerous books including Women's *Fiqh: A Kyai's Reflection on Religion and Gender Discourse* (2005).

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THE OTHER WITHIN: MUSLIM RIGHTS WARRIOR IN MALAYSIA

AZZA BASARUDIN

Abstract: In this paper, I reflect on debates about Islams and feminisms by re-centering a class-based analysis of women's activism and gender politics and re-emphasising the local self-positioning of women activists who are committed to Muslim women's movements for self-determination and social justice. I do so by considering the lived realities of working class Malay Muslim women activists in urban Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, who suggest that normative understandings of feminist ideals and feminist activists fail to capture the way they conceive of and do activism specific to their class location and local context. I argue that these activists' contextualised self-positioning opens up a more meaningful space to rethink the designations "Muslim feminist" or "Islamic feminist," often associated with women in communities of Muslims who are engaging in political struggles to reintegrate understandings of Islam with contemporary conceptions of justice and equality.

Keywords: feminism, women activists, muslim women, gender justice, social class, gender politics

Introduction

Debates on the politics of naming women who strive for equality - and justice oriented interpretations of Islam as "Muslim feminist" or "Islamic feminist" have generated competing, yet fruitful, scholar-activist analyses (for example, see Abou-Bakr 2001; Badran 2009; Barlas 2008; cooke 2000; Moghadam 2002; Tohidi 2001; wadud 2010). For the sake of brevity, I will not rehash the exciting and multilayered theorising of these analyses; suffice it to say that there are convincing arguments for embracing, negotiating, and rejecting the categories of "Muslim feminist" or "Islamic feminist." As I have argued

elsewhere, I am cautious about qualifying the rich tapestry of Muslim women's passion and commitment to gender justice under these categories, given the need for women activists to retain their desired cultural legitimacy within the context of postcolonial struggles (Basarudin 2016). My caution is also related to how feminism has served as the handmaiden of colonialism (Ahmed 1992) and has aided in the expansion of the U.S Empire and imperialist projects through a saviour mission (Abu-Lughod 2002).

In this reflection paper, I revisit my encounters with three young Malay women activists who were members of Sisters in Islam (hereafter SIS), a non-governmental organisation of professional Muslim women committed to the promotion of an Islam that "recognises the principles of justice, equality, freedom, and dignity within a democratic nation state" (www.sistersinislam.org.my) to re-center a class-based analysis of women's activism and gender politics and to re-emphasise the local self-positioning of these activists. I consider the lived realities of women activists to problematise normative understandings of feminist ideals and feminist activists, which sometimes fail to capture the way these women conceive of and do activism in a way that is specific to their class location and local context. I contend that these activists' contextualised self-positioning opens up a more meaningful space to rethink the debates of feminisms and Islams and the designation "Muslim feminist/Islamic feminist" often associated with elite and upper-and-middle class Muslim women engaging in political struggles to reintegrate understandings of Islam with contemporary conceptions of justice and equality.

I would like to note a caveat. Given the small sample that I am working with - I interviewed about 15 working class women but chose to focus on the narratives of three of them – I am not suggesting that this sample represents the unified voice of a particular social class. Rather, I draw attention to these class-based narratives of feminism and feminist activism because these narratives interrupt a standard depiction of the "Muslim feminist" or "Islamic feminist" as beneficiary of particular class politics and move beyond contextualised histories.

Narratives of the Other Within

I came to know Iza, Nadiah, and Suhaila when I conducted preliminary fieldwork with SIS a few years before my in-depth ethnographic research that began in 2006. After leaving the field in 2007, we kept in touch via email and sometimes met up during my visits to Malaysia. Iza is in her early thirties, while Nadiah and Suhaila are in their mid-twenties. These women were all educated locally and are more comfortable conversing in the

national language, Malay, rather than English, which is the dominant language of many rights-oriented, non-governmental organisations in Malaysia. With the exception of Iza, the other two women wear *tudung*, a colourful Malaysian headscarf. They were raised in working class homes in various areas on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur and their families can be considered conventional in that they practice strictly gendered division of labour inside the home and view suitable work for women outside the home as an extension of their gendered responsibilities and biological destiny: for example, nurse, secretary, teaching. As such, working in an office is considered suitable; however, the parents of these women are somewhat unaware of the controversial nature of SIS's advocacy and the extent of their daughters' activism with SIS.

These women activists come from families whose understanding and practice of Islam mirrors the views of the majority of Malay Muslims who believe that only the *ulama* (religious scholars), that is, those who are learned in Islamic sciences and jurisprudence, and trained in Islamic institutions revered by Muslims (for example, Al-Azhar) in the Middle East or South Asia, have the authority to engage in Islamic discourse (see Basarudin 2016). These women spoke about their relationship to Islam in terms of their knowledge prior to and after working with SIS. In our discussions through the years Iza, Nadiah, and Suhaila articulate their varying respective relationships to Islam and they all expressed that they came into political consciousness of feminist ideals through their work with SIS. Hence, their formative period of understanding debates about feminisms and Islams took place within the context of an organisation that is decidedly feminist in its orientation, in contrast to the socio-political context of their upbringing and environment that often associates feminist ideals with Westernisation and imperialism, thus equating feminist activists as corrupted by the West and trying to infiltrate Muslim communities with secular ideas. It is also through their work with SIS that these activists are exposed to the core ideals of feminism, its historical struggles, and its meanings. They are aware of the notion of homegrown feminism, that feminism is organic and its usage and application can be context specific, and that this allows for it to be embraced by varying activists.

In our conversations about the rights of Muslim women and the contemporary challenges facing Muslims, there was a recurring topic: feminism and Islam, and the labelling or representation of activists as Muslim feminists or Islamic feminists. All three women strongly distanced themselves from such labelling. Compared to many women's and human rights activists in Malaysia, who are of the elite or middle-and upper middle classes, these three women belong to a different social class, which sharpens the divide between the ways in which they practice gender politics and do activism. Who, for instance, gets to

define women's rights and women's interests? How do notions of equality and justice translate across social class? How does reform through legal means impact women's lives across class? How is class privilege reproduced in the framing of women's rights through a feminist ideology? In the narratives that follow, I sketch how Iza, Nadiah, and Suhaila's experiences and lived realities speak to the ways that they conceive of and do activism specific to their class positioning and local context.

The "F" Word

Iza is tall with wavy, shoulder length hair and a spirited personality. She was raised in a low-income family in the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. For as long as Iza could remember, her parents held two jobs each to make ends meet and there was never enough time for them to spend together or for them to focus on her religious education. When asked about how Islam factored into her life while growing up, Iza suggested that her parents are "bukanlah alim sangat" (not that religious), which she clarified as "tak solat lima kali sehari, ibu tak pakai tudung, dan tak tahu banyak sangat pasal hukum hakam agama" (did not pray five times a day, mother did not wear the headscarf, and did not know a lot about religion). In turn, she felt no pressure to wear the headscarf or observe prayer. Religion, said Iza, is best left to religious scholars who have the "necessary knowledge." However, her work with SIS shifted her understanding of Islam; she developed a passion for understanding ways to "unread patriarchy" from the Qur'an (Barlas 2002) and for a deeper knowledge about the political struggle for justice and equality. Over the years that I have gotten to know Iza, I have seen how she has hungered for and accumulated knowledge about issues of gender and Islam, and has redefined herself as an activist invested in the struggle to untangle Islam from its androcentric legacy.

Comfortable in her skin as a working-class Malay activist, Iza articulates the complexities of qualifying her activist stance as a Muslim feminist or Islamic feminist:

I raised my own consciousness through working with SIS and studying to better myself as a woman and as a believer. Knowing my rights is an unparalleled act of devotional piety. I believe that the basic idea of revelation is that women and men are equal in the eyes of Allah. If I am equal before Allah, any inequality comes from men's (or women's) desire for power and control. I understand that a feminist is someone who speaks out against discrimination and inequality. And what I do is exactly that but I don't call myself a feminist, let alone a Muslim feminist or Islamic feminist. The reason? It's a luxury and it is more of the province of Malay women such as SIS's founding members. They are educated, speak English well, comfortable with that label, and can easily use it without it

clashing with who they are. People like me with a different [class] background find this word "feminist" or "F" word as a bit too jarring. It is like branding – desirable yet restrictive. It's just not me and not a word that I feel fits me or who I am. I might share the same goals as other women in this organisation for gender justice but my priorities and the process of coming to that goal are different.
While I can see why my activism to educate others about Islam's equality and justice can be seen as feminist, I am an activist in a country where attempts to question men's dominance over Islam brands me a feminist or heretic, courtesy the Western world's political games and demonisation of Islam. Why would I want to embrace the "F" word? I cannot be effective as a Muslim activist by branding myself feminist because of how the word has been used and how it is understood in Malaysia. Why do I want to discredit my own activism by putting the "F" word in front of Islam? What I do is in the name of Islam, so why do I have to distract people by putting feminist in front of it? I find knowledge and strength from Islam, so why should I find a more suitable way to label it? Why do I need a word that even when translated into Malay does not sound right on my tongue?

For Iza, her class background and the socio-political context of Malaysia make it undesirable to claim the label of Muslim feminist or Islamic feminist. She elaborated on her class background and how the "F" word makes her uncomfortable because it does not fit with her values. While she is aware of how many Muslim activists claim the label Muslim feminist or Islamic feminist for themselves, she views it as mainly an exercise of class privilege. It is class privilege that allows certain women to be comfortable with such labelling because of their upward mobility, opportunities to travel, and their cosmopolitan outlook and life choices. She suggests that class privilege protects these women and does not make their claim to feminism as unfamiliar-sounding as it does in her social class.

Moreover, she expressed that while she shares the goals of gender justice for Muslim women, she sees the attainment of those goals for women of her social class to mean something different than what it means for women of higher socioeconomic class – having job security, being able to afford childcare, access to contraception, and having the time to take English classes to improve opportunities for employment. These, says Iza, are not the goals of the gender justice movement, or the work of SIS, for example. Legal reform in Muslim family law, she argues, would only benefit women in so far as they have an understanding of the legal system and the class backing to even seek legal assistance. Iza vocalises that her view of feminist identity is a minority view in SIS, and tries not to publicise her viewpoint, so as to avoid unpleasantness or conflict. While realising that emphasising commonalities across differences is necessary in order to move towards social

transformation, Iza upholds that the struggle for Muslim women's rights needs to be attentive to class differences. She sees the politics of naming as one example of how such differences can be acknowledged and incorporated, and not silenced.

Exclusive Club and Ticket out of Islamicville

Nadiah is a soft-spoken and petite young girl who wears colourful tudung that perfectly matches her clothes. I still marvel at the extensive collection of tudung that she once showed me, with its variety of colours, textures, and patterns. The only daughter in a family of four boys, Nadiah was raised in a working class family. Her father used to be a teacher and is now an imam in their village, while her mother is a housewife. Her parents, said Nadiah, made sure their children were provided with ample religious education to guide them through life's challenges. She had a strict upbringing and her parents are "alim, solat tak tinggal, puasa, dan rajin mengaji Qur'an" (religious, never miss prayers, fast during Ramadan, recite the Qur'an regularly). Since everyone in her village wore some form of head covering and her parents encouraged her to do so in high school, Nadiah took it on without thinking much about it. She also never paid much attention to her faith. When she joined SIS, she was exposed to diversity in Islamic thought, the contextual interpretation of religious sources, and so forth, and through this exposure she became more interested in the question of Muslim women's rights.

Nadiah sees a conflict in trying to reconcile the knowledge she had of Islam prior to joining SIS with her understanding of her own faith that is now strongly tied to the question of gender equality. On the one hand, she values her newfound knowledge, but finds it difficult to share with her parents, stating that she does not know how to phrase it in a manner that would translate into their working-class world where survival issues take precedence over practices of gender equality or justice. She also grapples with the representational politics of the term "Muslim feminist" or "Islamic feminist," particularly with respect to the comfort that many in SIS have, and encourage others to have, with this identification. Nadiah explains,

Since working with SIS, I have come to a better understanding of my rights as a Muslim woman. I know now why some people think that Islam is empowering for women but I also understand the problem of trying to make empowering practices a part of people lives. It's good enough for me for now to know my rights in Islam. I am using that knowledge to educate others. By learning about Islam I am empowering myself. Knowledge is power, as a wise woman once told me! [laughs] I think it is easy to slip into thinking about this powerful knowledge that I have as feminist knowledge because my fellow activists and

many of [SIS] founding members relate their knowledge to feminism. This is because they are highly educated and they have a different class background and family culture. Identifying as a feminist or relating their Islamic knowledge to feminism is natural to them. It's very class related – you have a way of being in this world and moving in and out of different social spaces that lower class people don't. They are fluent in English and do not struggle with how to speak or think in this language. With privilege you have more leeway to experiment with ideas. You have a different prism to see things. This is not a privilege that I have.

The basic argument [for those identifying as a Muslim feminist or Islamic feminist] is that Islam and feminism share the same ideals. But it does not make sense for me to see it that way. Islam empowers me. It frees me to know who I am. It lets me be who I am - a girl from a working-class family who is striving for upward mobility. Feminism was not even a concept that existed when Islam was revealed. Maybe it was an idea close to it but I doubt it. Society back then was hierarchical and male-centric. So I see my activist work as rooted in Islam and Islamic ideas of justice and piety. I don't see the need to call myself Muslim feminist or Islamic feminist. It makes it sound like an exclusive club. Moreover, given the work that we do in advocating for reform in law and public policies, what benefit does association with the ideas of feminism and identifying as a feminist, even Muslim or Islamic feminist, have in furthering our goals or making it easier for us to convince people or the government of the need for equitable laws? People are already suspicious that Western think tanks and governments fund our advocacy. Saying that we are feminist is the fastest ticket out of Islamic.

Similar to Iza, Nadiah also cites class politics as a marker of comfort with the label of Muslim feminist or Islamic feminist. Based on the conversations I had with Nadiah, I did not notice any envy that her fellow activists are able to easily claim these labels to represent themselves. I did not even detect a longing to inhabit such positioning. Rather, what I discovered was more of an exercise in the need for such labeling to incorporate her concerns as a working class young Malay woman aspiring for upward mobility. For instance, she brought up the debates on the headscarf and how she feels sidelined as someone who is not necessarily truly "liberated" because she chooses to wear it. She also wears the baju kurung, a modest Malay national long dress and skirt because it is affordable and she is comfortable in it. However, she feels that this attire does not translate into "what a feminist looks like," based on the occasional comments that she receives from her fellow SIS activists who normally wear such attire solely for formal events or meetings with state officials. Nadiah recalls this 'exclusive club,' the double standard of self-determination,

which applies to those seeking gender equality but not so much to those choosing to wrap themselves in the visible signs of modesty. Here, Nadiah is calling into question the class politics and privilege that enables one to seamlessly move in and out of spaces and social identities, in tandem with the claiming of a cosmopolitan identity of Muslim feminist or Islamic feminist.

Simplifying Commitments

Iza first introduced me to Suhaila, who has a great sense of humor and is a vocal activist. Similar to Iza and Nadiah, Suhaila was also raised in a working-class family. Her parents own a small sundry shop in their village and she has two siblings. Most of the women in her family wear the headscarf and she took it on when she was in her late teens. When she was growing up, her parents made sure that she attended Qur'an classes at their village mosque twice a week. Her religious teacher, an Ustat, was kind and generous, but as with many in Malaysia and in the Muslim world, she learned the Qur'an by rote and did not understand the meanings of the verses or the larger message of the Qur'an. It was not until she started working with SIS that she was able to appreciate and learn about Islam and women's rights. Suhaila's parents are happy that she has an office job with a decent wage and hope that she can move up in the organisation or move on to a more lucrative job once she has adequate work experience, so that she can better support the family. They know that she works for a "Muslim women's group" but do not really understand (or care to know, according to her) about her work with SIS. It was with SIS that she started reading literature about feminism and its historical development. She also learned about the historical and political dimensions of Islam and started discussing Muslim women's roles and contributions throughout history that she had been unaware of:

Working with SIS is eye opening on every level. I feel that my life is richer and more meaningful because now I can better understand the religion that I was born into. Before SIS I just read the Qur'an and had no interest in it because I didn't even know what I was reciting. Now I have a better idea. I don't know everything because I am still learning but what I now know makes me feel better as a Muslim. I am also learning about this feminist and feminism business and I find it fascinating. I think it's great ideology and has a nice history behind it as well.

I do see some similarities between ideas of feminism and Islam, or the Islam that I am learning through SIS. But for me, as someone who was raised in a low-income family, while feminism is a fun concept to think about (aside from its usefulness), it's not something I can easily relate to, or that I can relate the work I do to. It's different for upper class women who have lived in the city all their life, have certain levels of education, have

traveled, and have exposure to things that I never had access to. It's like this: I come from a social class that makes me conscious of who I am within this new urban environment. I never had the privilege to travel beyond my village and the farthest I have been is to leave my village to work in the city. I am aware of the many inadequacies that I have and I am working to better myself.

Much of the strength I have now is based on the new knowledge I have about Islam. So, I draw my strength from my faith. I don't see it as feminist Islam or Islamic feminist or any other label. These labels do not "add value or make it better." Does saying that I am an Islamic feminist or Muslim feminist make my knowledge about Islam more credible? If so, to whom? You know the political climate we work in. How would this label impact my activism? Is this label supposed to make me appear more sophisticated? Again, to whom? What is important to me is that I am educating Muslim women to know they can exercise choice in understanding Islam, allowing them to claim that knowledge for empowerment and carry it forward. Naming myself as a Muslim feminist or Islamic feminist and my activism as Islamic feminism simplifies my commitment to both Allah and our convictions for justice.

Suhaila's narrative evokes Iza and Nadiah's expressions of the ways in which their class-based understanding of activism and lived realities shape their worldview and their stance on the politics of naming and the ways that it is misaligned with their self-positionings. Suhaila also expressed discomfort over the manner in which women's rights is articulated through the limiting lens of feminist ideology in spite of its Islamic leanings, such as the concept of equality and how that concept translates differently according to social class and education background. She cites the example of a fellow middle class activist who views equality as the absolute and uncontestable right of women to be equal to men in all aspects. Suhaila says she does not want to be equal to men because she is different; equality for her is for her husband to share the double burden of housework, but for her colleague, equality is for her not to do the housework but for her husband to assume that burden instead. Another fellow activist suggested that her husband pay her for the housework and for Suhaila this is the luxury of those of the upper and middle classes, who can afford to be creative about how to spread the burden because they have hired help in the home. Meanwhile, she and her husband are trying to make ends meet and support their families.

Conclusion

In this brief reflection paper, I suggest that it is necessary to consider a class-based analysis of women's activism and gender politics, as well as the local self-positioning of women activists, for a more holistic understanding of how normative understandings of feminist ideals and feminist activists fail to capture the ways that working class women activists conceive of and do activism in a local context. By centering the lived realities of working class Malay Muslim women activists in urban Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, I suggest that these activists' contextualised self-positioning opens up a more meaningful space to rethink the designations of "Muslim feminist" or "Islamic feminist" that are often associated with elite, middle-and upper-class women in postcolonial Muslim contexts. These activists are exposed to the core ideals of feminism, its historical struggles, and its context-dependent iterations. They are also aware of the notion of homegrown feminism, that is, that feminism is organic and its usage and application can be context-specific, and that this makes it attractive to a more diverse array of activists. However, for these women, their class positioning and the manner in which feminist and class politics plays out in an organisational setting limits the type of cross-class solidarity that can be achieved. For Iza, Nadiah, and Suhaila, the politics of naming at best simplifies their commitment to and identification with feminist principles, and may provide an aura of exclusivity. But given their social location and educational background, perhaps the politics of naming is one area that they are not interested in transcending.

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THE NATIONAL LIBERATION STRUGGLE AND ISLAMIC FEMINISMS IN SOUTH AFRICA

NA'EEM JEENAH

Abstract: In this article, I investigate the impact of the national liberation struggle on the rise of Islamic feminisms in South Africa. Muslims form less than two per cent of the population in South Africa yet their minority status has not meant their exclusion from political life, including the anti-apartheid struggle. Their involvement in 'the struggle' has had many consequences for the Muslim community including encouraging the emergence of Islamic feminist tendencies. I argue that the development of political Islam in South Africa in the 1980s and its interaction with the national liberation struggle helped give rise to Islamic feminisms that flourished from 1990 to the year 1998 when the Islamic feminist tendency began to decline.

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Keywords*:* South Africa, national liberation struggle, Islamic feminism, Muslim women, Muslim Youth Movement, Muslim personal law

Introduction

For many Muslim women (and men)–whether in minority contexts like in most of the Western world or in Muslim majority communities– the label 'feminist' is often not worn comfortably. For many of them, 'feminism' carries a specifically Western meaning with particular historical and ideological baggage. Most Muslim activists prefer not having to be accountable for such baggage. Thus, the label 'feminist' is often avoided by such activists for strategic purposes.

But Muslim activists are not the only ones expressing such concerns. Many third world feminists express similar concerns. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, for example, while

emphasising that 'I always call myself a 'feminist'', nevertheless warns that 'we must be willing to give it [the term 'feminism'] up if there is reasonable resistance to it from groups we respect (Spivak 2000, 115). Many women in Muslim societies do, however, regard themselves as part of a feminist project—even if they do not use the 'F' word. This has seen the development in parts of the Muslim world, as well as in the West, of 'Islamic feminisms', where Muslim women (and men) articulate a discourse and struggle for the establishment of women's self-worth, gender equality and the subversion of patriarchy.

But what is Islamic feminism and who is an Islamic feminist? Furthermore, what are the manifestations of this kind of feminism in South Africa? These are some of the questions this article will explore. In exploring these questions, however, I will sometimes impose the label 'feminist' on people who would not–at least publicly–call themselves feminists. Such application will, however, be based on a definition–within the South African context–of 'Islamic feminism' that I will suggest.

This article will examine how feminisms in South Africa emerged out of the national liberation struggle, arguing that the anti-apartheid Islamism that swept South Africa in the 1980s, provided the impetus for the emergence of Islamic feminisms. Thus, an important focus of this paper will be the interaction between the Islamic Movement[1] and the national liberation struggle and how such an interaction influenced Islamic feminisms. To accomplish this I will look at the manifestations of Islamic feminism in two organisations: the Call of Islam and the Muslim Youth Movement.[2]

In the interest of full disclosure and so that readers will understand the background with which I approach this topic, I need to mention that my interest, as a man, in the topic of Islamic feminisms–and especially Islamic feminisms in South Africa–is partly because of my involvement in the anti-apartheid struggle through organisations in the Muslim community and my subsequent involvement in the terrain of Islamic feminisms—particularly through the Muslim Youth Movement Gender Desk. It is noteworthy that in the South African context–particularly during the anti-apartheid struggle – it was not unusual for men to be involved in feminist struggle and it was not something that was subjected to much scrutiny. The final reason for my interest in this topic and my involvement in the struggle of women is that my partner of 10 years, Shamima Shaikh, was one of the foremost Islamic feminists in South Africa in the late 1980s and the 1990s. Being married to her, I could not but be involved in women's struggles. (The significance of this statement will be revealed in the rest of this article.) In sketching the development of feminisms in South Africa, I will refer to the following key events and 'moments':

- 2 February 1990: Unbanning of South African liberation movements
- January 1990: Malibongwe Conference—heralded as the beginning of a feminist movement in South Africa
- 1990: First woman to be elected to MYM National Executive
- 1990: MYM adopts 'Women's Rights Campaign'
- August 1990: Relaunch of the ANC Women's League
- December 1991: CODESA [Convention for A Democratic South Africa] I (see p. 12)
- March 1992: CODESA II
- 1992: Launch of Women's National Coalition
- 1993: Muslim Youth Movement women in mosque campaign in Johannesburg
- 1993: Formation of the Muslim Youth Movement Gender Desk
- 1994: Women's National Coalition unveils its 'Women's Charter for Effective Equality'
- April 1994: ANC initiates task team to form representative body of Muslims to examine the possibility of Muslim Personal Law (MPL) legislation
- April 1994: South Africa's first democratic election in which a record number of women were elected to national and provincial parliaments
- August 1994: Launch of MPL Board
- April 1995: MPL Board shut down by United Ulama Council of South Africa
- 1996: Rylands vs. Edros court case results in limited recognition of Muslim marriages
- 1997–1998: Controversy of Radio Islam not allowing women's voices on air
- January 1998: Funeral of Shamima Shaikh
- 1999: Appointment of Muslim Marriages Project Team of the South African Law Commission

- 2000: Formation of Shura Yabafazi.

Not Everyone's Feminism

The dominant expression of feminism–Western feminism[3]–has come under much criticism from gender equality activists in the South, particularly for the assumption that underlay much of Western feminist theory which homogenised the oppression and the struggles of women throughout the Third World (Mohanty 1991b). Joanna Hicks (2000) writes about this when she critiques the approach of Western feminists from the perspective of women of the South:
[T]he enunciation of the foundations of the women's movement and feminist ideology within the industrialised world has been dominated by white, middleclass women. These women often un-reflexively set forth their concerns within their societal context as most important, uncritically use their culture's norms to judge others, and finally, leave unexamined their positions of privilege as citizens of formerly colonialist and, in many cases, neo-colonialist countries. Although these feminists, who try to help women in the 'Third World' liberate themselves, might be well intentioned, they still bring their own ethnocentric and racist assumptions along with their trenchant critiques of patriarchy in the deployment of context insensitive feminism (Hicks, 2000, http://www2.soc.hawaii.edu/css/dept/owr/Joanna.html).

Hicks' critique of Western feminism is not unique. Her thoughts on this matter are common to many expressions of what is often called 'Third World feminism'. This criticism is also articulated eloquently by women in the South like Desiree Lewis (1993) and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991a, 1991b). Many Third World women have criticised feminist movements (in the West) "on the grounds of cultural imperialism, and of short-sightedness in defining the meaning of gender in terms of middle class, white experiences, and in terms of internal racism, classism and homophobia" (Mohanty 1991a, 7).

Despite such criticism, most Third World feminists prefer to redefine the term feminist and use it for themselves, rather than to change the terminology (Schussler Fiorenza 1992, 8). Others 'have always engaged with feminism, even if the label is rejected in many instances' (Mohanty 1991a, 7). An example of this latter trend as described by Mohanty is Indian women's rights activist Madhu Kishwar, editor of the women's magazine *Manushi*, which is regarded as a beacon of Indian feminism. She explicitly states that she is not a feminist

(Kishwar 1990). This kind of criticism of Western feminism is also present in Muslim discourses about gender equality and many Muslim women, like Kishwar, opt to engage with feminism but reject the label.

Muslim women activists also critique Western feminism for a range of other reasons. For Azizah al-Hibri (cited in Fernea 1998, 388), the homogenisation that some Western feminists apply to women is problematic. As Badran (1999) points out, amina wadud, whose writings have been inspirational to Islamic feminists in South Africa and around the world, has only recently started calling herself a feminist. Talking about those who approach the issues of women's equality in Islam from 'feminist ideals and rationales', wadud says that although they are often concerned with 'valid issues', they would sometimes 'vindicate the position of women on grounds entirely incongruous with the Qur'anic position on women' (Wadud-Muhsin 1992, 2). Elsewhere, she says she 'gets tired' of:

[T]he ideas that come to us in so-called global dialogue. Most of that discourse suggests that we should put religion aside so we can get real women's problems on the table. As Muslims we can't do that, religion is the base. . . I can't separate religion from my identity. It's just not possible (cited in Fernea 1998, 403).

Similar concerns exist among South African Muslim women. Sa'diyya Shaikh interviewed a range of women in Cape Town, 'from those who called themselves religiously "conservative", to those that considered themselves "progressive and modernist" Muslims'. In these interviews:

Some progressive women indicated that while there were problems which all women had in common, Western women had their own yardstick for measuring freedom which was not necessarily the same for Muslim women (Shaikh 1996, 34).

Having noted the above criticisms of Western feminism, I believe that Muslims can reclaim the word 'feminism' so that it might be used on their own terms. Such an exercise would require a redefinition of the term and the addition of the qualifier 'Islamic'.

An Oxymoron?

Can there be such a thing as 'Islamic feminism' or is it a contradiction in terms? For many people, the term would seem an oxymoron. Some view women under Taliban rule, media images in movies and the controversy over Muslim school girls wearing headscarves in France, as examples that create a perception of Islam as inherently oppressive to women.

Thus, the idea of a movement for women's liberation having the qualifier 'Islamic' might seem strange. For many Muslims, the term seems to be an attempt to use Islamic texts and symbols in the cause of Westernism, and it would, therefore, be rejected. Expressing such concern, Al Hibri, referring to the Sisterhood in Global Institute, says it 'adopt[s] religious discourse–including Qur'anic verses–as a tool to achieve secular goals' (cited in Fernea 1998, 396).

What then are the possibilities for defining 'Islamic feminism' in a way that takes it beyond being 'a tool to achieve secular goals'? Since even the meaning of 'feminism' is contested, defining Islamic feminism should begin with an understanding of feminism. Margot Badran's (1996) description of feminism is useful in this instance. Discussing feminisms in Egypt, she refers to:

Women's coming into an awareness that being born female meant that they would lead their lives very differently from those of similar classes and circumstances who were born male. I refer to women's questioning *why* this was so, under what authority and what they started to do about it. The *why* was the beginning of an analysis of patriarchy—that is, the power that men had accorded themselves, irrespective of class, to make rules and to impose their rules on women to keep them subordinate. The *what* was feminism– ideas and actions expressed individually and collectively about personal life, family life, societal life; . . . in short, about being a woman in its totality and plurality of meanings–about gender and power (Badran 1996, 3).

Taking this as an adequate understanding of feminism, the question is: what makes 'Islamic feminism' different. Lamya' al-Faruqi (1988) attempts to define Islamic feminism by discussing the elements within Islam that make it different from Western feminisms and which feminist movements must understand in order for the cooperation between feminism and Islam. The first of the three points she makes in arguing that Islamic feminism can exist is that it would be an ideology where the Qur'an and the life example of Prophet Muhammad (the Sunnah) would represent the ideal for women. Asifa Quraishi is more forthright about using the term Islamic feminism; she does not regard it as an oxymoron or as illusionary. 'Islam holds the potential for a really vibrant kind of feminism. The basis of egalitarianism is there in the Qur'an,' she insists (cited in Fernea 1998, 378)

For Shamima Shaikh, '[t]he Muslim feminist looks to the Qur'an and the Prophet as a force for liberation (Shaikh 1997). And while the Call of Islam called on Muslims in the 1980s to 'unleash a debate on the question of women so that equality and freedom become achievable,' it added that '[t]his debate need not depart from the pages of the Qur'an'

(Esack 1997, 223). For Islamic feminists, keep Islamic sources (the Qur'an and Sunnah) used in the service of their feminism or does it flow from it? Shamima Shaikh (1994) says: I am often asked by people who are not Muslim why I do what I do; why struggle for the rights of women—and particularly Muslim women. What happened in my past that drove me to this? The answer is simple: we respond to the injunction of the Qur'an to 'enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong', as we did when faced with the terrible injustices of apartheid and oppression on the basis of race and class (Shaikh 1994).

Following the perspectives of al-Faruqi, Quraishi and Shaikh, I propose a definition of Islamic feminism for the purposes of this article. Islamic feminism is, firstly, an ideology which uses the Qur'an and Sunnah to provide the ideals for gender relationships, as well as the weapons in the struggle to transform society in a way that gender equality is accepted as a principle around which society is structured. Secondly, it is the struggle of Muslim women and men for the emancipation of women based on this ideology.

Such an approach does two important things. In the first place, it applies a qualifier to the understanding of feminism in that the principles of the feminism that it refers to, and the inspiration for it, are rooted in Islamic scripture. Secondly, while Shamima Shaikh (1997) says that 'Islam is a force of empowerment rather than of disempowerment', Islam has been used for the disempowerment of women as well. This approach then brings into sharp focus the issue of interpretation of Islamic scriptures. Islamic feminists seek to read scriptures on the basis of a liberatory theology of justice. 'It was not the text which restricted women', says Wadud-Muhsin, 'but the interpretations of that text which have come to be held in greater importance than the text itself' (Wadud-Muhsin 1992, vi). Her work seeks to review the Qur'an 'with its principles of social justice and human equality, and its objective of guidance.'

As with all religious scriptures, however, the principles of social justice and human equality are not always pre-eminent in the interpretations of those scriptures. Indeed, interpretive texts of the Qur'an are littered with misogynistic notions of men's superiority, gender roles and various restrictions on the movement and activities of women (Esack 2001; Majlisul-Ulema undated; Sa'diyya Shaikh 1996).

Feminism in South Africa in the 1990s

Many South African feminist scholars argue that there was no feminist movement in South Africa until the beginning of the 1990s (Meintjies 1996, 49). Others suggest that a feminist

movement did exist— although not self-consciously. The Malibongwe Conference in January 1990 in the Netherlands–2 weeks before the unbanning of South Africa's liberation movements by the Apartheid government–which brought together women from within and without South Africa for the first time, is heralded by many as the beginning of the emergence of feminism or a feminist movement in South Africa (Albertyn, Goldblatt, Hassim, Mbatha, & Meintjies 1999; Charman, de Swardt, & Simons 1991; Hassim, 1991; Meintjies 1996).

The 1980s saw the development of strong women's organisations like the United Women's Organisation, the Natal Organisation of Women and the Federation of Transvaal Women. This was also a period of increased anti-apartheid resistance and women emerged as a powerful force fighting around bread and butter issues. However, the relationships between class, race and gender were then only seriously explored in the trade union movement. The increased role of women as political actors generated new political debates about the possible transformation of political organisations so that they might take account of women's interests and facilitate women's participation. Thus, the Malibongwe conference was opportune. It 'legitimated feminism as a political discourse' (Albertyn et al., 1999: 10) and 'the position and status of women were legitimated as political issues to be addressed within the process of national liberation' (Charman et al., 1991: 40). An important aspect of the conference was the networking between South African women and women from other countries: Palestine, Mozambique, Angola, for example.[4]

Hassim's prediction, that the political transitionary period to follow Malibongwe would provide the space for a feminist movement to emerge (Hassim 1991), was proven to be true soon after the unbanning of the liberation movements. Four months after the Malibongwe conference, the ANC issued a landmark policy statement on women's emancipation (African National Congress 1990). For the first time in the liberation struggle, an official position from a section of the liberation movement acknowledged the centrality of gender equality to national liberation and its role in a future constitution. The document also called on the ANC Women's League to initiate a debate that would result in a 'Charter of Women's Rights'. This call led to the establishment of the multi-party and multi-organisational Women's National Coalition (WNC). The WNC was a broad front of women from across the racial, political, cultural and religious divides for the singular purpose of ensuring equality for women in the new constitution. It 'helped to bring [gender equality] directly into the mainstream of public discourse at a critical political moment— that of negotiating the new democracy' (Albertyn et al. 1999: 12). But it also served as a platform on which to mobilise women and women's organisations for gender equality. By

1994, when it presented its 'Women's Charter for Effective Equality' to a Women's Convention, the WNC had 90 national organisations and 14 regional coalitions as its members (Meintjies 1996).

Besides women being organised in the WNC, the various negotiation processes leading up to democratic elections in April 1994 also saw increased women's involvement. In December 1991, when the first plenary session of the multi-party negotiating forum called the Convention for a Democratic South Africa met (which was later referred to as CODESA I), women were excluded virtually completely; only 5% of the delegates were women. By CODESA II, there was a symbolic feminist victory with the formation of the multi-party Gender Advisory Committee (GAC) as a result of pressure by the ANC Women's League (ANCWL). The ANCWL's policy section also made inputs into the terms of reference of the CODESA working groups and into ANC positions in the negotiations. As well, the GAC allowed civil society gender activists and academics to get involved with the process. Women had even more impact in the second round of negotiations as they were included in all negotiating teams in the Multiparty Negotiating Process (MPNP) which was the new negotiating forum formed after the collapse of CODESA II. The WNC too was involved in the MPNP. The end of the negotiating processes saw the adoption of the Interim Constitution which was widely recognised as having tremendously advanced the cause of gender equality. The rest of the decade was witness to even more political gains being made as women were included in large numbers on party election lists (albeit still not in terms of their demographic proportion) and the strengthening of the 'triple alliance' of women politicians, activists and academics. (Albertyn et al. 1999).

The Emergence of Islamic Feminisms in the 1990s

While the Muslim scenario did not *mirror* the above national process in the emergence of feminisms—especially in terms of party politics[5], I will argue in this section that, at around the same time, there were similar developments in the emergence of Islamic feminisms. Diagram 1 illustrates some of these similarities.

Islamic feminisms of the 1990s developed out of organisations–and through individuals that had played a role in the struggle against Apartheid–notably in the 1980s. From the previous section it is clear that the development of feminisms (in general) in South Africa followed a similar path. The nationalist struggle (converging with a class struggle) in South

Africa led to the development of a strong human rights discourse among left activists and intellectuals. This then led to feminist discourses. From a Muslim perspective, the process began with an Islamist discourse influenced mainly by international Muslim politics. Islamic anti-Apartheid activists were also part of the nationalist (and class) struggle and attempted to develop Islamic discourses of this experience. These discourses, overlapping with the general human rights discourses, led to attempted Islamic discourses of human rights. These 'Islamic human rights' discourses then interfaced with the South African women's rights/feminist discourses, and were heavily influenced by international Islamic modernist discourses and international Islamic discourses on gender equality, to result in the emergence of indigenous South African feminist discourses.

The Muslim Youth Movement was established in 1970 and, since its inception, had dealt with a number of issues that might be regarded as elements of a women's agenda—although the organisation did not have a coherent women's agenda at the time. Addressing these issues often brought the organisation into conflict with the clergy. These elements included inviting foreign women guests for speaking tours; establishing a Women's Council; campaigning for women to be allowed spaces in mosques and attempting to form a 'Women's Islamic Movement'. The 'women in mosques' campaign attracted the most vitriolic response from the Muslim clergy, the ulama.[6] This campaign was one the organisation

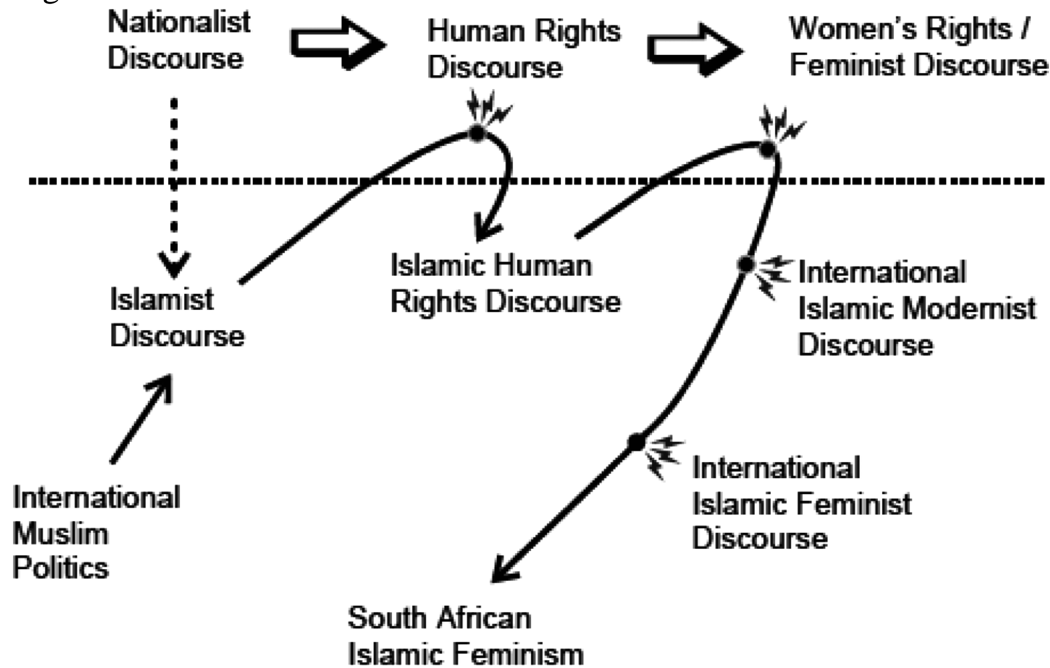

Diagram 1.

took up mainly in the Natal and Transvaal provinces (as they were called at the time) where virtually no mosques had any facilities for women. The MYM agitated for mosques to provide such facilities and attempted to encourage women to attend mosques where these facilities existed. Abdulkader Tayob (1995: 117) argues that in that period the MYM believed in a 'parallel development' of women within society, implying that women and men should have separate spheres within which they operated. The 'Women's Islamic Movement' was an attempt to entrench this separation. Such separation was also evident at most major MYM programmes until the mid-1980s.

The issue of women's leadership has been for centuries a thorny issue in Muslim discourse. Mainstream positions on it have ranged from the view that women could not be heads of state to the view that women could not hold any leadership position. The issue also posed a dilemma for the MYM. While the MYM's student wing, the Muslim Students Association (MSA), elected two women to its National Executive in 1984 (Muslim Students Association 1984), the MYM elected a woman to its National Executive only in 1990. Fatima Noordien became the first woman to become a member of the MYM's National Executive when the 1990 General Assembly decided to include regional chairpersons on the National Executive (Muslim Youth Movement 1990b). Noordien had just been elected Western Cape regional chairperson. This followed about 4 years of debate about the level of leadership that women could occupy. Noordien herself had taken a frontline position in this debate, arguing that there should be no restriction to women's leadership (Tayob 1995). Despite Tayob's correct criticisms, the MYM had remained–until about 1984–the most progressive Muslim organisation in the country as far as a discourse of Islam and women's rights issues was concerned.

In 1993, four MYM members broke away to form 'Muslims Against Oppression', an organisation which changed its name a year later to 'Call of Islam'. Farid Esack, Ebrahim Rasool, Adli Jacobs and Shamiel Manie left the MYM when they did not succeed in convincing it and the MSA to affiliate to the ANC aligned United Democratic Front (UDF). From 1984, until the late 1980s, the Call captured the role of being in the forefront of the articulation of women's rights among Muslim groups. One of the early Call brochures (undated, but circa 1984) had 'On Women' as the first point under the heading 'What is our line': We believe in the equality of men and women and in the liberation of the Muslim woman from legacies pertaining to the period of Muslim decline. We believe that our country will never be free until its women are also free from oppressive social norms (Call of Islam circa 1984, 2).

By the late 1980s, the MYM had rethought many elements of its theology and ideology, and began expressing ideas about the 'equality' of women and men. The debate about women's leadership had begun and the accession to national leadership of Abdur Rashid Omar (as president) and Ebrahim Moosa (as Director) (Tayob 1995), with their ideas of the contextualisation of scripture, began a new phase in the history of the organisation. That notion of reinterpreting scriptures for new contexts played down old, classical interpretations and opened the door for later feminist interpretations. Increased political activity, inter- faith relations and women's rights became among the most important issues on the MYM's agenda (Tayob 1995). The organisation's emphasis on women's rights was both a continuation and development of its previous commitment and an attempt to address the issues of the day. In a sense also, the MYM followed the lead of the Call of Islam, as far as these three issues were concerned.

On the other hand, by 1989, the Call had begun to somewhat downplay its message of gender equality. This was due to two reasons. Firstly, in its efforts to draw in the 'ulama into the liberation struggle, the Call was willing to compromise on some of its positions that were unpalatable to conservative Islam. One of these was women's equality. Secondly, while the Call began as an Islamic organisation attempting to develop a comprehensive Islamic programme, its focus soon became political activity, and for the sake of mobilising support for the national liberation struggle, compromises had to be made. The woman agenda was one of those. In this respect the Call mirrored the strategy of its political mentor organisation, the ANC. Hassim points to the August 1990 relaunch of the ANCWL as a 'depressing affair for feminists' and argues that 'the priority for the Women's League remains organising women for national liberation' (Hassim 1991, 67). She also talks about the 'macho nature of politics' in which the UDF was involved in the 1980s (Hassim 1991, 68). Another woman, Patricia Horn (1991) laments that women's [F]ear of creating divisions in the national liberation struggle has led to the development of a women's movement which is afraid of seriously challenging patriarchal domination. This timidity comes through in the general avoidance within the mass women's movement of strategic gender interests (Horn 1991, 37).

The positions and activities of both the MYM and the Call had given Muslim women a greater sense of assertiveness. An example was at a 1988 conference organised by these organisations when a 'women's caucus'–led by veteran anti-apartheid activist Fatima Meer–resolved to 'disarm' the 'ulama organisations and called for a number of actions to support the struggles of Muslim women (Campaign for Muslim Awareness, 1988).

In 1990, the MYM adopted a 'Women's Rights Campaign' as one of its three national campaigns.[7] While the campaign was in some senses a not-unexpected development, after the focus the organisation had placed on women's issues in the past few years and the increasing assertiveness of women in the organisation, it was also an attempt to remain relevant and address the issues of the day that defined progressiveness. Since a women's rights discourse was being articulated strongly within the liberation movement, it was appropriate that the MYM also took up such a campaign. 'The problem of emancipating women', notes a campaign brochure, 'is to change the overall relationship between male and female' (Muslim Youth Movement 1990a, 3). The brochure lists as one of its objectives: 'To examine the various verses in the Qur'an that contain "both the potential for oppression and liberation" of women and look at exploiting the latter' (p. 2). It lists 14 issues 'in which women are unjustly treated', including 'women in mosques', 'Muslim personal law' and 'women's leadership'. For the next 3 years, however, the campaign did not have a national character but was taken up in an ad-hoc manner.

In Transvaal the focus became the 'women in mosques' issue. However, unlike in the past when the MYM contented itself with speaking and writing pamphlets about the issue, and when the issue of women's presence in mosques was taken up by the men, MYM women now decided on a more confrontational approach. The new approach reflected the presence and role of more assertive and confident women in the organisation, women who had by now decided that they could take their own positions, develop their own strategies and prosecute their own struggles—and the men could join in if they wanted to. It was also an approach that required more mobilisation, and mobilising was a skill that MYM activists had learnt well, through political activity in the 1980s. Just before the Muslim month of Ramadan in 1993, MYM female activists anonymously printed pamphlets calling on women to attend the Tarawih prayer daily at the 23rd Street Mosque in Fietas, Johannesburg. The pamphlets were distributed at shopping centres and reflected 1980s-type political activity through door-to-door visits. While some MYM male leaders initially distanced themselves from the campaign, it led to the MYM's General Assembly deciding later that year to form the MYM Gender Desk, with Shaikh as its national coordinator. The change of mind for the men was due partly to their coming round to the idea that the gender agenda was enough of a principled issue that they could not be soft on it, and partly because–despite the men–the women and their women's rights campaigns had gained the MYM a lot of media coverage and respect in the broader South African society Women's defiance of the mosque committee, and the committee's almost violent responses to it, drew much media attention— especially for the leader of the campaign, Shamima Shaikh, a rising star in the MYM.

The Gender Desk was represented on the National Executive of the organisation by its National Coordinator and became effective in promoting gender equality and the agenda of Islamic feminism. Yet the Desk never claimed for itself the title of 'feminist'. The first time that Shaikh publicly applied the label 'feminist' to herself was 3 weeks before her death when, at an MYM training programme, she included herself among those she referred to as 'Muslim feminists' (Shamima Shaikh 1997, http://www.shams.za.org/itppaper.htm). Female and male members of the organisation from all over the country identified with the agenda of the Desk which included an education programme (including seminars, workshops and the distribution of publications) around its Islamic feminist agenda; campaigns (including the attempt to get Muslim women 'equal access' in mosques and the campaign for a 'Just Muslim Personal Law'); networking with Muslim women's organisations—even those without the same feminist agenda, and publicity and lobbying for Muslim women's rights (Muslim Youth Movement Gender Desk undated).

The Islamic feminism of the 1990s was influenced in part by the writings of foreign Islamic feminists like Amina Wadud-Muhsin (1992), Fatima Mernissi (1991) and Leila Ahmed (1992). Wadud-Muhsin's feminist hermeneutic of the Qur'an, and Mernissi's hermeneutic of suspicion in approaching the Hadith, were especially effectively employed by South African Islamic feminists to argue for a discourse of gender equality. But the assertive national feminist discourse also played its role. Both the MYM Gender Desk and the Call became members of the WNC (Shaikh undated) and promoted the Women's Charter idea within the Muslim community through workshops, al-Qalam–the newspaper of the MYM–and other forums.

The Private and the Public

Activities in the 1990s that highlight the feminist agendas of the MYM Gender Desk and the Call of Islam cover both the public and the private domains. The mosque campaign was representative of the attempt to claim space for women in the Muslim public domain, while the Muslim Personal Law campaign (the 'Campaign for a Just Muslim Personal Law', as the Gender Desk calls it) sought to improve the private lives of Muslim women. Hassim (1991) explains the need to examine both of these domains:

The political identities of women and of men are constituted through different relationships with the public and private spheres. Patriarchy forms a barrier between these two spheres, a barrier which feminism attempts to break down. Women are defined primarily in relation to their location within the private sphere, roles defined in terms of the family. For men, it

is the public role outside the family which is emphasised. The western political tradition has tended to limit its concept of "politics" to the public realm, thus marginalising women. A wide range of issues, such as child care, family violence, which directly relate to the private sphere, are thereby excluded from "serious" political debate, being labelled "moral" concerns. However, women's material and social location rooted in the "private", has deeper implications, shaping the very way in which they view politics (Hassim 1991, 73).

I have already covered the 23rd Street Mosque controversy which led to the formation of the MYM Gender Desk. Soon after that controversy, the MYM altered its language to call not for 'space in mosques' for Muslim women, but to demand 'equal access to mosques'. Shamima Shaikh (1996:2) claimed that this expression was introduced into Muslim discourse by the Gender Desk. This was a significant shift; 'equal access' implied that women and men should share the (same) main space in the mosque rather than the genders occupying different spaces—with women usually being relegated to a secondary space. The struggle for equal space became victorious in at least one case: at the Claremont Main Road Mosque in Cape Town.

Islamic feminist scholar and activist, amina wadud, visited South Africa in 1994, 4 months after South Africa's first democratic election. During her national speaking tour she delivered a Friday pre-sermon lecture at the Claremont Main Road Mosque. This was the first time in South Africa that a woman had delivered the Friday talk (al-Qalam 1994a, 1–2; al-Qalam 1994b, 2). (The pre-sermon lecture is an innovation in non-Arab Muslim societies where it plays the role of the sermon, admonishing the audience and analysing the events of the week. Indeed, some scholars argue that the sermon (or khutbah) is the Friday prayer.) wadud (in the press) subsequently criticised the episode, saying that she, as a woman, was again marginalised because most progressive Muslims involved with organising the lecture were more concerned with the fact of a woman speaking than with the content of her lecture.[8] wadud's lecture sparked an international controversy and resulted in violent responses in Cape Town. She was subsequently prevented from speaking at another engagement (al-Qalam 1994c, p. 2), and 6 months later, the mosque was picketed by members of the Muslim Judicial Council who physically prevented worshippers from entering the mosque for its Annual General Meeting. Some worshippers complained that they had been physically and verbally abused (al-Qalam 1995). wadud's courageous lecture set the scene for women to speak at the Friday prayer. It is now commonplace for women to speak on Fridays, both at the Claremont Main Road Mosque, as well as at Masjidul Islam in Johannesburg. The event was thus precedent-setting; it pushed the limits of Muslim women's participation in the Muslim public domain and it gave Muslim women

a voice in the most important Muslim institution—the mosque. In most mosques in South Africa women are not even allowed to attend the prayer, let alone being allowed to speak.[9] And in mosques where they are allowed, they are generally shunted to a gallery or basement section. The day that wadud gave the lecture was also symbolic, in that it was the first time that women had ‘equal access’ in a mosque in South Africa— women began praying in the main section of the Claremont Main Road Mosque from that day on. The incident was positively commented on by many important Muslim scholars (Esack 1994; Hathout 1994; Magardie 1994; Shaikh 1994; Tayob 1994), and the progressive Muslim monthly, *al-Qalam*, published wadud’s entire sermon (wadud 1994).

At the same time that the Claremont Main Road Mosque story was making news about women claiming their space in the public domain, another development was taking place which affected Muslim women very directly in the private domain, in the sphere of life where patriarchy thrives. This development–which assisted the development of Islamic feminism in South Africa–was the Campaign for a Just Muslim Personal Law (MPL). The apartheid government had attempted on many occasions– particularly in the 1980s–to woo the Muslim community with promises of the recognition of MPL. This was significant for a community whose marriages were not recognised as legal by the state and many of whose children were therefore illegitimate in terms of South African law. Such attempts, however, were continually opposed and thwarted by progressive Muslims, particularly the MYM. Progressive Muslims in the 1980s viewed any handout by the apartheid state as attempts at co-option into state structures. The 1980s were characterised by such attempts by the state to attract Black support: the Tri-cameral parliament; the Bantustan policy; the legal recognition of registered trade unions[10]; among others. MPL was regarded as one of these tools of co-option and was therefore rejected by progressives.

In April 1994–before South Africa’s first democratic election–the ANC began a process to establish a representative body of Muslims to look at MPL (Kathrada 1994). Thus, the Muslim Personal Law Board (MPLB) was launched in August 1994 with eight founding members: the Call of Islam, the MYM and six clergy organisations (Muslim Personal Law Board 1994). In less than a year, the Board was unilaterally closed down by the five clergy organisations that constituted the United Ulama Council of South Africa (UUCSA) (M. S. Omar 1995). The closure followed a period of intense organisation and mobilisation by the MYM Gender Desk and the Call. The last Board meeting was characterised by organising and debating techniques that these two organisations brought from their legacy in the national liberation struggle. The Gender Desk also mobilised women who were not members of the Board to attend the meeting as observers. These women walked out of the

meeting in frustration at the refusal by the Board's president, Shaikh Nazeem Muhammad, to allow them to speak, and at his malicious 'presidential decree' that women had to wear headscarves to the meeting (al-Qalam 1995, p. 2). Also, the MYM's involvement in the MPLB was firmly taken charge of by its Gender Desk rather than by its National Executive. The MYM's representative on the Board executive was theologian-academic Maulana Ebrahim Moosa. Yet, because the MYM had decided that MPL was a campaign to be driven by its Gender Desk, he–a former deputy president of the MYM– reported to the Gender Desk rather than to the National Executive. Other MYM, MPLB members–including the organisation's president and general secretary–were also accountable to the Gender Desk through its National Coordinator. The Gender Desk's main legal mind on MPL–Soraya Bosch– was also an advisor on legal aspects of MPL to Moosa and so influenced his academic writings on the subject. The Call's Fatima Hujjaij, a woman, was elected as a vice-president of the Board at a time when the clergy were refusing, on other occasions, to sit in the same meetings with women. The clergy members were also forced to accept that women would be represented on the Board 'as women' rather than only through their organisations. After the collapse of the Board the Gender Desk continued with its 'Campaign for a Just Muslim Personal Law'.

The continuation of that campaign saw the Desk shift its focus to attempting to influence Muslim experience of family law through the courts. One view within the MYM was that MPL should not receive more than minimal acknowledgement by the state, in that only Muslim marriages should be recognised. This, it was argued, would afford better protection to women because the civil courts were seen as more trustworthy than clergy organisations in safeguarding women's rights. Bosch, as a lawyer with the legal aid clinic at the University of Cape Town, represented Thoerayah Rylands in the Rylands vs. Edros case in the Cape Town provincial court in 1996. Rylands sued her ex-husband for a range of maintenance and other benefits after he had divorced her. The decision of the court[11] was a limited victory for Islamic feminists, because although Rylands was not awarded all that Bosch had hoped for (such as an 'equitable' share of the estate), she was awarded benefits that went beyond what the clergy would normally agree to award: arrears maintenance and a conciliatory gift. Furthermore, although the marriage in question was illegal in that it was only performed according to Muslim rites, the court nevertheless recognised it as a legal contract and so allowing other aggrieved Muslim women the option of using the courts to obtain justice in the case of divorces.

The issue of MPL also afforded Islamic feminists another voice, a voice in the national rights discourse. Members of the MYM Gender Desk represented the organisation at

various Constitutional Assembly hearings to put forward the idea of a 'Just MPL'. The stark contrast between the feminist and conservative positions is well illustrated by the debates around the clause on religious systems of family law in the Interim Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. Members of the UUCSA argued that this clause and the clause on freedom of religion should be allowed to trump other clauses in the Bill of Rights. Their main concern seemed to be that the Equality Clause might be used to interfere in their interpretation of MPL. Islamic feminists, on the other hand, argued that MPL was consistent with gender equality and there was no need for any such exemption. It must be noted that their passionate defence of the constitution and its equality clause was not motivated only by their Islamic ideology. These anti-apartheid activists were defending a document for which they believed they had struggled for decades and which encapsulated the achievements of that struggle. Interviewed by *al-Qalam* (1993), Shamima Shaikh, echoing the views of progressive Muslims throughout the country, argued that customary and religious family law "cannot be exempted from the Bill of Rights and be allowed to perpetuate inequalities. To even consider excluding any sector of society from being covered by the Bill of Rights is an injustice and makes a mockery of the Bill" (*al-Qalam* 1993, 1). Hujjaij responded that she recognised the "absolute equality of men and women as sanctioned by the Qur'an" (*al-Qalam* 1993, 1). Bosch pleaded for a review of Islamic law to bring it into line with the transformation taking place in the country and with constitutional provisions (*al-Qalam* 1993, 1). For Islamic feminists, the positive outcome of the anti-apartheid jihad had become a terrain for the 'gender jihad[12]', as they began referring to it.

In conclusion, it might be noted that no interaction results in only a one-way transfer of knowledge. Indeed, some Islamic feminists would argue that the Islamic feminist discourse was also active in the national scene and was not just a passive recipient. Esack (2000)–a former member of the Commission on Gender Equality–suggests (perhaps somewhat superciliously) that his efforts were probably responsible for the insertion of–or, at least, for the 'widest coverage' of–the phrase 'non-sexist' in the ANC call for a 'non-racist, non-sexist democratic South Africa' in the 1980s.[13]

Same Struggles, Different Struggles?

The above discussion suggests that the intersection with the national struggle did not have uniform results on the progressive Islamic Movement. Other factors also intervened, including people's political and Islamic backgrounds, and their gender. In particular, four groups of people responded differently to Islamic feminist challenges: women who enter

from a background in the liberation movement; men who enter from a background in the liberation movement; women who enter from a background in the Islamic movement; men who enter from a background in the Islamic movement. (Diagram 2 illustrates these groups.)

Soraya Bosch and Shamima Shaikh were two of the main proponents in the MYM's articulation of feminism. Interestingly, although both were committed Muslims, their entry into the Islamic Movement was through nationalist liberation organisations. Bosch was a member of the Gender Desk of the ANC-aligned National Association of Democratic Lawyers before she was recruited to the MYM and its Gender Desk, joining the organisation to work on its Just Muslim Personal Law campaign, as a legal expert. She entered the MYM with experience obtained from a professional association that was anti-apartheid and in the ANC's Congress tradition. This experience included ways of working, strategising and even understanding of concepts like negotiation, compromise and principles. Shaikh had been an activist with the Black Consciousness organisation, the Azanian Peoples Organisation, since her student days. She joined the MYM about 5 years after having already been involved in the heat of struggle during the MYM's anti-apartheid activities, feeling comfortable with an Islamic articulation of the struggle against apartheid. She, then, also came to the Islamic Movement with her own political baggage. Most of the earlier female MYM activists had been schooled in politics, organisation and struggle within the Islamic Movement. Many of these women often followed the feminist-type prodding of the influential men in the organisation–like Ebrahim Moosa and Rashied Omar–and looked to these men for leadership and for their understandings of women's rights in Islam. The feminist tendencies of these men derived from their newly adopted project of reinterpreting Islamic scripture and contextualising Islam. By contrast, Bosch and Shaikh insisted–as seen in the MPL Board case–that as women, it was their right to take the lead as far as women's issues were concerned

The members of the Call were somewhat different in their backgrounds to the members of the MYM. The Call, as mentioned earlier, was formed by MYM members who broke away from that organisation. The original four that broke away–Esack, Rasool, Jacobs and Manie–were based in Cape Town where the Call started and where its initial ideology was shaped. They–all male–were schooled in the Islamic Movement in the form of the MYM and then entered the national liberation struggle with their particular understandings of principles, strategies and negotiations shaped by the Islamic Movement dynamic. The Call's initial forthright positions on women's rights were drafted by this group led by Esack. This was the period in which–as I have argued above–the Call took the women's

rights initiative away from the MYM. By the late 1980s, as the Call grew, it began developing a group of members in Johannesburg. Most of these (mostly male) members entered the Islamic Movement (the Call) with a background of involvement in the national struggle. They were mostly members of the ANC-aligned Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC) and the UDF. They, then, as with the other three groups mentioned above, entered their new ideological homes with their peculiar political and organisational baggage. While many of these men were politically fairly radical in their anti-apartheid stances, they were theologically conservative. They did not have the benefit of the radical Islamic schooling

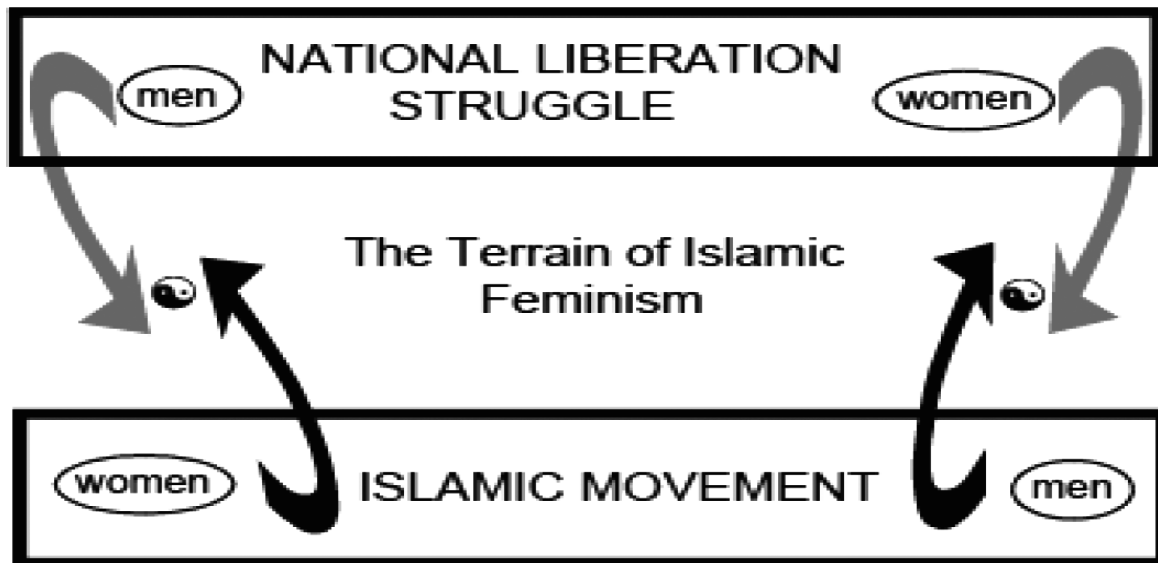

Diagram 2.

that their Cape colleagues had attained through their involvement in the MYM.

While in the MYM the group of women and the notion of women's agency represented by Bosch and Shaikh had achieved ascendancy in the 1990s, the Call's two groups (the Islamic Movement-schooled and the Congress movement-schooled men) existed side-by-side. Two examples of exchanges between Call and MYM members will illustrate the differences in the articulation of Islamic feminism that resulted from the different ideological starting points and the different genders of the protagonists. Both relate to the issue of women in the Muslim public domain.

The day before the launch of the Muslim Personal Law Board in Durban, the leadership of the Call and the MYM met to discuss the possibility of a merger between the organisations. Such an initiative was important for progressive Muslims, especially since–at about the same time–the six clergy founding members of the MPLB had united to form the United Ulama Council of South Africa in order to have a bloc against the two progressive organisations. Thus, the imperative of the merging of the Call and MYM became more critical. In September 1994, within 2 weeks of that merger exploratory meeting, the National Chairperson of the Call, Johannesburg-based Yusuf Saloojee, informed me that the proposed merger would "never take place". The Call had made this decision, he said, following the Claremont Main Road Mosque incident with Wadud where the MYM gave its full organisational and media backing to the mosque in the face of violent ideological and physical opposition. This had proved to the Call (or rather, to the Johannesburg Call) that the MYM was–in Saloojee's words–"ultra-radical and ultra- leftist". That signalled the end of the merger talks. Call members in Cape Town (Ebrahim Rasool, Rosieda Shabodien and, by now, ex-member Esack), whose background was more Islamic Movement (as noted above), had supported the mosque and the MYM.

Another example occurred in Ramadan of 1997 in Johannesburg at the Masjidul Islam, a mosque whose ex-coordinator, Iqbal Jhazbhay, is generally regarded as being progressive. Jhazbhay, a Call member at the time, was the coordinator of the mosque for the first 4 years of its existence. On the fourth Sunday in Ramadan, during a lecture at the mosque after the noon prayer, the sound system in the (upstairs) women's section broke down. Two MYM female members, Shamima Shaikh and Jennifer A'isha Roberts, entered the men's section of the mosque to listen to the rest of the lecture. Roberts was another woman whose entry into the Islamic Movement came through the National Liberation Struggle: she had been an activist in the National Union of South African Students. Their action resulted in a confrontation outside the mosque the following Friday between, on the one hand, Shaikh and Roberts, and on the other, the mosque chairperson Akhtar Thokan, Jhazbhay and Call member Muhammad Dangor, who was also an ANC member of the Gauteng provincial parliament (now based in the South African embassy in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia).[14]

According to Roberts, Dangor was the 'least progressive' of the three men. He had angered Shaikh with his accusation that she had "taken the women's struggle 20 years back". He was suggesting that the confrontational approach that Shaikh had taken, alienated the women's rights cause from the community, and made it more difficult to achieve any gains. "As if he knows anything about the women's struggle," she later retorted angrily.[15] Jhazbhay kept insisting that the altering of gendered space in the mosque must be a slow

process so as not to upset "the community". This was 2 years after members of the Call in Cape Town had already exposed themselves to violent retaliation by supporting the Claremont Main Road Mosque. A year later, on the 8 January 1998–the day of Shaikh's death– women were officially allowed to pray in the main section of Masjidul Islam for the first time. Before the funeral prayer Thokan approached me, and informed me that he had instructed Jhazbhay to direct the women to pray in the main section because: "We must set a precedent". For the rest of that month, two women who decided to follow through on the "precedent" and pray in the main section of the mosque were begged not to and harassed by Jhazbhay.[16]

The difference in understanding of Islamic feminism between these two groups–one male and one female, but both of which entered the Islamic movement with the experience of the national struggle–can be symbolised by the world (representing the national domain) and the mosque (representing the Muslim domain). It was as if the women had the world and were trying to find their space in the mosque. The men, however, had the world and the mosque; they were willing to share the world but were afraid that if they shared the mosque they would lose the world. Those men's main concern was not the feminist struggle that the women were waging, but the result of that struggle on their national agendas. Furthermore, having women as partners in a national struggle was somehow personally safe, but sharing the mosque with them began to get too close to home. And home is where patriarchy is most starkly powerful, in the personal relationships between men and women.[17]

Conclusion

While Western feminist models are often criticised in Muslim circles, there does exist within progressive trends of Islam, various strands of Islamic feminism. This is true of various national contexts; it is true too of South Africa.

In South Africa, one of the main impetuses for the emergence of Islamic feminisms and Islamic feminist thought has been involvement in the anti-apartheid struggle by a number of Muslim activists—especially those within the Muslim Youth Movement and the Call of Islam. The terms 'Islamic feminism' and 'Islamic feminist', however, are hardly ever used by these activists. South African Islamic feminists feel, in the main, that the baggage associated with these labels makes their use too burdensome. They are not alone in feeling this way. This has been an argument by a number of Third World feminists, like Madhu Kishwar (1990), who reject the feminist label but do the feminist work nonetheless.

In South Africa, the development of Islamic feminisms ran, in some ways, parallel to the development of other forms of feminisms. As the nationalist discourse in South Africa helped develop a human rights discourse which, in turn, helped develop a women's rights and feminist discourse, so too were there parallel developments in Islamist circles in South Africa. The initial Islamist discourse helped give rise to an 'Islamic human rights discourse' which helped spark an Islamic women's rights and Islamic feminist discourse. The parallel developments were assisted by the involvement of Islamists in the other discourses and with other liberatory organisations.

The 1990s witnessed the Islamic feminist discourse– and activism linked to it–coming into its own and saw an increasing confidence among Muslim women's rights activists at various levels, including at the level of challenging the clergy on jurisprudential matters. In 1998, Islamic feminist activism reached a peak, and then rapidly declined. Though such activism began to rise again in 2000–mainly in response to the process around the development of Muslim Personal Law legislation for South Africa–it has not yet reached the strength it had by 1998. Contributing to this is the ascendancy of Muslim conservatism and Muslim reaction to Islamophobia in various parts of the world and the United States' 'war on terror' which has targeted mainly Muslims. Progressive Muslims, in this climate, find it difficult to draw their co-religionists into the theological unknown to interact with such adventures as Islamic feminism. However, the regrouping of the Muslim Youth Movement Gender Desk, and the emergence of new groups like Shura Yabafazi and Taking Islam to the People (TIP), point to the possibility of increased Islamic feminist activism in the next few years.

POSTSCRIPT (2017)

Originally published in 2006, this article reflected on and analysed the emergence of Islamic feminisms in the 1990s in South Africa. It also posited the late 1990s as a high point in the development of South African Islamic feminisms. Much has changed on the Islamic feminist terrain in South Africa since this article was written. Much has also changed regarding Muslim women's rights and yet much has also remained the same.

Over almost two decades, activist forms of Islamic feminisms in South Africa have declined as a result of various organisational and other challenges. The Call of Islam, which had helped provide part of the ideological basis of South African Islamic feminisms, was in decline from the beginning of the 1990s and effectively ceased to exist before the end

of the 1990s, following South Africa's first democratic election in 1994.In its latter years the organisation had distanced itself from any feminist agenda in its attempts to endear itself to the more conservative elements in the Muslim community so that it might garner as much Muslim support as possible for the political (especially electoral) agenda of the African National Congress (ANC, the ruling party in South Africa since 1994). After the death of Shamima Shaikh in 1998, the Muslim Youth Movement Gender Desk began a slow decline, ignoring the past campaigns of the Gender Desk including its education campaign that sought to reread Islamic scriptures from a women-friendly perspective. Within three to four years it had all but discarded any feminist agenda. South Africa also witnessed attempts at forming strong women's organisations such as Shura Yabafazi which failed after brief periods of activism. A positive development has been the emergence of a few, mainly women, academics who have sought to theorise issues of women in Islam. But the activist vibrancy of the 1990s has waned significantly.

This should not, however, give the impression that there has been a wholesale deterioration of Muslim women's rights, or that there are no active advocates for Muslim women's rights except in academia. On the contrary, the notion of discussing the rights of women in Islam has seeped into the Islamic discourse at various levels beyond the spheres of influence of the 'traditional' feminist or 'progressive' circles, and such discussions sometimes happen in surprising places and fora. Although the feminist discourse has become muted at a pubic level, the effects of the feminist activism of the 1990s persist and reproduce themselves in not altogether predictable spaces.

In many traditional and even conservative Muslim circles there has been a gradual re-evaluation of the role of Muslim women in society. Much of this has been done subversively. People initiating or engaging in these discussions do not necessarily exhibit themselves in the mode of the powerful public expressions of the 1990s. Nevertheless, this suggests a possible long-term persistence of debate, and even an entrenchment of the idea that Muslim women need to realise their rights, if sometimes in ways that the feminists of the 1990s might feel uncomfortable with.

An example of one of these surprising spaces is Radio Islam. One of the 'battles' around Muslim women's rights, particularly the right to have their voices heard, occurred around the Johannesburg-based Muslim radio station in the mid-1990s. The station, owned by the traditionalist ulama organisation Jamiatul Ulama, was hauled before the South African broadcasting regulatory body, the Independent Broadcasting Authority, for refusing to allow women to be heard on air. At the threat of losing its license, Radio Islam

compromised and agreed it would allow women's voices to be broadcast. Many critics felt, at the time, that the station got off easily, without having to commit to what kind of women would be allowed, what they would be allowed to do at the station, and at what times they would be allowed on air. Today, however, Radio Islam has women presenters at various different times of the day, discussing all manner of issues, including politics. One of its flagship current affairs programmes is produced by a woman, and women regularly call in on air to discuss matters they feel strongly about. The station and its owners would baulk, and might even feel insulted, at the suggestion that they had made any move in a feminist direction, yet their encouragement for women's voices to be heard heralds long-term significance and a gain unlikely to be easily reversed within Muslim media and broader Muslim community.

Another development, grossly understudied, if studied at all, is what I refer to as the 'assertive niqabi' phenomenon. Partly as a result of the impact of articulate feminist women who publicly discussed matters concerning fiqh and shari'ah, partly as a result of the insistence of various progressive organisations about the need for women to be educated, and partly because of the human rights and women's rights culture in South Africa from the late 1990s, the Muslim community witnessed the formation of religious schools to further the Islamic education of young Muslim women. The education that these religious schools provide is as conservative as their counterpart male institutions but the standard of education in the religious schools for girls is not as high. Women in these institutions are not being trained to be ulama, but to be educated mothers and wives. Nevertheless, many of the graduates of these institutions, who will be seen in public donning their niqabs or face veils (as they have been made to understand that this is ordained by religion) have developed an assertiveness that is refreshing and displays potential for the future. Many insist that they were given certain rights by the Qur'an and Sunnah that are not being realised, and they insist on exercising these rights. In conservative homes this has resulted in bitter battles between daughters and parents, as well as between young married women and their husbands on the one hand and their parents-in-law on the other. Given the nature of conservative sections of the community these battles do not explode into the open but the long-term effects of these underground developments could be significant.

Finally, there is now greater acceptance of the activities of Muslim women in the broader society. Perhaps the best recent examples are of two Muslim women student leaders who have been at the forefront of the #FeesMustFall university protest movement, which has placed them in positions of leadership, negotiating with university management and government, and even placed them at the centre of violent confrontations with police. One

of them was recently shot 13 times with rubber bullets by police. Both women are devout Muslims who have, interestingly, been proudly accepted by a broad cross-section of the Muslim community in a manner that would not have been possible two decades ago. This is not to suggest that the entire community has moved in a more liberatory direction. But these developments are indicative of the role of incrementalism in women's struggles. While the 1990s might be seen as explosive and very public in terms of the articulation of Muslim women's rights, the current developments, which doubtlessly are due in part to the heritage of 1990s, are more quiet and incremental. Often the latter type has greater long-lasting effects on society.

NOTES

[1] The term 'Islamic Movement' carries particular meanings and developed out of the Islamic resurgence movements in the Middle East and South Asia. It was imported into South Africa by the Muslim Youth Movement in the 1970s (see Muslim Youth Movement 1981, pp. 8–94 and Muslim Youth Movement, circa 1984, pp. 21H1–21H6). It (loosely) referred to Muslims who believed in a 'comprehensive understanding of Islam'. In the 1980s it became a contested term as organisations outside the MYM also laid claim to it. The definition changed to accommodate that contestation. It became 'Muslim individuals and organisations that have a comprehensive understanding of Islam and are part of the anti-apartheid struggle' (Shuaib Manjra, "Islamic Movement in South Africa", unpublished talk delivered at numerous MYM camps). Thus, the definition of the Islamic Movement was broadened to include those organisations that formed the 'three strands' (Esack, 1988, pp. 473–498) of Muslim anti-apartheid activity in South Africa. I will use 'Islamic Movement' with this latter definition. However, because of the subject of this paper, the term will be used here to refer to only the MYM and the Call of Islam.

[2] This is not to suggest that Islamic feminism in South Africa has been their sole property. There have been other–particularly local–manifestations of the phenomenon which will not be covered here.

[3] See Mohanty (1991a, pp. 3–4) where she expresses the difficulty of using the term 'Western feminism' but argues that the term can be used in terms of the kind of scholarship produced by feminists in the West especially regarding Third World women.

[4] Cathi Albertyn, in personal conversation, 15 June 2000.

[5] While two Islamic parties were formed in 1994, Muslims largely ignored these parties and neither of them won any seats in national or provincial parliaments. Muslims were rather involved in, and supported, the established political parties.

[6] While there were numerous attacks against the MYM for its position on women's presence in mosques, the most detailed was contained in Majlisul- Ulama (undated). The Arabic word 'ulama (literally, those who are knowledgeable) is generally used in reference to Muslim clergy.

[7] See Muslim Youth Movement (1990a). The other two campaigns were its "Living Wage Campaign" and the "Campaign against Alcohol and Drug Abuse".

[8] The lecture was called "Islam as Engaged Surrender" and discussed, almost exclusively from a woman's biological perspective, submission to God. For the full text, see wadud (1994).

[9] Internationally, there is greater accommodation for women in mosques. Nevertheless, in recent history, this was one of the first occasions on which a woman delivered the Friday lecture.

[10] While the broad liberation movement generally rejected such attempts, trade unions decided–as a strategic manoeuvre–to register and thus get legal recognition. The state's plan at co-opting trade unions went terribly wrong as legalisation allowed unions to grow at phenomenal rates.

[11] Rylands vs. Edros, 4 ALL SA557 (C), 1996.

[12] The term 'gender jihad' was first used by Rashied Omar (1995), former president of the Muslim Youth Movement and imam of the Claremont Main Road Mosque. Subsequently, it has become a popular term in progressive Muslim discourse in South Africa.

[13] Personal email from Farid Esack, 3 June 2000.

[14] Information about this confrontation was obtained from a personal conversation with Shaikh (January 1997) and an interview with Roberts (3 June 2000).

[15] Personal conversation with Shamima Shaikh (January 1997).

[16] Interview with Moefidah Jaffer, 5 June 2000. Jaffer was one of the women who prayed in the main section for a few nights before Jhazbhay forced her with repeated phone calls (even asking her husband to convince her) to abandon that mosque for the rest of the month of Ramadan. (Her husband responded that his wife 'does not listen to me'.)

[17] See, for example, Srilatha Batliwala's (1997, http://www.qweb. kvinnoforum. se/papers/RFSU1.htm) argument that the family is 'the last frontier of patriarchy'. See, also, the assertion by Yakin Erturk (cited in UNPO 2004, http://www.unpo.org/news_detail.php?arg=02&par=616), UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Commission on Human Rights, that 'oppression in the home was a particular problem, since it was often overlooked and justified as a private matter'.

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BETWEEN AWARENESS AND ACTIVISM: GENDER AND ISLAM IN SOUTH AFRICA

FARHANA ISMAIL

Keywords: Indian Muslim community, Indian Muslim women, Islamic feminist

Interview with Farhana Ismail, MYM Gender Desk member, at the moment when efforts were being made to re-invigorate the Gender Desk, by Margot Badran, Johannesburg, August 8, 2002.

Farhana Ismail (FI) I was born in 1971 in Johannesburg. I started my education at an Indian school called Ferreira Primary School. For secondary school education, I went to the Sacred Heart College, a non-racial Catholic school which had started accepting people from different backgrounds and religions. I finished my matric (high school diploma) in 1989. I then trained as an optometrist and worked in this profession for about four years. It was during that time I first became associated with the Muslim Youth Movement (MYM). In 1995 I went to Jordan where I studied Arabic at Zarka al Ahliyya. I also travelled to Palestine, Syria, Egypt, and Turkey. When I returned to Johannesburg I resumed my involvement with the MYM and started broadcasting at its radio station. I also had babies.

I first met Na'eem Jeenah and Shamima Shaikh at a *halaqa* (Islamic study circle) at Wits (Witswatersand University) around 1992. My husband Ashraf Ahmed Park who was a friend of Na'eem had introduced me to the halaqa. About six or seven of us used to meet every Friday night for discussion at the *jamat khana* at Wits. We read Fatima Mernissi's book Beyond the Veil. We also read a book called *Muslims and Identity* about how you identify yourself as a Muslim in your community and in the wider society which was an eye-opener for me. I came from a very conservative jamaat and Tablighi background. I also got involved more generally in MYM activities. I had only read writings by Abdul Rahman Doi, a lecturer in the Islamic Studies Department at RAU (Rand Afrikaanse

Universiteit now known as the University of Johannesburg) and books put out by the jamaat. I had never been exposed to other kinds of literature.

I think my whole life I was irritated by Muslims' social views on women. I used to have arguments with my father. When people came looking for money for mosques I would say: why don't you ask them why they don't have facilities for women. I had been made to think I was not allowed in a mosque as a woman and that kind of thing.

Margot Badran (MB) Within the Indian Muslim community would you say your parents were slightly more liberal?

FI They were liberal as far as my studying and going out with friends was concerned. As far as attitudes toward women they were very conservative. My Mum was quite open-minded but not my Dad. We constantly came to blows. But when I spoke for the first time at the juma prayer in the mosque last Friday my father came. It was really nice to see him there and to see that he had opened up and had begun to support me.
MB *Why do you think he came around?*

FI I think he decided he needed to tap into his daughter's brain to see what she was thinking. He said to me: you were very controversial, I think you'll need bodyguards now. But he was quite impressed actually. He was very proud of me. The subject of my talk was Islamic women's history and how it was recorded, controlled, and manipulated, and how culture and traditions have informed and shaped it. I also spoke about the experience of Muslim women in South African society drawing from my experience in the Indian Muslim community.

MB *Can you tell me about Shamima and your relationship with her?*

FI I was intimidated when I first met her. She was about ten years older than me. She had all these radical ideas about women and especially their position in society. Shamima was very well-spoken. For me coming from a very conservative background and not having the facts and not knowing my rights or privileges it was a bit daunting at first but she made me start thinking. She introduced me to a lot of literature.

MB *Was she one of the most influential women drawing you into the gender scene?*

FI Definitely, there were not many people on the gender scene at that time. She was one of the very few. Shamima organised an MYM conference--more like a public discussion group-on Women Gearing up for Change. One of the guest speakers was Ebrahim Moosa who gave out a reading packet. It included, for example, chapters from Fatima Mernissi's book *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam.* Women and men of different ages came but there were more women. Some women got very upset and walked out but most stayed. This event was a turning point for me because it introduced me to more of this new literature.

Shamima led the effort for women to be able to go to the mosque for congregational prayer. In the Muslim communities in Johannesburg and Durban women did not go to the mosque. We were told women are not allowed. Single-handedly Shamima wrote letters to different *ulama* councils and to the *jamaat*. She wrote to the Fietas mosque (also known as the Twenty-Third Street mosque) in Johannesburg saying women wanted to be part of the coming Ramadan program in the mosque. The Fietas mosque had a reputation for being a bit more progressive and also it had an upstairs room. Shamima backed the insistence that women participate in congregational prayer at the mosque with *hadiths* (sayings and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad) and verses of the Qur'an. A lot of letters went back and forth. The letters are still in the MYM files. During Ramadan we women started going to the mosque. Men, including many who donated money to the mosque, were very upset and threatened to stop coming. One night when I went to the mosque with Mofidah Jaffer (an MYM member) for *tarawih* (evening prayer in Ramadan) we found the door to the upstairs room locked. We learned that before the *tarawih* the imam had told the men to tell their mothers and sisters not to come to the mosque because there is no space for them. About fifteen women gathered in the courtyard and we had started reading the Qur'an when suddenly it began to rain. Mofidah had her little baby with her and her husband Jaffer Khan got worried. He went around and found an entrance near the *wuduhkhana* (place for ablutions) which was unlocked and called us. We passed by the wuduhkhana where the men making *wuduh* (ablutions) and headed up the stairs and found the room empty. The imam had obviously lied. During the rest of Ramadan the women continued to pray upstairs. For the celebration of Lailat al-Qadr (Night of Power) on the 27th night of Ramadan marking the revelation of the first verses of Qur'an and considered a night of blessings and forgiveness, the mosque is filled to capacity because men who do not appear during the regular days of Ramadan show up then. The men of the mosque decided to erect a tent outside to accommodate the women and to put up a big television screen so we could see the *imam*. Shamima was upset. She said: "We women want our space in the mosque and we don't want that space to be taken away when all those men decide they want to

come to pray. We have been there the entire month of Ramadan. Leave that space alone. It is our space.” There was a big huha. Shamima and other women went upstairs and stayed there. Some of the men came with guns and one or two threatened the women. But the women did not budge.

Around this time Shamima and I were trying to work out the programs for the community radio station in Johannesburg called The Voice. I had the idea to do a kind of halaqa on radio but Shamima wasn’t too sure it would work. Anyway, I went on air with a guest speaker. I was just the host. I really didn’t know much about the Qur’anic verses so it was a good way for me to start learning as well. My guest speaker was Na’eem. We spoke about why you should study the Qur’an and who should study it. In our communities, and especially in Na’eem’s community, we have a lot of tablighis and jamaat who believe you should not read the Qur’an in English unless a *maulana* (religious teacher) is there to provide interpretation. I felt as a Muslim your beginning point should be the Qur’an, that you should start there. I saw that the Qur’an has been very much neglected in our community. When Shamima heard the program, she said: “It was brilliant, it will work”. That is how I began the program called 'In the Shade of the Qur’an'. The Qur’an was the place where you could find answers to your problems. We dealt with issues such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, death, and the hereafter. I ran the program ran until 2000 when I went to Cape Town for a year.

Liberals and conservatives alike say the Muslim community isn’t ready for new ideas and you must go slow. Even though the liberals are saying we should open up their minds they insisted on gradualism, just like the conservatives. I feel we have to get through to the women in the Muslim community because they are the ones who need to learn about their rights and privileges. If women themselves are not willing to take their cause forward no matter how much you try nothing will happen. If we can reach them, maybe they’ll start asking questions and then maybe you can start throwing out more radical ideas.

Is Islam driven by a text or shaped by experience and by society? People are discussing this. Radio journalist with the Voice of the Cape (VOC) Munadia Karaan brought up the subject of the force of practice, traditions, and customs versus independent thinking and new ideas. It used to be the ulama (religious scholars) who controlled religious knowledge, especially concerning the Qur’an. But now the word is out. People know about the Qur’an and hadith. The ulama know that once people can read the religious texts for themselves and can make up their minds for themselves they won’t need them. Detractors claim the Claremont mosque, which they label ‘the MYM mosque,’ and which is known for its

progressive ideas, is irrelevant and that they are isolated from the community and nobody is with them. I think when they say this it means they fear they are irrelevant at some threatening level. The community is in a state of ambivalence and nervousness but I think the ulemah are the more nervous. They need to possess the control card. They claim that the progressives don't understand the community. I answer: do you understand the community and why are you able to understand the community more? You say you have specialised knowledge but the progressives have PhDs. But we have to remember the ulemah in Cape Town are different from those elsewhere. A very good example of how they try to control is the issue of the women's voice on Radio Islam. Before, the ulemah in Johannesburg would never have sat down in the same room with women and had a discussion with them and now they do. They are forced to because they are scared they are not going to be relevant anymore. They need to show they are progressive but I think they are scared of being left behind.

MB *Do you call yourself an Islamic feminist?*

FI No, because I feel being a Muslim--a true Muslim--is being an Islamic feminist in the way you describe. For me the Qur'an has laid down principles of justice and gender equality and the way I practice my Islam is what Islam is all about so as a Muslim I don't need to identify myself as a feminist.

MB *People give feminism negative connotations as a way of silencing or intimidating you and me. We define feminism for ourselves. Feminism in a generic sense upholds gender justice and human equality which may be embodied in the tenets of our religions, our national constitutions, international instruments, and in our commonsense. It is up to us to define and shape the contours of our own feminism. Islamic feminism is a discourse and practice grounded in the Qur'an and other religious texts so it is not something imposed from outside.*

FI I just have a problem taking on the label feminist.

MB *They are silencing you.*

FI Exactly. Feminism comes with lots of negative connotations in the community which I don't want to deal with. I like being a feminist in a silent kind of way. I'm a strong silent type.

MB *It's partly strategic?*

FI Yes.

MB *It is partly psychological because you don't want to be bashed around?*

FI I am just tired.

MB *Do you think there is some space for people within the Muslim community to stand up and say: I am a feminist, I am an Islamic feminist and work within an Islam-based feminist framework? There is space. Do you think it is important for people to occupy this space today in South Africa?*

FI Yes, I think it is. But if you put yourself in that space you limit yourself to being heard by only a few people.

MB *Are there any people who occupy that space?*

FI Na'eem is definitely an Islamic feminist.

MB *Is he heard?*

FI He is in Johannesburg. There are Farid Esack and Ebrahim Musa but I think they have left the country.

MB *The women?*

FI Of course, Shamima was an Islamic feminist but I can't think of anyone else.

MB *Why only men?*

FI I think maybe because men don't have much to lose when they speak out. But you don't have to take on the label because very often when people hear you are an Islamic feminist nobody wants to listen to what you have to say. In the community where I operate it is important to maintain silence about where I stand. I want to get people thinking and to start dealing with the issues. Actually, I am an Islamic feminist. My husband tells me all the

time that I am an Islamic feminist although I deny it, I am. I should say this to myself. It would be a first step.

MB *Where are you now in your gender jihad?*

FI I am working at the radio station here in Johannesburg called The Voice doing the program 'Lifting the Veil'. As I have mentioned, Shamima had started the program 'Lifting the Veil' that ran on Monday mornings in which she dealt with problems facing Muslim women from a feminist perspective. After she died they couldn't find anyone to take over and I wasn't around in that period. When I returned to Johannesburg I wanted to continue the program but in a slightly different way. I wanted to look at the history of Muslim women and show how women in the past were active in politics, in economic life, and in literature—things Muslim women in our society would not dream of doing today. I wanted to draw on stories from women's past and relate women's earlier experience to contemporary problems facing women. For example, I told the story of the Prophet's daughter Fatima and how when her husband Ali wanted to take another wife she went to her father who then spoke with Ali who did not proceed to take another wife. Polygamy is a real issue in our society. In confronting polygamy, I linked it to the Prophet's approach. I am doing a lot of research. Historians have been selective in what they write. I had a program about the story of Hagar and said: let's look at it this way: that she was black, a woman, a slave and oppressed when religion came to liberate her. We have come full circle. Fatima Mernissi gave a presentation at the UN Conference in Beijing Conference recalling Muslim women rulers in Islamic history. She spoke about how this history was hidden and threw out the challenge that Muslim women get more involved in their own history. This is what I am busy doing.

When Shamima died Na'eem called and told me: Shamima wanted you to lead the *janaza salat*, the funeral prayer. I went to her home and led the funeral prayer. Afterwards, her mother and sisters and I went to the mosque. It was the first time it was all right for Shamima to be downstairs in the mosque. It hurt because for her entire life she was fighting for women to be in that space. The only time that the mosque committee and no one else had any problem with this was at her janaza. For me leading the janaza was a way to say goodbye. Being asked by Shamima to lead the prayer was very touching to me. When she was around I always thought she was a bit too progressive as I was still coming to terms with where I stood on gender issues in the community. When I met Shamima I was very Tablighi but I had been growing at the time of her death. I needed to progress to where she had been. It was her way of saying: this is your legacy, take hold and go forward.

Contributor:

FARHANA ISMAIL. Is a community activist and academic with a focus on gender equality and youth development. Farhana obtained a M.A. in Religion, Gender and Health at the University of Kwa- Zulu Natal in 2016, and B.A. with honors in Journalism and Media studies at the University of the Witwatersrand in 2007. She participated in the anti-apartheid activism of the progressive Muslim movement in South Africa, including women-led gender rights struggles. She was a presenter from 1997 to 2000, and later trustee, of the community radio station The Voice in Johannesburg, hosting programs on women's experiences of injustice related to the Muslim family and marriage law. She has written on the non-recognition of Muslim marriages in South Africa. She helped draft a submission to parliament on the South African Muslim Marriages Bill. She offers a woman-friendly Qur'an study group for young teens with an ethos of equality, dignity and justice.

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TALKING ISLAMIC FEMINISM IN SOUTH AFRICA

FIRDOUZA WAGGIE AND YUMNAH HATTAS

Abstract: Firdouza Waggie and Yumna Hattas of the Gender Desk of the Muslim Youth Movement (MYM) and Margot Badran met in Cape Town on July 17, 2002 to exchange views on Islamic feminism and to discuss issues relating to Muslim communities in South Africa prior to Badran's presentation at the MYM Gender Desk Roundtable on Islamic feminism on August 3, 2002. The round table was part of the initiative to revive the MYM Gender Desk. Below is an edited narrative of their conversation.

Keywords: Islamic feminism, Muslim Youth Movement

Firdouza Waggie (FW) The term Islamic feminism is still not widely accepted in South Africa but people are not completely closed to the idea now. Two years ago I did not call myself a feminist. I was not comfortable with the term because society did not accept it. People have the idea that feminism is Western and therefore unsuitable to Muslims.

MB *Are you Western, Eastern, Northern, or Southern?*

FW (laughter) South African and Western. But whether I am Eastern or Western I see myself as Muslim.

MB *If you see yourself as Western why would you have a problem with something Western or allegedly Western?*

FW Because of the connotations. You cannot not speak of women's rights.

MB *Huquq al-mar'a (women's rights) is an Arabic construct and used in Arab Muslim contexts.*

FW Where we are coming from it is a problem. It is the problem for the Muslim Youth Movement (MYM) Gender Desk. Before, speaking of feminism or calling ourselves feminists would completely alienate us from Muslim society. Nowadays we in the leadership of the Gender Desk are more comfortable calling ourselves feminists. We have a greater understanding of feminism. We can now engage the Muslim community nationally and locally. We are a society in transformation. During the time of the anti-apartheid struggle Muslims took different approaches to political struggle. We in the MYM invoked Islamic principles in our political activism. Islam fights injustice. We were active not only around issues of color, ethnicity, and origin but also religion.

Yumnah Hattas (YH) In the 1980s we had to fight a national political battle as well as a battle inside our own households. At home we lived conservative Muslim lives and we dressed in a particular way. (She points to her jeans and top and says if she had dressed that way then it would have been unacceptable.) When we tried to get an English translation of the Qur'an into our homes we were told it was *haram* (forbidden). Our parents could not marry politics with Islam. They did not speak about politics but we youth discovered that Islam is politics, that Islam is about justice. That is the kind of history we experienced. Islamic feminism is now at the cutting edge of where as a community we are deciding to head. It is fear that prevents us from taking the first step in defining Islamic feminism. We need to share our views and address our activism to the larger community, not just the academics at the University of Cape Town. Our community is at the point where they might accept Islamic feminism and see that it is not *haram* (religiously forbidden)

MB *Why is the community now ready?*

YH Because the leadership has changed. Half the community now are those who were part of the progressive battle getting us to where we are today. The old generation is dying out. We the progressive thinkers are becoming the new senior generation.

FW The time is now ripe because the Muslim Judicial Council has a new leadership which is much more open-minded. They are the same age as the upcoming progressive groups: thirty or thirty-five to forty. They have been having an open dialogue around issues concerning women. The media has also been playing a crucial role, especially the Muslim radio stations like the VOC (the Voice of the Cape) and 786. Two months ago, VOC, for the first time, had a debate on Islamic feminism which opened up thinking. I was there along with Sa'diyya Shaikh (a graduate student at the University of Cape Town) and Akida Muhammad (a filmmaker). Hadija Ali, an imam's wife, pulled out at the last minute.

Munadia Karaan, a respected radio journalist, ran the program. We on the Gender Desk do not only want academics to debate Islamic feminism but we wanted to reach ordinary women at home. There still is a problem in this country because people don't understand the difference between feminism as something coming from outside and Islamic feminism which expressed in our religious framework. If Muslims understood this I don't think they would have problems with it.

YH South Africa is unique. When we speak of Western and Eastern I do not see myself in either category. I am South African. We are making our own history and our own feminism.

MB *How did you get into the different space you are in now?*

FW There are two new realties: 1) a greater familiarity with the idea of Islam-based gender equality and 2) the new democracy in the making in post-apartheid South Africa. We are now an open society. We have more freedom. People are traveling more. Women are travelling more and are working abroad. There is a shift in attitude and a shift to a new era. We have made important strides but there is more work to be done. We have to struggle to get rid of certain demons. Women have always been quoted selected verses of the Qur'an and *hadiths* (sayings and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad, of varying degrees of authenticity) to uphold their subordination. Now we are offering women alternatives. We are engaging with the *ulemah* (religious scholars) saying if you look at the principles of Islam you find freedom, justice, and equality. We point to verses of the Qur'an supporting gender equality. Also, very importantly, we are telling the *ulemah* about the day-to-day problems our women are facing. I think we are getting through to the *ulemah*.

YH Economic rights are also important. The right of a woman to control her own wealth. The issue of inheritance. What is being said about women and wealth. We could take examples from the Prophet's life. We could learn more about Khadija (the Prophet's first wife and the first person to subscribe to Islam). We just heard that she was a business woman but how did she conduct her business and what were her business principles? I would like to develop an Islamic discourse around women's economic autonomy. We need to know more about the history of Muslim women's economic experience and relate it to our society today.

MB *You mentioned that you need a strong Islamic feminist discourse. Is developing that now the way to go?*

FW Yes. It is the only way we are going to be able to move forward. We want to do it in a way that does not alienate people. We are embarking on several campaigns including an education campaign and a roundtable with open debates and discussions with mainstream organisation leaders. We aim to bring people together around current campaigns dealing with HIV, domestic violence, etc. But education is our major focus. The Gender Desk wants to have smaller reading groups to help people move from acquiring a new Qur'an consciousness to initiating new practices.

YH If something comes from an Islamic country people overall buy into it. For example, they listen to what Saudis are saying. In your Roundtable talk (speaking to Badran) it would be interesting for us to hear what other women are experiencing. For example, what Egyptian women or Yemeni women are going through. We do not get women's side of the story from abroad. We have tested the waters with the first Roundtable. There is an interest in hearing what you have to say on Islamic feminism because the debate is current and people are curious to know what is happening elsewhere. We want to hear from someone who has studied this. The audience will not care about your identity. There will be a crowd who want to hear what you have to say even if maybe later they will challenge it. As the organisers of the Roundtable we are telling people it is all right to be in an uncomfortable zone. Maybe this will help you to question further and to develop your own Islam. If you are just a passive recipient of ideas, you are not evolving.

MB *Are people more uncomfortable with Islamic feminist ideas out of concern for the reactions of husbands, family, community, and traditional authorities or because it shakes up their certitudes about Islam bringing into question their long-held ideas and asks people to figure things out for themselves?*

YH I think their fears are connected to change, even positive change. They will say: I grew up with this and now I have to unlearn it.

FW I think their fear has to do with patriarchy.

MB *Concluding thoughts?*

FW We at the Gender Desk want to take all our women with us. I do not ever want to convey the idea that I own Islamic feminism because I do not.

YH In this new era we can choose how to be a Muslim. We are thinking about how to go. We see this inside the community. I would like to see what the community will look like in five to ten years. We could be at the forefront of change but we could also take another path and dip but I think it is unlikely.

Contributors:

YUMNAH HATTAS. An experienced public health professional and development specialist, has worked in development for the last twenty years. She started as a volunteer coordinating youth and gender related camps and development projects. She then became a full-time employee and consultant in gender, sexuality and HIV related projects, and health systems strengthening. A firm belief in conducting life with integrity, responsibility and accountability are key principles and values she lives by. Her choices of work are driven by a deep passion to define herself in a world that is fair, just and equal. Her efforts are inspired by leaders who are accountable, responsible and respectful of the rights of every human being, especially those who have a full understanding of the magnitude of the contribution of women in this world. She lives her life daily inspired by her three daughters trying to carve a future for them to be able to fulfil their purpose as women who are just, fair and possess integrity.

FIRDOUZA WAGGIE. Is a registered physiotherapist and senior lecturer at Cape Town University of Technology. She holds a BSc and MSc in physiotherapy, and PhD from the University of the Western Cape. She completed a postgraduate certificate in project management at Cape Town University of Technology. She worked as a physiotherapist at Groote Schuur Hospital where she became a senior physiotherapist. She is currently the Director of the Inter- professional Education Unit in the Faculty of Community and Health Sciences at the University of the Western Cape. The unit is responsible for developing and coordinating interdisciplinary community-oriented core courses and service-learning in both rural and urban communities for health science students. Her expertise and research areas include: health professions education, community engagement and development, interprofessional education, service-learning and school health promotion.

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ISLAMIC FEMINISM AND A NEW MEDITERRANEAN CULTURE: A CLOSE - UP ON SPAIN

MARGOT BADRAN

Abstract: This paper argues that Islamic feminism has the potential to play a significant role in the shaping of a new Mediterranean culture. The paper provides a historical background on 1) the emergence of feminisms in nation-states or state-based feminisms in the south Mediterranean early last century and their international interactions during the colonial period and 2) the emergence of Islamic feminism as a new global discourse of egalitarian Islam toward the end of the twentieth century. The paper looks at the diffusion of Islamic feminism in Spain through Muslim women professionals and leaders in convert communities, influenced by the work of Islamic feminists from the south Mediterranean, and their interaction with new Muslim citizens and immigrants, focusing on a case that Muslim women across the spectrum took out against an imam for claiming in a book he published in Spain that Islam endorsed wife-beating, accusing him of fomenting gender-based violence. Through the force of Islamic feminist arguments and Spanish law the author of the book was pronounced guilty of inciting gender-based violence.

Keywords: Islamic feminism, emergence of feminisms, egalitarian Islam discourse, new mediterranean culture, islamic feminist discourse, Muslim women

The paper published in Italian as “Il femminismo islamico e la nuova cultura mediterranea,” in Franco Cassano and Danilo Zolo, eds. L’alternativa mediterranea: Un dialogo fra le due sponde [The Alternative Mediterranean: A Dialogue between the Two Shores] (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2007) appears here for the first time in English in a slightly revised version.[1]

As I reflect upon how Islamic feminism may contribute to the creation of a new Mediterranean culture I ponder its geographical and religious template, and glance at its history. The rich alluvial of the Mediterranean world spans three continents: Africa, Asia, and Europe. Old Muslim majorities and old Christian minorities are found on the African

and Asian shores. Old, now long secularised Christian majorities and new Muslim minorities populate the European shore. Historically, one of the great Muslim civilisations flourished in Andalusia on the northern shore while Muslim communities and cultures were also found historically in parts of Italy and France. Jewish minority communities have existed historically on both shores and in more recent times a Jewish state was established on the south-eastern shore. Religion operates in the Mediterranean world in various ways as roots, as memory, as identity, and as practice, and in complicated dynamics with secularism/s.

Al-bahr al-abiyad al-mutawassit in Arabic, or "the middle white sea" and the Mediterranean "between the land" from Latin, the Mediterranean Sea, often connoting division between north and south or east and west, marking a frontier of deep difference and hostilities, has also nurtured exchange and commonalities. The Mediterranean has long witnessed a two-way traffic of people moving between and settling on opposite littorals. The Mediterranean world in modern times was the terrain of both colonisers from the northern shore, coming from France, Italy, and Spain and the colonised along the southern shores in countries populated by Arabs and Berbers. In the 19th century before the significant flows of people from the North to the South accompanying the empire, economic opportunity served as a magnet in some places, such as Egypt. The latter decades of the 20th century saw vast migrations of people from former colonies in the economically depressed south Mediterranean to countries on the north shore. Affinities deriving from elements of shared culture persist in the larger Mediterranean universe along with deep antagonisms related to still recent colonial history and deriving from more historically distant tensions between "Christendom and Islam." The final decades of the 20th century saw the rise of political Islam or Islamism in the south Mediterranean and with it a surge of an amalgam of religious and cultural conservatism which many migrants brought with them to the north. In the northern Mediterranean world, (as in the broader West) Islamophobia surged.

In 2005, controversy and outrage ignited by the publication of cartoons in a Danish newspaper depicting the prophet Muhammad in ways deeply offensive to Muslims, and republished in papers across Europe and beyond, spread like a global wildfire in cyber space and real space. In the global imbroglio much of the West and 'Islam' re/essentialised 'the other,' resurrecting earlier stereotypes and antagonisms. The edges of the three continents that make up the Mediterranean world felt and responded to the massive 'culture quake' and surrounding politics. The publication of the offensive images, justified by freedom of speech in 'the West,' set off a counter deployment of angry words and physical

violence perpetrated by some Muslims in extreme outrage at the desecration of the sacred. From all quarters old dichotomies were re-asserted as arrogance, ignorance, and defensiveness were wantonly paraded. The storms unleashed and the barricades set up on both sides signaled deep fissures in the shared global terrain and profound animosities, and fears, in what Karen Armstrong called 'the clash of the 'sacreds' which was that and much more.

The eruptions exposed what lay below the surface and how old cultural, social, and political frictions could be re-asserted and stirred to boiling point. In Europe and the West more generally, there was a broad outcry and defense of dearly-won freedoms, importantly, freedom of expression, but less evident was a sense of the limits of free speech and what constituted defamation and degradation. In parts of Asia and Africa the cartoon incident demonstrated how deep offense to religious and cultural sensibilities in proximity to flammable Islamist extremism and state war-mongering could spark instant violence. The incident brought into plain view to Europeans conundrums concerning immigrants and new citizens from Asia and Africa living among them, many of them Muslims. Such newcomers no longer simply filled jobs Europeans did not want but were now competing in the wider economic marketplace, and as permanent residents and citizens rather than transients, appeared to many to threaten the very fabric of familiar society

The challenge in European countries, as elsewhere in the West, becomes how to build new more richly textured pluralistic societies that respect the freedoms, liberties, and rights of all citizens of both sexes while also productively engaging difference in an era of intensive immigration. The challenge in countries of Africa and Asia is how can citizens, Muslims along with adherents of other religions, women and men alike, equally enjoy the practice of their constitutional rights? How can inequities resulting from constricted readings of Islam, that are widely influential, be eradicated? How can the world abounding the "middle sea" with its unique positioning at the nexus of contesting and contested cultures within and across its shores, create a new Mediterranean culture for the 21st century?

The Woman often becomes the symbol of the nation and an emblem of abstract ideals.[2] The Woman also functions as a negative emblem of the Other. There is perhaps no harsher way of portraying Islam, the religion and the umma (community or faith-nation) as the Other than through gender and the figure of The Oppressed Woman. Seldom in the West has 'Islam and Woman' or 'Islam and Women' conjured up positive images. Readings of Islam detrimental to women and impositions by Muslims of practices oppressive to women in the name of the religion have often been taken as 'Islam itself.' This has distressed many

Muslims, as well as non-Muslims, who have recoiled at injustices perpetuated in the name of Islam. Muslims often take regressive gender ideas and cultural practices from their towns and villages with them when they migrate to the West where frequently their rendition of Islam is taken to be Islam as such. At the same time, conservative men of religion in the form of imams and religious teachers, also take a restrictive view of women and gender with them to the West. Meanwhile, other Muslims from diverse locations around the globe advance understandings of Islam that are a woman-sensitive and gender-egalitarian Islam and strive for its application. This is often called Islamic feminism.

Islamic Feminism: Argument and Definition

The central argument of my paper asserts that Islamic feminism can play a critical role in shaping a new Mediterranean culture and a new West more broadly. I suggest that the egalitarianism that Islamic feminism promotes will help national cultures that constitute a broader Mediterranean culture to become spaces of greater pluralism where rights, liberties, freedoms, and dignity are living practices and where racism, sexism, and religious and national chauvinisms will find no place.

I define Islamic feminism as a discourse of gender equality and social justice that derives its understanding and mandate from the Qur'an and seeks the practice of rights and justice for all human beings in the totality of their existence across the public-private continuum. Islamic feminism, as Islam, understood as din wa dunya (religion and the world), meshes the religious and the secular. Islamic feminism breaks down dichotomies: not just the secular-religious, but East-West, male-female, and public-private. Islamic feminism takes a holistic approach to the world and human experience. Some Muslim women in different locations of Africa and Asia in the late 1980s, and 1990s noting the articulation of this new feminist paradigm called it "Islamic feminism." The term was not invented by non-Muslims in the West as some Muslims displaying umbrage, along with some westerners displaying arrogant contempt, have alleged.[3]

Who are the Islamic feminists? Human beings or insan are exhorted to read (iqra) the Qur'an. Iqra signifies reciting words and gleaning meanings. The Revelation (the Qur'an) was delivered orally. People recited/repeated it orally. The process of discerning meaning/s is called tafsir (exegesis). Those who draw from the Qur'an a message of the fundamental equality of all human beings, inclusive of gender, race, and ethnic variation, and adhere to a discourse based upon this understanding, and who wish to see implementation of this understanding, may be regarded as de facto Islamic feminists. Muslims who created this

new Qur'an-backed discourse of gender equality, as I have observed, did not themselves use the term and actually displayed discomfort with it. In time, however, many who had initially resisted the term "Islamic feminism" came to accept it even as they did not accept an identity associated with it. Yet, many also began to identify as Islamic feminists. There do remain some who continue object to the term Islamic feminism and vehemently refuse any identity associated with it.

Those who subscribe to Islamic feminism include born Muslims, who may either be observant or nominal Muslims, and Muslim converts among whom globally Western women constitute the largest number.[4] Islamic feminists, understood as those who embrace the discourse of Islamic feminism, are mainly but not exclusively Muslims. Islamic feminists include both women and men but women are more numerous. Islamic feminists include Africans and Asians as well as Europeans and North and South Americans. Both 'Western Muslims' and 'Eastern Muslims' (to employ designations some use), who comprise global Islam, are shaping the discourse and practice of Islamic feminism.

I have argued that Islamic feminism will inform other feminist discourses. We utilise plural discourses in our complex worlds.[5] As feminists we judiciously mobilise a discourse meaningful to situation and circumstance.[6] In moving forward, we need languages or discourses that intersect and re-enforce each other and which are at the same time, distinctive and responsive to our particular contexts and needs. The insights and dynamics of Islamic feminism, as we shall see in this paper, have already begun to contribute to the shaping of a new Mediterranean culture that draws upon multiple wellsprings.

A Heritage of Trans/national Feminisms in the Mediterranean: A Look at the South

I locate my discussion of contemporary Islamic feminism in the historical context of the creation of feminism/s by women on national soil in parts of the south Mediterranean before, during, and after colonial occupation. Some women in the south Mediterranean, developed a feminist consciousness in the late 19th century in the midst of social and technological modernising processes and the rise and spread of Islamic modernist thought.[7] This new awareness, maturing as anti-colonial nationalist struggle was accelerating, led some women to engage in feminist activism referred to in the day as "secular feminism" or a nation-based feminism shaped by women sharing the same country (watan) while belonging to different religious communities. Women as feminists and nationalists engaged in the collective struggle to win national sovereignty and to create state institutions gender equal in concept and practice.[8] Women in Egypt developed a feminist template,

later replicated in other countries of the Arab East, that drew upon secular nationalist, Islamic modernist, and humanitarian discourses. Women honed their feminism in collective campaigning and in pioneering acts of everyday activism to change social practices.

Feminisms everywhere in the world from their early foundational moments in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were nationally rooted. Western feminists in the heyday of colonialism built international networks in the early 20th century to strengthen their respective campaigns in their home countries, first organised mainly around suffrage struggle and then around the practice of democratic citizenship. In the south Mediterranean, even as their cross-border movements and communications were heavily constrained under colonial rule, feminists managed to forge transnational and regional networks. They also expediently joined international feminist networks dominated by Western women who were eager to expand their global reach. While women from opposite shores of the Mediterranean contested each other's positions and priorities in the context of colonial rule and anti-colonial struggle, they also offered mutual support.

The Ninth Congress of the International Women Suffrage Alliance (IAW) held in Rome in 1923 marked a turning point in the history of feminism in the Mediterranean when for the first time feminist organisations from beyond the West became members of the IAW. From the south Mediterranean came a delegation from the Egyptian Feminist Union representing Egypt and a delegation from the Jewish Women's Equal Rights Association of Palestine representing Jewish women in Palestine but not Palestine itself. The IAW like other international feminist networks of the day was comprised of national affiliates, confined by protocol to a single organisation representing the country as a whole. The Jewish delegation from Palestine was an exception.

In succeeding years, feminist delegations from the south Mediterranean representing Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria joined the IAW enlarging the international feminist community in a world sundered by colonialism. Women built an international feminist culture, or what Rupp and Taylor have called a "social movement community," but only up to a point, as feminists struggled for common gender interests in the context of colonialism which seriously impeded their efforts, most egregiously in Palestine.[9] Feminists on both sides of the Mediterranean exploited international space while pressing ahead with their own nation-based feminist movements. In my study of the Egyptian Feminist Union and its concurrent national and international feminist work, I analyzed the

commonalities, divergences, and two-way flows from East to West and West to East within the world global feminism of the 1920s, 30s, and 40s. Such trans/national phenomena within the Mediterranean context are just beginning to receive extended comparative attention as we see in Sorbera's recent historical investigation of Egyptian and Italian feminisms.[10]

Western women within international feminist circles, who were as prone as any to what would be later identified as 'orientalist' notions of Islam and Muslim women, were informed by feminist Muslims about women and Islam. Western feminists learned about women's right in Islam to inherit and to control their own wealth. Western women also discovered that Muslim women retained full legal independence after marriage, including retention of their original name, at a time when women in European states after marriage were still considered legal minors. French feminists in the 1930s fighting for property rights taunted their male compatriots saying that Muslim women "in their colonies" enjoyed legal control of their own wealth while they did not.

In the 1930s and 40s, women from Arab countries of the south Mediterranean, Muslims and Christians together, moved to consolidate a pan-Arab feminist culture. A nationalist cause, the plight of Palestine, catalyzed feminists from the south and east Mediterranean (plus Iraq) to join forces in collective nationalist and feminist activism. At the height of the Arab revolt, which broke out in 1936, when British and French mandatory authorities in the east Mediterranean were obstructing Arab political organising, Arab feminists convened the Eastern Women's Conference for the Defense of Palestine in Cairo in 1938. In defending Palestine, Arab women, at the same time defended their rights as women. As the French and British mandates in the east Mediterranean were being dismantled at the end of World War II, Arab feminists reconvened in Cairo in 1944 for the Pan-Arab Feminist Conference to strategise post colonial nation-state building. The women voted to establish the Arab Feminist Union which officially came into existence the following year. Within this institutional framework, Arab Muslim and Christian feminists worked to forge egalitarian state structures in their newly independent postcolonial countries and to further the acquisition and practice of women's rights.

In the 1950s and 60s, socialist state regimes in the south Mediterranean granted rights to women a citizens and cadres in national development while suppressing women's independent initiatives as feminists. In Egypt women, like men, enjoyed significant gains in education and employment. Women were accorded the political rights they had been demanding since the 1920s when the Nasserist state in 1956 granted them the right to vote

and to be elected to parliament. However, women lost their political, economic, and social independence when that same state shut down the thirty-three year old Egyptian Feminist Union. Feminism in the form of free public activism by women deciding on their goals and priorities was quashed as the state exerted its control. Gender concerns were subsumed by the state.

With the move away from socialist state rule in parts of the south Mediterranean in the 1970s and especially from the 1980s, public expression of religion as a force in society was fostered from on high. This occurred earliest in Egypt which shifted from state socialism to Open Door capitalism (*al-Infitah*) at the start of the 1970s. The move toward a renewed public expression of Islam as a political and social force was meant to break the hold of socialism and its late charismatic leader Nasser and to pave the way for the introduction of a new capitalist order and the state's tilt to the West. An unintended result was the unleashing of a resurgence of Islamism or political Islam. The neoliberal state in simultaneously allowing feminism and Islam to resurface could signal a new freedom of expression allowed by the state and at the same time feminism could serve as a antidote to a resurgent political Islam with its aggressive patriarchal agenda. The unleashing of forces of political Islam in Egypt was repeated elsewhere in the south Mediterranean and beyond.

As their vying for power with the state intensified, Islamists redefined "the secular" and "the religious" casting them as rigid terms in an oppositional binary. Islamists redefined secular to signify unreligious and even anti-religious. Islamists branded "secular feminism" (which had been shaped in part by Islamic modernist thinking) anti-religious, with a blanket condemnation of being "Western." Islamists meanwhile spread an atavistic hyper-patriarchal definition of "the religious." Emergent second-wave feminisms in the south Mediterranean in the final third of the 20th century met less with state control, than before although states continued to play manipulative roles. Meanwhile the hardening forces of political Islam were out to de-legitimise the egalitarian definition of religion and society that feminists supported.

By the end of the 1980s, and especially in the 1990s, women in the south Mediterranean and in other Muslim societies, had begun to confront the virulent gender atavism unleashed in the name of religion. They did this by advancing a strong gender egalitarian Islamic discourse. In the first decade of the 21st century Islamic feminism has begun to help shape a new Mediterranean culture. On both shores of the Mediterranean Islamic feminism is becoming one of several discourses calling for the application of gender equality and gender justice. In the south Mediterranean, Islamic feminist discourse and local secular

feminisms have been interconnecting in common pursuits, most notably in efforts to reform religiously-backed family law. Islamic feminism is finding a place in the discursive arena in the north Mediterranean in conversation with various local feminisms and human rights discourse. The common concerns and shared force of multiple discourses have the potential to produce enhanced difference- respecting, egalitarian, pluralistic democracies.

Islamic feminism presents a very different Islam from the one that patriarchal Islamists broadcast which has conveniently played into the hands of the Islamophobes. Why do conservative and reactionary articulations of Islam act as the lens through which Islam is so often seen? How can Islamic feminism, promoting an egalitarian understanding of Islam have an impact in shaping a new Mediterranean culture? We look at the Spanish experience.

Islamic Feminism in Spain

Islamic feminism appeared in Spain in the 1990s, the decade this new discourse was circulating more widely.[11] In Spain, Islamic feminism was promoted initially by new converts, mainly from the old Left. Prominent among these were Mansur Escudero, a psychologist, who became president of the Islamic Council (Junta Islámica) and Jadicha Candela, lawyer, who founded and headed the Asociación Al-Nisá (The Al-Nisa Association). At the first Conference of Muslim Women in Spain in 1991 held in Barcelona, Candela gave a keynote titled: "The Egalitarian Revolution of Islam." She spoke about the principle of human equality to be found in the Qur'an, calling the sacred message "the first universal declaration of the rights of man [the human being] and the citizen."[12] Candela denounced misogynist readings of Islam perpetuated by conservative *ulama*. She pointed to Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi's investigation of *hadiths* (sayings and deeds attributed to the Prophet) and her exposure of misogynist *hadtihs* as fakes. She noted that a misogynist version of Islam has also been circulated in the West to discredit Islam and Muslims, by the very same West that benefited centuries ago from the rational thought of the Muslims of Andalusia. Candela spoke of Islamic feminism's deep roots in its own indigenous past at a high-point in the Spain's history when Islamic culture and science flourished within its borders and beyond.

Candela is among those who approach the Qur'an and other religious texts through *ijtihad*, rational investigation. She makes clear that she does not come from the ranks of the *ulemah* with their traditional training in the religious sciences and who claim this training as the source of their religious authority. Candela positions herself within that expanding group

of educated professionals who examine the Qur'an and other religious texts directly on their own, whose readings resonate among Muslims, and who are being increasingly regarded as new authorities. Among the new critical interpreters is Abdennur Prado who was the major driving force behind organising the first International Islamic Feminist Conference that convened in Barcelona in 2005. Prado wrote a paper called "Gender Jihad" in which he outlined the egalitarian message of Islam. It is patriarchal readings and practices of Islam that come into conflict with current norms in Spain, he stressed, not egalitarian Islam.

He noted that subjugation of women was now coming to be seen, not as a mark of Islam but as a distortion of Islam. Islamic feminism, asserted Prado, can serve Muslim immigrants, both women and men, as a path to integration into the broader society. The Catalan Islamic Board (Junta Islámica Cataluna) on which Prado acts as Secretary, has set itself the task of sharing an egalitarian understanding of Islam among fellow Muslims who are newcomers to Spain.[13] It is not easy as Muslim immigrants, who mainly come from Morocco, are mostly poor and uneducated. The patriarchal cultural practices they bring with them are entangled with their notions of religion and are typically imposed on women more aggressively in contexts of immigration. Yet, the new realities of immigration can also loosen the hold of patriarchal controls.

Islamic feminism in Spain has been informed by the work of Moroccan feminists Fatima Mernissi and Asma Lamrabet. Over some three decades, Mernissi produced a vast corpus of work including her already alluded to critique of misogynist *hadiths* in her book, *The Veil and Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Womens Rights in Islam* regarded as a founding text of Islamic feminism.[14] Widely translated into Spanish, her work, has circulated among Muslims in Spain in print and through cyberspace on the portal web Islam and the digital magazine *Verde Islam*. Mernissi is esteemed not only among Muslim liberals in Spain but as well among non-Muslim secular feminists and progressives. In recognition of her work, the Spanish state awarded Mernissi its prestigious Austurias prize in 2004.

Moroccan medical doctor Asma Lamrabet writes on the Qur'an. Her books, *Musulmane tout simplement* (2002) and *Aicha, Epouse de le profet ou islam en féminine* (2004) have been influential among Islamic feminists in Spain. At the International Conference of Spanish Speaking Muslims in Seville in 2003, Lamrabet presented a paper titled: "Féminism islamique?"[15] Lamrabet, like Mernissi, is part of the crescendo of voices in the south Mediterranean that deplore the centuries-old patriarchal take-over of Islam, or what

Egyptian Islamic feminist Zainab Radwan branded "un- Islamic patriarchy." In Seville, Lamrabet declared that "Passive faith has no use in our Islamic emancipation. We have no choice but to continue to mobilize Muslim women to regain their rights."[16]

Islamic feminism among Muslims in Spain, draws inspiration from twin sources: a gender-progressive re-interpretation of the Qur'an articulated by the new women exegetes; and the enlightened scholarly tradition of their own past when the Islamic civilisation that flourished in Spain was a font of learning in Europe.[17] Spanish Islamic feminism "is rooted in al-Andalus, as an inspiration and symbolic reference" declares Prado "and a sign of our own distinctiveness."[18] In the looping effect characteristic of Islamic feminism in Spain, as elsewhere, protagonists both draw upon and feed into the global circulations of Islamic feminist discourse. During the intense debates in the media and cyberspace on women as *imams* leading congregational prayer in the mosque, ignited when Islamic theologian amina wadud performed as *imam* in leading a congregational prayer of women and men in New York in 2005 on March 18, international women's day, Prado wrote a strong piece in support of women as imams. He backed his argument referencing two renowned Islamic luminaries of twelfth century Spain: Ibn Rushd (known as Averroes in the West) and Ibn Arabi.[19]

Islamic thought in Spain was occluded at the end of the fifteenth century when the last of the Muslims were silenced or driven out of the country in 1492 and their religion was suppressed. In 1992, the Government of Spain signed an agreement with the Islamic Commission of Spain officially recognising Islam and permitting Muslims to practice their religion once again in public for the first time in five hundred years. Freedom of religion signified broader freedom for the Muslim community and as well for the entire country. It marked a new moment in the integration of Muslims into society as equal citizens.

Islamic feminism in Spain, as elsewhere, is coalescing in conditions that are highly charged and culturally politicised. Muslims, although now an officially recognised religious group able to practice their religion freely, appear not to be widely well received in Spain. Religion in Europe more generally conjures up a hindrance to individual and societal freedom rather than connoting freedom. In Spain, the situation becomes complicated with reactionary influences at work among the Muslim immigrant community which is said to number 600,000 (an estimated 6,000 Muslims are Spanish converts). The Islamic Commission of Spain (Comisión Islamic de Espaňa) officially represents Muslims vis-à-vis the state. The Islamic Commission is composed of two bodies: the Federación Espanola de Entidades Religiosas Islámicas, collectively called FEERI and the Unión de

Communidas Islámicas de Espana or UCIDE. The Islamic Commission was headed by its liberal founder Mansur Escudero, until 2005 when it fell under Saudi influence. UCIDE, headed by Ryad Tatary of Syrian origin, became linked to the Muslim Brotherhood

Muslim liberals and Islamic feminists in Spain take a two-pronged approach. One, they confront the inherited patriarchal Islamic scholarly tradition perpetuated by conservative *ulemah* originating from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere abroad. Two, as noted, they promote gender egalitarian readings and practices of Islam. Feminist Muslims and other Muslim liberals in Spain communicate their views in public talks, journals, and cyberspace. They are active as well in convening women's conferences like the Conference of Muslim Women in Barcelona in 1999 and the Conference of Muslim Women in Cordoba in 2002 which took a firm stand against wife-beating. They also participate in meetings organised by others such as the Conference of Spanish Speaking Muslims in Seville in 2003.[20] The population of Spanish-speaking Muslims world-wide is growing rapidly, especially in the Americas, and is said to range from ten to twelve million.

International Islamic feminist networking in Spain

Spanish Muslims organised the first ever global conference on Islamic feminism. Convening in Barcelona in 2005 it gathered an impressive array of scholars and activists from Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America. Secretary of the Islamic Council in Catalonia, Abdennur Prado was at the forefront in organising this path-breaking event along with the Spanish Muslim NGOs: the Sakina Social Cultural Association and the Social Cultural Association for the Development of Islamic feminism. The conference received sponsorship from the government of Spain and the Catalan state, as well as backing from the UNESCO office in Catalonia. The cooperation of civil society and Spanish regional governments in organising this pioneering Islamic feminist initiative, along with receiving international backing, demonstrated what could be achieved with broad support.[21]

Spanish conferees included feminist activists, Arabists, leaders of Muslim organisations, and public officials. Among the feminist activists were Jadicha Candela, Ndeye Andujar, and Lidia Puiguert. Arabists included Dolores Bramon and Gema Munoz. Leaders in the Muslim community included Yaratullah Monturiol, President of the Catalan Islamic Council and Mansur Escudero, Secretary of the Islamic Commission of Spain. Public officials came from the Board of Religious Affairs in the Catalan Autonomous

Government, the Women's Affairs and Civil Rights in the Barcelona City Council, and the Women's Institute of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of the central government.

The Barcelona conference gathered an array of scholars and activists from around the globe. The scholars included two women whose works been widely accepted as foundational texts of Islamic feminism: African- American theologian amina wadud, author of *Qur'an and Woman* (1992, 1999)[22] and Pakistani-American international relations specialist Asma Barlas author of "*Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (2002). [23]

Activists included many globally recognised women in the Islamic feminist scene. They dealt with a broad set of issues: progressive religious education at the grass roots level for both sexes, women's access to mosques for congregational worship, women's right to function as *imams*, reform of Muslim family laws; rights of women to their bodies, and questions of sexuality. Lily Munir, head of the Center for Pesantren and Democracy Studies in Indonesia, active in grassroots Islamic feminism promoting progressive educational initiatives in Islamic boarding schools serving girls and boys, discussed lived experience in her country. Indian-American mosque activist Asra Nomani spoke about organising the gender-mixed congregational prayer in New York in 2005 when amina wadud acting as *imam* led the prayers and gave the *khutba* (sermon). Earlier, Nomani had taken the initiative in encouraging women at her local mosque in West Virginia to enter through the main door and pray together in the same space with men. Raheel Reza, a Pakistani-Canadian shared her experience as a Muslim community activist and performing as *imam* at Friday congregational prayer in Toronto. Zainah Anwar represented Sisters in Islam, the pioneering Islamic feminist organisation created by professional women in Malaysia who reached out to the broader Muslim community, publishing booklets giving Qur'an-backed answers to questions on issues of immediate concern to women.[24] Mufaliat Fijabi Dasole from the Nigerian organisation, Boabab for Women's Human Rights, a secular association with a Muslim and Christian membership which belongs to the global network Women Living under Muslim Laws (WLUML), discussed Boabab's recent success in taking the lead in appealing cases before higher *shar'iah* courts of two women who had been convicted of adultery and sentenced to death under recently introduced *hudud* (Islamic criminal laws). These landmark cases demonstrated how gender justice could be achieved through the application of enlightened reading of Islamic jurisprudence.

The organisers of the Barcelona conference believing it could be productive for Islamic feminists and Islamists to engage in face-to-face debate invited Nadia Yassine, the head of

the Moroccan Islamist organisation, the Justice and Spirituality Association (founded by her father Abdesallam Yassine, an Islamist jailed by the Moroccan government). She was, however, barred from traveling to the conference by Moroccan state authorities who held her under house arrest. In her writings and talks Yassine decries the hijacking of the gender egalitarian message of the Qur'an by men going back to the early days of Islam. While upholding the ideals of an egalitarian Islam Nadia Yassine locates herself in the Islamist movement (called by some the Islamic revivalist movement) revealing complex and contriductory politics at work in the world of Islam and gender.[25]

The 2005 International Islamic Feminist Conference in Barcelona attracted wide media coverage, especially from mainstream media which displayed amazement that an Islamic feminism could exist. The Barcelona conference led to an expansion of global scholarly and activist networks and demonstrated the rich diversity of Islam and Islamic feminism.[26]

Through an Islamic Feminist Looking Glass:

Collective Activism in Spain

I continue my discussion of the Spanish experience of Islamic feminism by shifting from the global to the local. I look at an incident relating to violence against women in the form of the circulation of a discourse alleging that Islam sanctions wife-beating. The incident raised issues of authority and authenticity. Whose Islam? What Islam? Islam in what social and political context?

The question of violence against women was taken up in the south Mediterranean by Muslim and Christian women in Egypt in the second- wave secular feminist movement from the 1970s and 80s and has remained on the agenda ever since. Egyptian feminist Nawal Al-Saadawi, a writer and physician. drawing upon observations in her clinical work, confronted violence committed in the family against women in her 1972 book *al- Mar'a wa al-Jins* (The Woman and Sex) in 1972. Al-Saadawi insisted that Islam opposed violence of any sort against women.[27] In Malaysia the organisation Sisters in Islam countered the rampant belief that Islam authorised a husband to beat a wife by publishing a booklet in accessible language intended for wide circulation titled: "Is Wife Beating Condoned in Islam?" Referencing the Qur'an, the answer was: "No."[28]

The issue of wife beating as allegedly condoned by Islam came to the fore in Spain in 2003 when the imam of the mosque in the town of Fuengirola in southern Spain, Muhammad Kamal Mustafa of Egyptian origin published a book titled *La mujer en el Islam* (The Woman in Islam) declaring that the Qur'an permitted wife-beating.[29] The book, which was said to have sold three thousand copies, occasioned loud public outcry across the country. Three Muslim women's organisations: the Asociación An-Nisá, the Asociación Cultural Inshallâh, and the Asociación Baraka demanded that Imam Muhammad remove the problematic discussion of wife-beating from his book. The Spanish Federation of Islamic Religious Organisations (FEERI) also requested that he amend his text. Mustafa refused. He claimed authority as the holder of a doctorate from Al-Azhar University in Cairo, declaring he was one of two Muslims in Spain qualified to issue *fatwas* (religious pronouncements). He branded as heretics those who opposed his opinion.

Muslim women's organisations and human rights associations filed a legal case in a Spanish court against Muhammad for inciting gender-based violence. At his trial Mustafa insisted that he was acting in accordance with his religion. He argued that the Qur'an condoned wife-beating and that he was merely reflecting with what was found in the holy book. In advocating light beating to discipline a disobedient wife, he portrayed himself as sympathetic to women.

The court sought clarification concerning Islam and wife-beating. Witnesses including Jadicha Candela, president of Asociación An-Nisá; Maryam Cabezos, president of the Asociación Cultural Inshal-lâh; and Medhi Flores, Secretary of FEERI, who advanced arguments against a Qur'anic endorsement of wife beating based on their readings of the Qur'an and *hadith*. The Third Conference of Muslim Women in Cordoba in an affidavit to the court asserted that physical and psychological abuse, were prohibited in Islam.

The judge in his summation pronounced that the defendant Mustafa was advancing his own opinion in his book and that his pronouncement did not constitute definitive doctrine as he claimed. Citing Article 15 of the Constitution of Spain which prohibits inhuman and degrading treatment, along with citing the Spanish Penal Code, the judge convicted Muhammad on the grounds of incitement to gender violence. Muslim liberals together with other Spaniards saw the indictment as a victory for gender justice and human rights. The incident, at the same time, dredged up old fears and stereotypes, rekindling contempt for Islam and Muslims provoking many Spaniards to reconfirm their view that Islam is a misogynist religion.

The wife-beating case underscored the significance of interpretation (*tafsir*) in understanding religion as opposed to the idea of fixed and undisputed doctrine valid for all time. The Spanish case occasioned the re-articulation of understandings set out so cogently by wadud and other women interpreters demonstrating that the Qur'an does not condone violence, physical or psychological, against any human being. Their readings assert that the principles of the equality and dignity of all human beings to be found in the scripture take precedence over wordings in any particular passages that might seem to suggest otherwise. All three Abrahamic religions of which Islam is the last, can and have been read in ways that 'justify' patriarchy and they can be read in a more gender- egalitarian manner as Jewish and Christian liberation theologies and Islamic feminist discourse demonstrate. The verdict in the Spanish case showed how a judicious interpretation of Islam and the application of Spanish law together were able to deliver justice.

Muslims are exhorted to approach the Qur'an for guidance and understanding. At the same time, there have arisen historically in Muslim societies bodies of religious scholars who have generated knowledge that has been institutionalised and given official authority by the religious establishment and that has often been endorsed by the state and in instances has formed the basis of statutory law. In the last several decades, global Islam has witnessed the appearance of individuals emerging not from the ranks of those trained in the religious sciences in Islamic seminaries, but from those educated in secular institutions in the social sciences, liberal arts, women's and gender studies, engineering, medicine, and the natural sciences, who have offered compelling interpretations of the Qur'an and other religious texts. Increasingly these new interpreters have been spontaneously accepted by people as sources of inspiration and de facto authorities. These new interpreters of religion include women, some of whom have received education in the religious sciences to the highest levels at Islamic institutions of learning including Al-Azhar University in Cairo, the same institution from which Imam Mustafa received his doctorate.

Condoning wife-beating must be placed in the context of a patriarchal reading of Islam. In this context, the reason given for condoning a man's beating of his wife is to coerce her into obeying his authority. In an egalitarian understanding of Islam, the two spouses who in the Qur'an are identified by the same term, *zawj*, or partner, are mates and "protectors of one another." In 2004, Morocco amended its religiously-backed *Mudawwana* or Civil Code legally casting the two spouses as co-heads of family. The reformed Civil Code also extended ways a wife could affect a divorce, as did a 2002 law in Egypt where, however, the husband is still the legal head of the family. If a wife is seen to be 'recalcitrant' presumably there is a problem in the marriage and if spousal relations cannot be resolved

amicably the answer is not resource to compulsion though the violence of beating but a dissolution of the marriage. Gender oppression in marriage, as outside marriage, is not acceptable. It is a commonplace that: "there is no compulsion in Islam."

While the resolution of the case in Spain elicited widespread support from Islamic feminists and Muslim progressives globally, it also occasioned reiterations among reactionary and conservative *ulemah* of patriarchal readings of Islam concerning wife-beating. Prominent among conservatives is Yusuf al-Qaradawi (like Mustafa, an Egyptian educated at al-Azhar), a founder and head of the European Council for *Fatwas* and Research (headquartered in Dublin) who resides in Qatar. Al-Qaradawi's patriarchal readings of Islam are found on his website Islam Online and in his 1984 book, *The Lawful and the Prohibited: The Future Civilisation*. Such thinking was of the sort circulated in Spain in Mustafa's book. It is this thinking that conservative Muslims in their countries of birth or of immigration typically cling to as they remain beholden to established authorities, whether family or community, or religious leaders and elites. Islamic feminism undermines patriarchal Islam threatening the grip of Muslim conservatives. Islamic feminism at the same time is unsettling to Western Islamophobes as its egalitarian understanding of Islam removes a trump card in their denigration of Islam and Muslims. Prado contends that the resolution of the Mustafa case constituted a turning point, or a new defining moment, for Islamic feminism in Spain. The wife-beating case spurred collective activism among Muslims as immigrants and new citizens and Spanish born converts, and deepened ties between them.

Concluding Thoughts

In considering how Islamic feminism contributes to the creation of a new Mediterranean culture I have focused on Spain, the site of the first International Islamic Feminist Conference and locus of a burgeoning Islamic feminism in a country that was once the center of a brilliant Islamic civilisation in Europe where enlightened thought and religious and cultural pluralism thrived. Today, two versions of Islam are struggling to implant themselves in Spain: a patriarchal Islam and an egalitarian Islam.

The assertion of retrogressive thinking that legitimises violence against women in the name of Islam was successfully countered by a reading of the religion that eschews violence. Harmful assertions and behaviors were not condoned in the name of religion. Multicultural arguments were not an excuse for aiding and abetting violence of any sort, through word or deed.

How can Islamic feminism help create a new Mediterranean culture? The Spanish experience offers insight into what may develop in the north Mediterranean world more generally. In Spain, women who articulate Islamic feminist ideals are generally well-educated professionals. Along with well-educated Muslim women as new residents and citizens, Muslim converts of Spanish heritage are well-positioned as co-religionists to share Islamic feminist ideals with Muslim immigrants, who are mainly poor and under-educated, and cling to patriarchal versions of Islam brought with them from their countries of origin. The potential of Islamic feminism in immigrant cultures, presaged by the Spanish experience, in fashioning a new inclusive egalitarian Mediterranean culture has yet to be fully realised. Islamic feminism, meanwhile, can help erode Islamophobia.

In the south Mediterranean, Islamic feminist discourse has been appropriated by secular feminist activists in their struggles to attain egalitarian Muslim family laws. The greatest success, as noted above, was achieved in the Morocco an experience where activists across the secular-religious spectrum mobilised egalitarian arguments of Islam. Countries of the south Mediterranean face the greatest challenges in fostering the practice of equality among citizens in overhauling the remaining patriarchal Muslim family laws, and inheritance laws (which often stand apart from family laws). Islamic feminism provides the thinking and the tools.

Through the spread and development of Islamic feminism a new Islam in the Mediterranean is slowly being forged. On the northern shore this new Islam finds its place in secularised states and societies. On the southern Mediterranean shore, Islamic feminism emerges in nations that are officially secular, albeit where Islam is the state religion (as forms of Christianity are in some European states) but where (unlike in such European countries) state and religion are bound up through religiously grounded personal status or family laws. In countries of the south

Mediterranean religion remains a strong force in everyday culture. In the south Mediterranean, Muslims belong to old majoritarian communities (with the exception of Lebanon) and in the north are typically members of still relatively new minority communities in countries which have difficulty accepting Muslims and people of non-European ethnicities as equals in their midst. Through the interchange of Islamic feminist thought and of lessons learned from activist campaigns on both sides of the Mediterranean an egalitarian Islam can be seen slowly but perceptibly to have a positive impact in fostering more egalitarian cultures, states and societies. A new Mediterranean Islam is part

of a new Mediterranean in the making. For both Islam and the Mediterranean, the process will be long and tortuous, but, it is to be hoped, with a light at the end of the tunnel.

NOTES

[1] I wrote the paper in English in 2005-06; it should be read with this time frame in mind. I thank political economist Danilo Zolo for inviting me to contribute to this Mediterranean volume and forcing me to rise to the challenge of thinking Mediterranean. I thank Abdennur Prado for generously responding in detailed emails to my questions and offering information and insights, and for sending me materials.

[2] For a recent study see Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

[3] For reference to the early use of the term Islamic feminism among Muslims from non-Western societies see Margot Badran, “Islamic Feminism: What’s in a Name?” in Margot Badran, *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009) pp. 242-52. Originally published in *al-Ahram Weekly*, 17-23 February 2002.

[4] On women and conversion see Karin van Nieukerk, ed., *Women Embracing Islam: Gender and Conversion in the West*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2006. In this volume see Margot Badran, “Conversion and Feminism: Comparing British Dutch and South African Life Stories.”

[5] See miriam cooke, Creating *Islamic Feminism Through Literature: Women Claim Islam. London*: Routledge, 2001.

[6] See “Introduction to the Second Edition,” xv-xxi, Margot Badran and miriam cooke, eds., *Opening the Gates*: *An Anthology of Arab Feminist Writing*. (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 2004, 2nd edit.

[7] Feminist consciousness and early feminist thought in the Middle East first surfaced in the latter decades of the 19th century as I discuss in my book: *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995. Published in Arabic as Arabic translation: *Raidat al-Harakat al-Niswiyya al-Misriyya wa al-Islam wa al-Watan*. Cairo: Supreme Council of Culture, 2000. For

women's early written expressions of this see: Margot Badran and miriam cooke, *Opening the Gates*. On feminist consciousness and expression through biography in Egypt (where Arab women from the Levant lived and wrote) see Marilyn Booth, *May Her Likes be Multiplied: Biography and Gender in Egypt*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001. On secular feminist movements and their contexts in the southeast Mediterranean see: Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation; Elizabeth Thompson, Colonial Citizens*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000; and Ellen Fleishman, *The Nation and its New Women: The Palestinian Women's Movement*: 1920-48 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

[8] See Kumar Jayawardena's classic *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London: Zed, 1986).

[9] Rupp, Leila J., and Verta Taylor, "Forging Feminist Identity in an International Movement: A Collective Identity Approach to Twentieth Century Feminism." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 26 (2): 363-386, 364.

[10] PhD dissertation: Ca'Foscari 2006. For a commemorative piece on the eightieth anniversary of the 1923 IAW meeting with a focus on the Egyptians and Italians see Margot Badran and Lucia Sorbera, "In No Need of Protection: Nationalist Militants and Determined Feminists," *Al Ahram Weekly* (Cairo) 24-30 July 2003.

[11] See "Islamic Feminism: What's in a Name?", Margot Badran, *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009) pp.243-52.

[12] The full title is: "The Egalitarian Revolution of Islam: Reflections on the Rights of the Woman in Islam and her Status in the Social System the Qur'an Inaugurated in the First Century [Hijra]." *Islamverde* Nov. 1999.

[13] Webislam, Sept. 2005.

[14] New York: Addison - Wesley, Trans. by Mary Jo Lakeland. 1991; originally published as *Le harim politique* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1987).

[15] Both books are published by Tawhid press in Paris.

[16] This talk is available at www.oumma.com. Lamrabet also draws attention to Saida Rahal Sidhoum, "Féminist et de culture musulmane dans la société française, une identité contrôle," *Confluences Méditerranée*, no. 7, automne 1998.

[17] By way of noting past and present circulations of knowledge Tajik scholar and feminist Munira Shahidi in a major work Ibn Sina and Dante (first serialised in Moscow in Russian, then published as a book in Dushambe in Tajik and later published in translations in Italy and other Western European countries) explores the transfer of liberal thought from Central Asia to Spain and from there to the rest of Europe in the Middle Ages. See Margot Badran, "Tajik Gender and Identity, *Al Ahram Weekly*, 10-16 May 2001 (based on an interview with Shahidi).

[18] Email communication from Abdennur Prado, Mar. 14, 2006.

[19] Abdennur Prado, "About the Friday Prayer led by amina wadud," www.webislam.com (Spanish Islamic website) which also appeared on the websites of WLUML and alt-islam. While Prado does not draw specific attention to Ibn Rushd and Ibn Arabi in this piece he talks about their contributions in an email communication of Mar. 24, 2006 to the author.

[20] Hisham Aidi, "Let us be Moors: Islam, Race and 'Connected Histories'" *in Middle East Report*, no. 229 offers an account of the spread of Islam among Spanish-speakers in the Americas as well as in Spain.

[21] On the conference see the organisers' website www.feminismeislamic.org; for accounts of those attending see Ulises Mejias, "A Jihad against Gender Oppression," www.ideant.typepad.com and Asra Nomani, "A Gender Jihad for Islam's Future," *The Washington Post*, Nov. 7, 2005

[22] Published in 1992 in Kuala Lumpur by Penerbit Fajar Bakati and in 1999 by Oxford University Press.

[23] Published in 2002 by University of Texas Press.

[24] Zainah Anwar is the author of numerous articles. Her "Muslim Women Speak Out," appeared in Islam 21: *A Global Network for Muslim Intellectuals and Activists*, no. 36, May 2004, pp. 9-12, also on line at www.Islam21.net.

[25] She sent her paper titled “On the Status of Woman in Islam” to the Barcelona conference. See her website: nadiayassine.net. Her book *Toute voils dehors* (Casablanca: Le Fennec, 2003) is now available in English as *Full Sails Ahead* (Iowa City: Justice and Spirituality Publishing House, 2006). Also on Nadia Yassine see Mark LeVine, *Why They Don’t Hate Us: Lifting the Veil on the Axis of Evil*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2005, passim.

[26] By way of noting past and present circulations of knowledge Tajik scholar and feminist Munira Shahidi in a major work Ibn Sina and Dante (first serialised in Moscow in Russian, then published as a book in Dushambe in Tajik and later published in translations in Italy and other Western European countries) explores the transfer of liberal thought from Central Asia to Spain and from there to the rest of Europe in the Middle Ages. See Margot Badran, “Tajik Gender and Identity, *Al Ahram Weekly*, 10-16 May 2001 (based on an interview with Shahidi).

[27] Al Saadawi was joined by others in leading a vigorous movement for women’s rights and a whole generation of women were influenced by her landmark book *al-Jins wa al-Mar’a* (Woman and Sex, published in Beirut in1972).

[28] On Islamic interpretations of wife-beating and the issue of interpretation and authority see three articles in *Hawa*, vol 2. no. 3 (2004: Hadia Mubarak, “Breaking the Interpretive Monopoly: A Re-examination of Verse 4:34,”) pp. 261-89; amina wadud “Qur’an, Gender and Interpretive Possibilities,” pp. 316-36; and “Gender Biases in Qur’anic Exegesis: A Study of Scriptural Interpretation from a Gender Perspective,” pp. 337-6.

[29] Published by the House of the Arab Book in Barcelona. This incident was widely reported in the international media, which often appeared more intrigued by the negative face this put on ‘Islam’ that by the feminist issues it raised. While I have read much of this reportage which supplies a certain amount of information, I have drawn in particular from Abdennur Prado’s article “The Qur’an in the Spanish Courts: The ‘Kamal Case’ and Freedom of Islam in Spain available on webIslam. In a personal communication Prado said that this incident proved a turning point in Spanish Islamic feminism as it forced people to take an unequivocal stand.

Contributor:

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THE CONFLUENCE OF ISLAMIC FEMINISM AND PEACEBUILDING: LESSONS FROM BOSNIA

ZILKA SPAHIĆ ŠILJAK

Abstract: This paper maps the closely intertwined trajectories of Islamic feminism and peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It examines how the socio-political context of the region influenced the emergence of peacebuilding and Islamic feminism, and how secular human rights and feminist organisations provided a fertile ground for female Bosnian activists to practice feminist theology even before they were exposed to the theoretical underpinnings of Islamic feminism. Through examples of notable feminists and human rights activists in the region, as well as projects committed to raising awareness about topics such as gender-equality, peace, and reconciliation, the paper explores the enduring relationship between Islamic feminism and peacebuilding. The language of religion and feminism has proven to be a useful tool for promoting peacebuilding and dialogue within the community, while at the same time secular human rights organisations continue to provide the only space for engagement with Islamic feminism in a patriarchal society.

Keywords: Islamic feminism, feminist theology, peacebuilding, secular human rights, gender equality, Muslim women

Introduction

What Islamic feminism and peacebuilding have in common and how they both emerged and reinforced each other in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the beginning of 1990s was part of my research on feminism in post- socialist and post-war Muslim contexts[1] and gender and peacebuilding.[2] The Bosnian war (1992-1995) was a trigger for many women and men to begin a search for their own identity, spirituality, and religion, and part of that journey was discovering feminism, in particular Islamic feminism. After the war, Bosnia remained stuck due to ethnic/religious divisions, poverty, and dependence on foreign aid and exposure to a variety of both Western and Eastern political and cultural influences.

This paper examines how Islamic feminist ideas started to be shaped on the foundations of the peacebuilding activism developed under the auspices of international human rights and feminist organisations during and after the war, and how the revitalisation of Islamic educational and cultural institutions in socialist Yugoslavia enabled the religious and secular education of women who became peacebuilders and conciliators in their communities.

Revival of Islam With(out) Gender Equality

Islam came to Bosnia with the Ottoman conquests in the fifteenth century. Muslims lived as a privileged group until near the end of the nineteenth century when the Austro-Hungarian Empire took reign over the territory. For the first time Muslims had to learn to live under non-Islamic rule and one of the novelties was the appointment of the grand mufti (*rais ul-ulama*) as the head of the Islamic Community in Bosnia, detached from the authority of the *shaykh al-Islam* in Istanbul.

Exposed to modernisation and secularisation Muslims struggled to keep their identity and faith under different regimes through the twentieth century.[3] Secularisation during the period of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1945-1990) was a particular challenge in the first phase, between 1945 and 1968 when religion was completely separated from public life. The second phase of gradual liberation and awakening of religion started in 1970 and lasted until the late 1980s. As part of the global trends of Islamic revival, Muslims in Bosnia returned to observing religion, building mosques, and re-opening Islamic education and cultural institutions such as the Gazi Husref-Bey Madrasa for men (1961) and for women (1978) and the Islamic Studies Institute (1977) for both women and men.[4]

Reform ideas of nineteenth-century scholars such as Muhammad Abduh, Rashid Rida, and Sayyid A. Khan came to Bosnia mainly through the scholarship of Bosnians who studied at Al-Azhar University during the twentieth century. From 1970 onward, Islamic revival was also advanced by the Islamic press such as the weekly magazine *Preporod* and the monthly magazine *Islamska misao* as well as through translations of Islamic literature such as the ground-breaking book by Pakistani scholar, Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (1978), which was one of the key texts in the Islamic studies curriculum in Bosnia.

Despite the fact that women also attended the Gazi Husref-Bey Madrasa and the Islamic Studies Institute in Sarajevo, and that many reform thinkers were part of the curriculum, these changes did not include the introduction of gender themes. Gender equality was reflected only in the increasing number of women who graduated from the newly opened Islamic institutions that partially integrated them into Islamic community activities such as preaching to women during Ramadan; participation in some rituals practices like the *mevlud*, (Arabic: *mawlid*, the birthday of the Prophet) or the *tevhid* (Arabic: *tawhid* unity and oneness of Allah), the farewell ritual with recitation of *dhikr* at commemorations of death together with men; and through working as teachers of religious education (*muallimat*) in mosques and public schools from 1994. Before the 1970s all these activities were gender segregated.[5] Women who studied in the first Woman's Madrasa between 1933 when it was established and 1948 when it was shut down by the Communist regime in Yugoslavia, together with women from the younger generations of women who studied at the Madrasa when it re-opened in 1978, perform these rituals for women only.

Local Muslim scholars who appeared to be progressive and oriented towards reform, gender, and feminism were completely absent from the scholarly discourse and debate. They were not integrated into the university curriculum or into any other alternative form of education. As a student of the Islamic Studies Institute in the late 1980s, I realised that something was missing. Studying about Muslim women by only focusing on motherhood and their educational roles within the family seemed unfulfilling. The only example of female leadership was that of 'Aisha, a wife of the Prophet Muhammad, in the "Battle of the Camel" but it was taught as a disgraceful attempt of manipulation by the "Mother of Believers," who was tricked into thinking that a woman could take part in the leadership of her community. Like most of my colleagues in late 1980s I did not know how to articulate my discomfort, because I did not have the appropriate vocabulary at my disposal. This only began to change with the start of the war in Bosnia in 1992 and my acquaintance with European secular feminists.

The Emergence of Feminism and Peacebuilding

The emancipation of women started in socialist Yugoslavia in 1946 when they obtained suffrage rights but granting gender equality was a state-directed project. Feminism arose in late 1970s in opposition to the state-controlled gender equality project although it was mostly a secular and atheist discourse that did not take religion and female believers into account. Female scholars at universities in Zagreb, Ljubljana, Belgrade and Sarajevo brought to the surface questions of freedom and individual choice because, as Slavenka

Drakulic explains, women wanted more than being part of the workforce and Communist Party-controlled political participation.[6] Not only were religious women marginalised by the state Communist ideology and secular feminists, but they were marginalised as well by their own faith communities.[7] Muslim women who entered Islamic studies and mastered classical Islamic texts and teachings did not have the opportunity to learn about feminism in general and about Islamic feminism in particular. The space for their activism was limited to the aforementioned rituals of the *mevlud* and *tevhid*.

The eruption of the war in 1992 changed the course of women's lives. Suddenly they had to deal with painful issues such as wartime rape, torture, and loss of families and homes. Female theologians, including myself, became engaged for the first time in the Islamic Community. However, the Islamic community in Bosnia limited the space for our activities to the religious education of refugees. Muslim humanitarian organisations from Kuwait, Egypt, Iran, and Saudi Arabia required religious women to follow the dictates of their understanding of Islam such as wearing long black robes or *burqas* and teaching the Salafi version Islam or risk losing their paid jobs. However, Bosnian women rejected that sort of "blackmail" because they saw that these organisations appeared with their own agendas and missionary tasks.

New opportunities came with European secular feminist organisations which arrived in Bosnia to help women in promoting and protecting women's human rights. Medica Zenica established by German feminists in 1993 became the first feminist NGO in Bosnia. It gathered together a team of international and local experts. For the first time in our experience, international secular feminists accommodated religion and religious perspectives in the process of trauma healing and enabling women to get back their lives. They did not come to impose an outside approach, but rather to work cooperatively harnessing local religious and cultural practices in healing women's trauma. In the socialist period secular and atheist feminists did not include religious women in their activities. However, during and after the war, secular and religious women worked together because they shared the same vision to empower Bosnian women and advance their rights.

Secular feminist organisations constituted the only safe space in that period for religious women to discuss feminism from a religious perspective. As I was part of the process of shaping feminist theology and Islamic feminism in Bosnia I provide insight into peacebuilding and Islamic feminism initiatives from my own personal experience as an activist and scholar along with the perspectives of peacebuilders Amra Pandžo and Sabiha Husić. Peacebuilding and Islamic feminist initiatives were developed exclusively within

secular NGOs and at the University of Sarajevo. The Islamic community remains closed to these ideas until this day.

Islamic Feminism Born in the Lap of the Secular

When Medica Zenica was established I was invited to join their psychosocial team to bring a religious perspective to trauma healing. Soon after Sabiha Husić, who is a prominent peacebuilder today, became part of the team as well.[8] Secular international feminists believed that wartime rape survivors, the majority of whom were Muslims, would feel better and more confident about accepting psychosocial treatment if they had somebody from their own religious background supporting them. This proved to be correct. Raped women felt more comfortable opening up to and talking about their traumatic experience with coreligionists. Religion was a refuge for them when everything was falling apart. It became a great coping mechanism for many women. We had to react and answer the immediate needs of hundreds of refugee women who survived various types of violence. We were open to whatever might help. At that time neither Sabiha nor I knew anything about feminism, Islamic feminism, or gender equality in general. All these words and concepts sounded alien, but we could not wait to explore, and learn about feminism.

We did not have any support from the Islamic community because they did not have personnel equipped to deal with trauma and healing. To them, the word rape echoed the shame of their community and nation because they could not protect the bodies and honor of their women. The sole positive step they undertook was a symbolic one; issuing a religious decree (*fatwa*) designating female wartime survivors of violence as heroines of the war and instructing their families to accept them and help them to heal. It was important for women to hear these words of support but they also needed counseling and more tangible forms of aid. It was up to Sabiha and me to try to answer some very difficult questions such as: Why did God let us get raped and tortured? How can I believe in God again? Am I sinful? What do I do with a child born of rape? They asked many other questions which we were not prepared to answer.

We learned to listen and be there for these women. In these shared moments of suffering our feminist theology was born without our knowing it. We focused on helping these women and alleviating their pain, and not on naming what we were doing. It was not theoretical considerations that helped us practice feminist theology but rather the opposite. Our practical work with the “do it first and then name it” approach helped us shape our first feminist hermeneutics through our contextualised readings of the Qur’an and Hadith.[9]

These readings were not rooted in classical commentaries. We did not have access to them at that time. But we also assumed that we could not find in such sources answers that would help us with the concrete situation of wartime rape in such sources. We applied *ijtihad* or independent reasoning to comfort human beings who experienced terrible pain just because they belonged to a particular ethnic and religious group. We were driven by Islamic teachings on our common humanity (creation form a single entity, Qur'an 7:189), compassion (Qur'an 7:156), justice (Qur'an 4:135), *taqwa* (piety or righteous behaviors) as the only relevant distinguisher before God, and verses on the equality of all human beings and competing in performing good deeds (Qur'an 49:13). Through this we helped many women and families find ways to deal with trauma and lessen their feelings of guilt and shame.

Using *ijtihad* Sabiha introduced new Islamic practices such as the naming of a newborn. This ritual was a powerful practice in re-connecting raped women and their families and served to bond them to their children. This ritual was usually performed by a man or imam in Bosnia, but Sabiha introduced a new practice whereby women started to perform the ritual of naming the newborn. She helped them use it as a platfrom or a platform to build new connections and strenghten relations that were affected by horrific crimes and traumatic experiences.[10]

Sabiha continued to work with these women after I left in 1994. Over time she became a distinguished therapist, and peacebuilder. She became the manager of Medica Zenica when the international feminists withdrew physically and financially from the region. She also worked to obtain legal rights for women victims of wartime rape and survivors of domestic violence in the complex domestic legal system of Bosnia. In partnership with other NGOs and state institutions Sabiha fought to provide equal rights for anyone who experienced the horrors of the war, not just Bosnian Muslims. Through these, and many other initiatives,

Sabiha created a web of networks that included civil society organisations and state institutions in order to pursue peace in her community and her country. While Medica Zenica remains a secular feminist organisation it is run by an Islamic feminist who successfully combines secular and Islamic approaches to women's rights and peacebuilding. Both Islamic feminism and peacebuilding grew together and reinforced each other in the lap of secular feminist organisations.

In 1998, during the post-war period, secular organisations came to incorporate more religious perspectives in conversations on gender equality and peacebuilding because

religion despite its divisive role during and after the war remained a powerful identity marker and deeply important to many women and men in dealing with ethnic/religious divisions, war crimes, and trauma healing. Some of the first organisations that encouraged scholarship and research on Islamic feminism were the NGO Žene Ženama (Women to Women) and the faith-based organisation IMIC Zajedno, which was led by the prominent Franciscan friar Marko Orsolic, a doyen of multi-religious peacebuilding in the Balkans. I learned a great deal about peacebuilding and reconciliation from the Franciscans who have had a long tradition of ethics reflected in being and living with people which is the optimal help people can get to move beyond their suffering a war-induced trauma.

Gender, Feminist, and Religion Curriculum

During the war we did not have time to study and explore the topics of gender and feminism. However, after the war, in 1998, some feminist NGOs, including Women to Women in Sarajevo, established the first non-degree program of women's studies named after the Serbian feminist scholar and anti-war activist, Zarana Papic. Professors Nirman Moranjak Bamburac, Jasna Baksic-Muftic, and Jasminka Babic-Avdispahic were the scholars from University of Sarajevo who first designed the program and taught in it. They invited me to develop the syllabus on gender and religion as well as to provide comparative perspectives of feminist theology in the Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions.

I accepted the challenge and started exploring feminist theology. I learned about feminist theology in Christianity from the works of Elisabeth Shussler Fiorenza, Rosemary Radford Rauther, and Mary Daly. Through the works of Judith Plaskow and Rachel Adler I studied the Jewish perspective. I investigated Islamic feminist theology through the scholarship of Riffat Hassan, Aziza al-Hibri, and Fatima Mernissi. In the years that followed this list was enriched with the scholarship of amina wadud, Margot Badran, Asma Barlas, Ziba Mir-Hosseini, and others. One of the challenges I faced was how to teach feminist theology and how to introduce feminist interpretations of religious texts in the Bosnian multi- religious context. During my scholarly journey I was stunned by the amount of rich literature and number of feminist voices in the different religious traditions that questioned the prevailing patriarchal interpretations of God's message while at the same time providing feminist analytical tools to approach the sacred texts with gender sensitive lenses.

One of my most important discoveries was Fatima Mernissi's book *The Forgotten Queens of Islam* on the lives of fifteen women who seized power in Muslim lands between the 11th and 17th centuries, exercising the prerogatives of a political leader including having their

names inscribed on coins and invoked during Friday congregational prayer. I translated the book into Bosnian. When it was published in 2005 in Sarajevo it became the first Islamic feminist text in our local language. Another ground-breaking book, *In Memory of Her*, by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza was translated into Croatian in 2011 by Marina Miladino, medievalist and freelance translator from Zagreb.

The women's studies program created by the NGO Women to Women attracted both female and male students. They were particularly interested in the intersection of gender with women's other identities and socially prescribed roles. A revelation for students was reading the Qur'an and the Bible through gender sensitive and feminist lenses which was eye-opening for the students in striking contrast to the approaches of mainstream theology that were devoid of gender as analytical category. Many of the students became active peacebuilders whose work was informed by these feminist theology courses where they had learned how to use non-mainstream theological exegesis in navigating peacebuilding in their communities.

Gender Studies and Religious Studies

In 2006, eight years after the Women's Studies Program was established under the NGO Women for Women, a team of scholars from the University of Sarajevo under the leadership of Professor Nirman Moranjak-Bamburac obtained approval from the Faculty Senate to start the first Master's degree program in Gender Studies at the university. There was a desire to introduce gender studies in the undergraduate program as well, but obstacles put in the way preventing this from happening persist to this day. I taught a Gender and Religion course in the Master's Program. I invited the Catholic theologian Rebeka Anic from Croatia, a Jewish feminist gender studies scholar Judith Frishman from the Netherlands, and prominent faith-based peacebuilder from the United States, Marcie Lee. The first generation of doctoral students enrolled in 2014.

In 2007 the Master's program in Religious Studies in Sarajevo entered into partnerships with Arizona State University and Oslo University. With Amra Pandzo, a prominent faith-based peacebuilder today, I was part of the team that designed the curriculum for these partnerships and served as program coordinator for seven years. This program was unique in southeast Europe because in the post-socialist era theological studies only existed within various religious traditions. Our courses provided comparative Jewish, Christian, and Islamic perspectives. Women theologians from the Balkans and Western Europe taught a course on gender and religion collaboratively. Two generations of graduate students

equipped with tools to pursue gender equality, peace, and reconciliation function today as teachers of religious education, human rights activists, peacebuilders, and clerks in state institutions.

A striking achievement of the gender and religious studies program was seen when a generation of young scholars and activists initiated their own research starting to build a new body of literature on feminism in the Bosnian language. Some of them worked closely with me on my research project Contesting Female, Feminist, and Muslim Identities in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, which became a book of the same name published in 2012.[11] The aim was to produce the first study in the post-war and post-socialist context that examined how female, feminist, and Muslim identities intersect, construct, and transform each other and what strategies women employ to remain faithful to both cultural and religious traditions while fighting for gender equality. We discovered that the strong social stigma attached to feminism prevents many women from publicly embracing it. The research also revealed that Muslim women face a double social stigma: as religious women wearing the hijab they are marginalised in secular environments, and as feminists they are not accepted in either religious and secular contexts. To avoid pressure, or to preserve their professional positions religious and secular women alike often hide their feminist identity.

(Religious) Peacebuilding on the Wings of (Islamic) Feminism

In my research on women and peacebuilding in Bosnia, I found women to be key players in the peace and reconciliation efforts. But, in the words of Ina Merdjanova and Patrice Brodeur "religion was not a conversation starter."[12] In the first five years after the war religion was absent from peacebuilding efforts with the exception of few multi- religious initiatives undertaken by the Franciscans. Because of ambivalence towards religion from 1990 onward many religiously oriented women did not use religion as argument in peacebuilding. The foundation of women's peacebuilding activism was built on an ethics of care and a feminist ethics of justice and compassion. Socialist ethics of unity and equality as well as international human rights norms embedded in the constitutional legal framework of Bosnia played also an important role in shaping their peace work.

Women who were preoccupied with humanitarian activities and reconciliation efforts, as Elissa Helms pointed out in her research in Bosnia, did not declare feminist identities and political sentiments.[13] Like myself, they did not have time to explore feminism before becoming active in the community. Later when I conducted my research on feminist and Muslim identities I discovered that education and civic activism were key to developing

feminist thinking. In time, as women's human rights activists learned more about feminism through trainings organised mainly by secular women's organisations they overcome problems associated with social stigma and started to publicly declare their feminism. However, prejudice against feminism remains strong to this day causing women to keep their distance. Complicating matters further is the reluctance of donors and state institutions to support explicitly feminist NGOs.[14]

Women meanwhile played key roles in peacebuilding in local communities. Even though they did most of the peace work, women have remained invisible[15] and are still marginal in public life.[16] Men dominated decision-making, leaving women without the ability to bring their perspectives to the table.[17] However, as Svetlana Slapšak points out, because of their marginal position in society and politics women have always been more ready to communicate, reconcile, and create networks of support.[18] Importantly in the peacebuilding scene, Muslim women collaborated with women from other ethnic and religious and non-religious groups, crossing the ethnic borders imposed during the war and the gender boundaries that governed the lives of women in the post-socialist patriarchal society as they had before.

Intersection of Peacebuilding and Islamic Feminism

Amra Pandzo was one of many women in Bosnia who were raised in a communist family in the socialist period and re-discovered Islam during the war. A secular feminist tradition is deeply rooted in her family background. Her strong and highly educated grandmother, mother, and aunts were leaders in their family and in the community. Amra embraced Salafi Islam which adheres to a rigid and reductionist interpretation of the religion, struggling in the beginning to reconcile her religious and feminist identity.[19] Previously she had never known gender segregation but under pressure from Salafism she complied with it for some time while searching for alternative understandings of Islam. She struggled on daily basis with injustice and inequality justified by a conservative reading of Islam. Meanwhile she was associating with women human rights activists and Muslim feminists.

In time she declared an Islamic feminist identity. Being an Islamic feminist to her meant "practicing Islam in an enlightened way."[20] It also included a determination to deal with controversial issues such as ethnic and religious differences and gender equality in faith-based peacebuilding work. As she asserts, genuine peacebuilding work cannot avoid these "hard topics" in order to make everyone comfortable. Peacebuilding for Amra is not a comfortable endeavor but a very demanding task that cannot be separated from her life.

She considers peacebuilding her life calling. That life calling is driven by the Qur'anic declaration that human beings are created from a single soul or entity, *nafs al-wahidah* (Qur'an 7:189) and that the promotion of equality and competing in good deeds which the Qur'an urges (Qur'an 49:13) are the best means to reconcile differences. She believes that peace is a spirit that finds its way. With this conviction, she established her own NGO called Small Steps to plant the seeds of peace wherever she finds fertile ground within or outside religious communities.

Using the smart-flexible strategy which Lederach explains is, "more [about]… the creation of platforms for generating creative responses … than [about] creating solutions,"[21] Amra tried to build a platform for dialogue and peace in both civil society organisations and in the Islamic community. Instead of clearly stating her Islamic feminist goals and agenda, she chose another path. She offered collaboration as a conciliator and peacebuilder who wanted to help teachers of religious education acquire peacebuilding skills relevant to their work in schools and communities.

The word "peacebuilder" did not resonate as a threat, but rather as something fluid and undefined enabling her to obtain permission from the grand mufti to train Islamic education teachers. She designed a manual laying a foundation for peacebuilding approaches in the Islamic tradition, which included gender sensitive approaches to the Qur'anic text.[22]

Amra faced two challenges. One, to explain why it is important to take the first step and help teachers understand that a person who steps outside the cycle of violence or victimhood, whether the perpetrator or the victim, wins by experiencing psychological relief and spiritual growth. Two, to discuss Islamic feminist identity with teachers who had discovered it online and asked her about it. Amra related to me that her explanation of Islamic feminism sounded as she had dropped a bomb.[23]

Being a feminist and at the same time educating teachers of Islamic religion was something these teachers could not easily reconcile. She does not wear the hijab which is considered to be an important marker of legitimacy for a Muslim woman and necessary for being accepted as an authority figure. The majority of Muslim women in Bosnia today do not wear the *hijab* nor do they find it relevant to their faith.[24] But if they wish to speak about religion they are expected to adhere to conventional dress codes. Amra's feminist identity stirred up the teachers who suspected that Amra had a hidden agenda. They asked if she were a Bahá'í because Bahá'is are often connected to the peace movement. The Bahá'í

religion was established in Iran in the mid 19th century. Its teaching rests on the welfare of humankind, peace and global prosperity.

Amra's approach was not to deny her feminism, but rather to explain that her feminism is rooted in the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet and that she is working within this religious framework to achieve peace and justice. Hearing her explanation people accepted her and continued to work with her. Having their legitimacy questioned is something that most Muslim women experience when they do public work. Amra thinks that being a woman and a peacebuilder outside the conservative Islamic community mainstream helped the doors to collaboration within the community open more easily.

Like many other peacebuilders Amra used "affirmative essentialism" depicting women as more peace-oriented, consistent, and honest than men.[25] She explained that in a patriarchal culture women and men are trained and socialised differently. Men are taught to wear different faces in different domains of life. Women are expected to be more consistent. Amra compared men to actors who play different roles, recite lines designed for different situations and do not find this disturbing or morally problematic. Women, according to her experience, tend to be more task-oriented, responsible and consistent. Although she uses the notion of affirmative essentialism Amra does not think that women are inherently peaceful but rather they are socialised to be more family and community-oriented.[26]

Bridging the Secular/Religious Gap with Religious Feminism

For some years after the war dozens of NGOs worked on peacebuilding and reconciliation in Bosnia. Only a few tried to integrate a religious feminist perspective, most notably students from the Gender and Religious Studies Program at the University of Sarajevo. A lack of adequate knowledge is one of the reasons for the absence of religious feminist perspective. But another, and especially salient one, was the reluctance of international and local NGOs to do anything that might provoke negative reactions from faith communities.

When I tried to talk to UNIFEM (now UNWOMEN) in Sarajevo in 2006 about connecting religious and feminist perspectives to peacebuilding work they became anxious and did not know how to convey this proposal to their headquarters in New York. Their biggest concern was to avoid conflict with the faith communities. Two years later I tried again with new arguments. I pointed out that the Gender and Religious Studies Programs at the University of Sarajevo had only a limited outreach and if we wanted to gain a more profound influence in local communities, especially outside Sarajevo, we had to unite the

efforts of secular women's NGOs and faith-based NGOs as well as faith communities, including the Islamic community, in order to succeed in promoting gender equality and eliminating discrimination against women. I also argued that although the United Nations Security Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security (2000) and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW 1981) were ratified years ago their impact in local communities has been negligible. To effectively channel the message of gender equality guaranteed in the international human rights norms and standards to the wider population, and to achieve their application I insisted that we needed to marshal local customs and religious traditions. Human rights language is arid and not convincing to ordinary women and men. If we transmit that message through sensitive cultural and religious narratives and stories which resonate more intimately we can achieve greater impact. For instance, when the story is told how Umm Salama, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad, proposed a peaceful solution to the Prophet at Hudaybiyyah when the people from Makka did not allow Muslims from Medina to perform the hajj, as an example of conflict resolution people will grasp its importance and remember it. The names and articles of international conventions do not have the same resonance.

They finally heard me but they were jittery and made me promise that I would not cause any conflict with the faith communities. With my colleagues, Rebeka Anić, a Catholic theologian and gender studies scholar, and Milica Bakić Hayden, an Orthodox Christian from Belgrade who teaches religious studies in the United States, I started the project titled Modification of the Social and Cultural Patterns of Conduct of Men and Women in Bosnia and Herzegovinia in the Transcultural Psycho-social Educational Foundation (TPO) in Sarajevo. For the first time we had an opportunity to offer women peacebuilding activists training materials based on the teachings of Christianity and Islam, and a universal human rights perspective. The collaborative work of the three of us along with women of various religious backgrounds from Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia resulted in the book *Women: Believers and Citizens* with an accompanying training manual.[27] This was the first comparative study on human rights from a secular-religious perspective in the Balkans.

The book was used to facilitate twelve-day training for women trainers from NGOs, faith communities, and faith-based organisations as well as religious education teachers. It was demonstrated by marshalling religious arguments that violence cannot be justified by religion and that feminist interpretations of Islam can help women act as conciliators in their own communities. The collaborative work of Islamic, Catholic, and Orthodox Christian feminists, facilitated more profound dialogue among women activists who

realised that patriarchy operates in common ways in all traditions, keeping women submissive to man's authority and leadership.

Using a similar approach Sabiha Husić, the Islamic theologian and peacebuilder; Alen Kristić, a Catholic theologian and peacebuilder from Sarajevo; Marija Grujic, a student from the Religious Studies program at the University of Sarajevo, and I designed the manual *Countering Violence with Dialogue*, focusing on gender-based violence from the perspective of Christian and Islamic traditions.[28] We noticed that women in particular were not willing to come to activities when the word "violence" appeared in the invitation and the program. To attract people we used the terms "dialogue" and "multi-religious dialogue" in announcing gatherings and once underway we proceeded to tackle issues of violence.

During the sixteen days of the activism campaign more than a thousand women from fifteen Muslim, Catholic, and Orthodox Christian villages came together. The idea was to gather five women from each of these different kinds of villages in order to start a dialogue. After they got to know each other we raised questions of gender-based violence to illustrate that violence happens everywhere and in each community. Using religious arguments against domestic violence and employing multi-religious dialogue as a vehicle to channel discussion on the sensitive issues of gender-based violence proved to be a worthwhile approach.

Conclusion

Islamic feminism and peacebuilding emerged during wartime in Bosnia (1992-1995) when devastating circumstances required urgent answers and actions. Bosnian Muslim women began their peacebuilding journey with the support of European secular feminist organisations. They used religious arguments about the equality of human beings to contribute to helping heal war wounds. In that way, they unconsciously practiced feminist theology and became Islamic feminists. Thanks to their theological background some Muslim women acquired in Islamic educational institutions revived during the socialist era they were able to combine religious and secular knowledge and tools to help those in need during and after the war as peacebuilders and conciliators in their communities.

Secular human rights organisations and gender and religious studies programs of the University of Sarajevo were, and still are, the only space for the development of and engagement with Islamic feminism. Rare examples, such as the peacebuilding program for teachers of Islamic education in public school run by Islamic feminist and peacebuilder

Amra Pandžo demonstrates how women can use peacebuilding to channel Islamic feminist ideas among Muslims. As they operate on the foundations of the Qur'an and Sunna they may have chances to open dialogue with the mainstream practices of Islam in Bosnia that are still male-dominated and conservative.

NOTES

[1] Zilka Spahić-Šiljak, *Contesting Female, Feminist, and Muslim Identities: Post-socialist Contexts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo*. Sarajevo: Center for Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Studies of the University of Sarajevo, 2012.

[2] Zilka Spahić Šiljak, *Shining Humanity. Life Stories of Women Peacebuilders in Bosnia and Herzegovina*. Cambridge Scholars Pubishing, 2014.

[3] Ahmet Alibašić and Asim Zubčević, "Islamic Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina." in Ednan Aslan (ed.) *Islamic Education in Europe*, Wien-Koln- Wiemar: Bohlau Werlag, 2009, p.44.

[4] Harun Karčić, "Globalisation and Islam in Bosnia: Foreign Influences and Their Effects, in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*. Routledge Taylor and Francis Groups, Vol 11, Number 2, 151-166, June 210, p.153.

[5] Tone Bringa, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way. Identity and Community in a Central Bosnia Village*. Princeton University Press, 1996.

[6] Slavenka Drakulic, *Smrtni Grijesi feminizma: Ogledi o mudijologiji*. Zagreb: Znanje, 1984.

[7] Zilka Spahić Šiljak, "Do it and Name it: Feminist Theology and Peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina". p. 179.

[8] Sabiha Husić, a peacebuilder who advocates for wartime rape survivors at Medica Zenica, the first feminist organisation in Bosnia established in 1993 is one of the peacebuilders who created safe space specifically for wartime rape women. As a young Muslim refugee from the central Bosnia she was expelled from her home in Vitez (Central Bosnia) by her neighbors Croats/ Catholics in 1993, and soon after she settled down in Zenica city, one of the few territories at that time that were not occupied by Serbs or Croats.

She became involded in Medica - – the center established by German feminists- to bring religious perspective into therapy work with wartime rape women. Her full story is avaialble in the book *Shinining Humanity: Lifes Stories of Women Peacebuilders in Bosnia*, Cambirdge Scholars Publishing, 2014.

[9] Ibid., 181.

[10] Personal Interview with Sabiha Husić, December 11, 2012.

[11] Zilka Spahić-Šiljak, *Contesting Female, Feminist, and Muslim Identities: Post-socialist Contexts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo*. Sarajevo: Center for Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Studies of the University of Sarajevo, 2012.

[12] Ina Merdjanova and Patrice Brodeur, 2009, *Religion as a Conversation Starter: Interreligious Dialogue for Peacebuilding in the Balkans*. New York: Continuum, 108-124.

[13] Elissa Helms, 2013, *Innocence and Victimhood, Gender, Nation, and Women's Activism in Postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 158-192.

[14] Ibid.,

[15] Elisabeth J. Porter, *Peacebuilding: Women in International Perspective*, London: Routledge, 3, 2007.

[16] Dona Pankhurst, 2009, *Gendered Peace: Women's Struggles for Post-war Justice and Reconciliation*, New York, Routledge, 26.

[17] Swanee Hunt, *Worlds Apart: Bosnian Lessons for Global Security*, Durham, Duke University Press. 2011.

[18] Svetlana Slapšak, 2001, "The Use of Women and the Role of Women in the Yugoslav War," in Inger Skjelsbaek and Dan Smith (eds.), *Gender, Peace, and Conflict*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 181.

[19] In Bosnia these Muslims, usually called Wahhabis, are a new addition to the Bosnian Islamic scene. Salafis claim to represent an Islam that is "pure and free from any additions, deletions or alterations" (according to "An Introduction to the Salafi Da'wah" http://www.qss.org/articles/salafi/text.html).

[20] Margot Badran, "A Piece of Peace: Looking at Feminist Spaces in Islam," *Track Two: "Religion, Conflict, and Peace," Reflections on Peace and Conflict in the Aftermath of September 11*," Quarterly of the Centre for Conflict Resolution, University of Cape Town, South Africa, 2003 (an earlier version presented as a talk at Robert L. Bernstein Symposium on Fundamentalism and Modernity, the Center for International Human Rights Yale University, Apr. 2002).

[21] John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 85.

[22] Amra Pandžo, *Priručnik za nastavnice i nastavnike islamske vjeronauke o mirovnoj dimenziji islama*. (Manual for teachers of Islamic religion on peace dymension of Islam), Sarajevo: Udruženje za dijalog u porodici i društvu Mali koraci, 2008.

[23] Personal Interview with Amra Pandžo, January 16, 2013.

[24] Spahić-Šiljak, *Contesting Female, Feminist, and Muslim Identities*. p.254.

[25] Elissa Helms, *Innocence and Victimhood, Gender, Nation*. 9. 2013.

[26] Fiona Robinson, *The Ethics of Care. A Feminist Approach to Human Security*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 120. 2011.

[27] Zilka Spahić Šiljak and Rebeka Jadranka Anić (eds.). *Women: Believers and Citizens* (Sarajevo: TPO Fondacija Sarajevo, 2009). Information about the book and the Project are available on the TPO Foundation Sarajevo website: www. tpo.ba

[28] Zilka Spahić Šiljak and Sabiha Husić (eds.) *Countering Violence with Dialogue*. TPO foundation 2010. www.tpo.ba

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TURKISH WOMEN IN ISLAMISM: GENDER AND THE MIRAGE OF "ISLAMIC FEMINISM"

ESRA ÖZCAN

Abstract: In this paper, I reflect on the use of the term "Islamic feminism" in Turkey from the 1990s to the present. I discuss how Turkey's Islamic feminists who were once the victims and strong critics of secular authoritarianism have now become advocates of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's populist Islamist authoritarianism which has severely restricted rights and freedoms in the country. I claim that using the term "Islamic feminist" in reference to the Islamist women supporters of Erdoğan is misleading as it puts a progressive spin on their ideas and activism. I argue that the terms "conservative" or "right-wing" more accurately describe the political positioning of these women.

Keywords: Islamic feminist, psalmist women, Islamist movement, Boğaziçi university, secular mainstream media, conservative women

1988

My grandmother, the strong matriarch of our family, passed away in 1988. My mother, a dentist and a single-parent, had to work a lot. I spent a lot of time with my grandmother. Born in 1923, the year when the modern Turkish republic was founded, my grandmother was raised as a secular girl. Educated as a lawyer, which was a privilege for her generation, she had turned to religion in her 40s and covered her hair. This was so unusual during the 1960s in Turkey that her whole family thought she had lost her mind. She then re-educated herself to become a very sophisticated instructor/interpreter of the Qur'an. In my childhood, I remember her acting as an "imam" to women in mosques and preaching. Her vast library included volumes and volumes of books about Islam: on Muhammad's life, Qur'anic exegesis, Islamic law, history of the sects in Islam, Sufism, and many other topics. When I was young I used to browse through those books.

My mother's life also crisscrossed Turkey's secular and religious territories in odd ways. When my grandmother passed away my mother entered a period when she looked to religion for protection, comfort, and support. She kept my grandmother's library and decided that the only way to protect me from the pain and evil in this world was to raise me as a God-fearing young woman. As a result, I started covering my hair at the age of twelve. By the time I started university as a young student of sociology I felt I had learned enough about religion and was ready to learn something new.

1992 – 2002

During my undergraduate and graduate study at Boğaziçi University in Istanbul in 1999 to 2000 I encountered the scholarly literature on the Islamist movements. It was particularly exciting to study this subject at that time in the liberalised atmosphere of the 1990s. Public expression of religion had become more visible in the 1990s under the staunchly secularist state that had resolutely discouraged public displays of religiosity. The headscarf ban in the university, which was enforced on and off was a particularly hot issue. At the same time, the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*/ RP), an Islamist party on the far right, was gaining political ground by mobilising all kinds of frustration toward the system, some based on religion some not. The RP had won the municipalities of the big cities in the 1994 local elections and introduced Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as the new Mayor of Istanbul into Turkish politics. The RP emerged from the general elections of 1995 as the leading party and became the senior partner in a coalition government in 1996. The coalition government was forced to resign by the military the next year. The military which sees itself as the guardian of secularism could not tolerate a coalition government with an Islamist party for more than a year.

At Boğaziçi I had the good fortune of working with Nilüfer Göle, a top scholar of Islamism, while these developments were unfolding in Turkey's secularised social and political life. Göle, the author of *Modern Mahrem*, (1991; published in English as *The Forbidden Modern*, 1997), was among the few pioneering scholars whose work focused on women with headscarves who were part of the Islamist movements in Turkey.[1] Her work opened up new possibilities for understanding interactions between Islam and modernisation in Turkey. She looked at moments when Islam and modernity interacted and transformed each other in new hybridising ways. She worked with a small group of students interested in different faces of Islam in Turkey. Göle called our working group an atelier. In our atelier, we were mostly interested in "cultural Islam "rather than "political Islam." Our atelier produced a book titled *İslamın Yeni Kamusal Yüzleri: İslam ve Kamusal Alan*

Üzerine bir Atölye Çalışması (The New Public Faces of Islam: An Atelier on Islam and Public Sphere, Metis, Istanbul, 2000).We focused on how Islamic practices became visible in concrete spaces in Turkey's modernised and secularised public sphere. Each of us looked into specific themes such as Islamic women's organisations, women with the headscarf in Islamic radio stations, the headscarf in the mainstream media, beaches, and coffeehouses, and the new consumption patterns among the rising Islamic middle classes.[2] Some of us looked at changes in the secular public sphere through interactions with Islam. Being especially interested in this subject I studied Yaşar Nuri Öztürk (1945–2016), a scholar of theology who had become a celebrity in the secular mainstream media in the 1990s preaching the modernised "real" Islam as opposed to the "distorted" politicised Islam or Islamism. Öztürk had made Islam appealing to Turkey's secular publics and provided them with Islamic arguments with which to criticise the Welfare Party.[3]

Göle was interested in moments when lived experience defied or challenged modernisation theory. Modernisation theory had assumed that with increasing modernisation people would leave religion behind. Turkish modernisers had diligently applied the premises of modernisation theory to Turkish society. From their perspective women demanding to wear a headscarf and go to university at the same time were an anomaly. According to Göle, Turkish modernisers were mistaken to read it this way. What was happening was rather a new form of modernity in the making which she called an "indigenous modernity" whereby women were defining for themselves a new way of becoming modern. They objected to abandoning their belief in order to become modern in the way that the Turkish state wanted.

According to Göle's complex approach women in the Islamist movements occupied a unique position. In her view they had the potential to transform these movements from within. Turkey's secular modernist establishment saw such women as pawns of men or as duped by them. But when looked at closely the women were not at all pawns. They were highly active and they did not see themselves as submitting to the men in the movement. The women that Göle talked to in the 1980s and 1990s were university students, journalists and writers who were critical of Islamist men in many instances. They engaged with feminism and criticised patriarchal interpretations of Islam. They were fighting on two fronts: against the strict implementation of secularism (and for the right to wear the headscarf at university) and against patriarchy within their own circles. Göle assumed that this was a transformative position that might lead to the dissolution of the gender regime within the Islamist movements and eventually produce a new hybridised public sphere in Turkey.

Göle's thesis became widely popular among Turkey's liberal democrats. It generated great interest in both the mainstream and Islamist media. During the 1990s and early 2000s, evidence supporting Göle's theory abounded. Following the shut-down of the Welfare Party in 1998, Islamist intellectuals and politicians started to engage in discussions about participatory democracy questioning their radical discourse that aimed to overturn the democratic secular state to establish an Islamic state. The Islamist discourse of the 1990s looked quite different from the Islamist discourse during the 1980s. The 1990s Islamic discourse was more compromising, softer, and more integrated into capitalism and consumption. The Islamists who kept demanding more religious rights did not live their lives according to The Book as they spoke of it. They did not practice gender segregation and claimed to be Islamic. Books by the Islamist authors condemned dating and flirting but young people in the movement did not seem to pay much attention. Women wearing headscarves and flirting and kissing in public became a topic of everyday conversation. In the 1980s Islamist men and women rejected capitalism and the middle class life style. In the 1990s they embraced capitalism, started to get richer, and began to create a new Islamised middle class lifestyle. Göle and her students, like myself, interpreted these developments as evidence of the transformation of the Islamist movements in Turkey. Meanwhile I, along with my closest friend from the atelier, born into conservative families, were moving away from religion and conservatism. Our research and engagement in sociology provided us with a new language to examine our upbringing in light of Turkey's political history had transformed us. In a way, we had become evidence supporting Göle's thesis. In 2001, a year after I finished the M.A. program in sociology at Boğaziçi University I stopped wearing the headscarf.

Meanwhile during the 1990s disagreements between Islamist men and women seemed to be growing. When Islamist women who wanted to participate more and more in social life encountered resistance from the men in their communities they fought back. Their discontent became visible in the television programs they took part in and the books they authored. Inspired by Göle's work, the new descriptor "Islamic feminists" referring to Islamist women writers and intellectuals who challenged patriarchal interpretations of Islam started to circulate in the media around that time. This new descriptor framed Islamist women positively and gradually gave them more access to the secular mainstream media. The women gained the chance to share their stories with larger audiences. Their personal accounts were effective in conveying their struggle and revealing the difficulties they faced as practicing Muslim women in Turkey. Women inside the Islamist movements were not only challenging their own men but were also building bridges with secular circles.[4] We in

Göle's atelier saw this as a promising development auguring the expansion of democratic rights and freedoms in the country.

In 2002 the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*/AKP) led by former Welfare Party Mayor of Istanbul, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, came to power tapping into the economic and cultural resentments of the poor. Using populist rhetoric the AKP pointed to the failures of previous governments and cast Erdoğan's AKP as the "true" representatives of "the people." Erdoğan and his team which had abandoned the radical Islamist rhetoric that advocated the overthrow of the system argued that they were fundamentally different from their predecessor. Erdoğan's AKP committed itself to implementing the European Union's democratisation reforms and seemed ready to embrace everyone in Turkish society. Islamist movements in Turkey were heading into new territory integrating with secular democratic mechanisms. Everything seemed to be going in line with Göle's analysis.

2017

As of January 2017, fifteen years into AKP rule, things look quite different. AKP leader Erdoğan has become more and more authoritarian. He is at the moment working towards changing the Constitution to have monopoly control over the executive, legislative, and judiciary branches of the government. Instead of expanding democratic rights, the AKP has severely constricted the rights that existed. Erdoğan's crackdown on the Kurdish, leftist and secular opposition took a more aggressive turn after the failed coup attempt in July 2016. The crackdown has taken Turkey to the top of the charts in terms of the number of jailed journalists and academics. His party has pushed conservative religious politics into all areas of life: it has changed the school system and curricula to educate new "pious" generations.

In 2011 the AKP started a gradual lifting of the headscarf ban in Turkey. Now not only can young women wear a headscarf in universities but also girls as young as seven years can wear a headscarf in schools. Once victims of Turkey's secularist state, women in the Islamist movements have moved from the margins to the very center of power. They now hold positions of influence in the government and media. Some of these women actively support a new conservative women's organisation, KADEM (Kadın ve Demokrasi Derneği / the Association of Women and Democracy, established in 2014). Erdoğan's daughter Sümeyye Erdoğan is the Vice President of the association that aims to spread Erdoğan's notion of "gender justice" as opposed to "gender equality." The term "gender justice," as

they define it, holds that men and women are created different and treating them equally is harmful to women. Women and men's strengths, they insist, lie in separate spheres. The emphasis on "gender justice" and differences between men and women reflect Erdoğan's dislike of Turkey's feminists and their support of gender equality. Erdoğan does not shy away from expressing his anti-feminist sentiments at every opportunity. He supports the view that women's proper place is in the home and that they are created to be mothers first and foremost. KADEM might be seen as constituting a kind of "institutionalisation of antifeminism" in Turkey to use Ronnee Schreiber's term (2008: 22).[5]

I examined how women journalists and writers in the pro-AKP media responded to instances when the AKP silenced critical voices during the last five years. Many secular journalists and academics who had supported Islamist women and advocated for the abolition of the headscarf ban at the universities were jailed. Göle, who stood against the ban and worked hard for the incorporation of disaffected Muslims into democratic channels came under fire as soon as she criticised the AKP's authoritarianism. I was almost certain that the women intellectuals close to the AKP who themselves had suffered under secularist authoritarianism would loudly protest the violations of basic rights and the silencing operations taking place under a government to which they had given support. Sadly, that never happened.[6] Turkey's "Islamic feminists" are now happily and fully integrated into Erdoğan's new authoritarian regime in Turkey. They provide justifications for Erdoğan's authoritarian moves and suppression of critical voices. The women that Göle and we in theatelier thought or hoped would transform the Islamist movement have themselves been transformed by an Islamist government in power. Turkish politics disproved our theory.

I have been reflecting on my frustration and disappointment, and what went wrong in my own thinking. I can only speak for myself. Göle and my other colleagues may read the unfolding events in Turkey differently and come to other conclusions. Göle read Turkish history in terms of a shift from Islamic to Western civilisation and focused on the tensions between Turkey's secular elite and the Islamists. Yet, reading modern Turkey's history in terms of a struggle between Islamism vs. secularism ignores other important axes of struggle in Turkey particularly the struggle between the left and the right. Writing in the aftermath of the 1980 military coup which seemed to erase this very significant axis of struggle from Turkish politics, Göle focused on what seemed to be a new axis of struggle in Turkish society. In her narrative, the Islamist movements and women's headscarves enter the scene of Turkish politics in the 1980s. Yet, these movements have a prior history going back to the 1960s with women activists such as Şule Yüksel Şenler (b.1938) advocating conservative gender roles and conventional religious values. These active

women were not as yet called "Islamists" by sociologists and political scientists. They were seen as women on the right. My own grandmother was probably among the very early examples of Turkey's active and educated conservative women. In that sense the women Göle talked with were second or even third generation conservative women. In the post 1980 military coup era they were not called right-wing or conservative but were now labelled "Islamist" women. The 1980 military coup had created a new political context and a new label producing an illusion of discontinuity.

When I look at the activism and writing of these women along a continuum from the 1960s to the present the picture looks different. Yes, religion constitutes an important element of how these women define themselves but this is only one dimension of their activism. A strong anti-feminist and anti-leftist strand has characterised both their earlier and later writing. The generation of religiously oriented women which became visible in the 1980s engaged with feminism and used feminist ideas in a very selective manner to reinforce their "Muslim" identity with reference to intersectionality theory and deflect criticism of their activism coming from those Islamist men who would be pleased only with a Taliban- or Saudi-style gender order. An analysis of the website of the pro-AKP conservative women's organisation KADEM indicates that feminism is mainly seen as a foreign Western imposition and as "turning women into men."[7] In the last twenty years some women in the Islamist movement have objected to being called "feminist" while others have accepted the term with reluctance, in a rather "ok, well … if you really want to call me so…" fashion. Although Islamist women distanced themselves from the term "feminism" being called a "feminist" brought them to the attention of the secular mainstream media and enabled them communicate with secular circles. The term "feminist" made Turkey's conservative women activists on the right look more progressive than they are or want to be.

Scholars who came after Göle have used the terms: Islamic women, Islamic feminists, pious women, and conservative women in speaking about the same women[8] I believe the term "conservative" or "right-wing" would be a more appropriate descriptor for capturing the politics of the women intellectuals supporting the AKP in Turkey today.[9] The AKP reveals itself more and more as a typical right-wing populist party. Its rhetoric on domestic and foreign policy issues is characterised by an aggressive nationalism and racism that pits "pious" people against the corrupt cultural elite and their "foreign enablers." Both the pro-AKP women inside the party and in the media work diligently to propagate the party's spin on events and help it to increase its grip on power. Their nationalist right-wing rhetoric is deeply divisive and essentialist. Only those who embrace Islam and Turkish nationalism are defined as the "real" and "essential" elements of Turkey. Criticism of Erdoğan is

equated to being anti-Turkey. The half of Turkey who did not vote for him--secularists, Alevites, the majority of Kurds, the left, and others--are not considered an "essential" or fundamental part of the country. They are now outside the "nation" cherished by the AKP leadership.

During the 1990s our research group clearly overestimated the potential of active conservative religious women to transform the far- right movement of which they were a part. By focusing on "Islam" and "culture" we neglected the problematic past of this reactionary movement and its divisive political language, authoritarian tendencies, and ways it mobilised the electorate through grassroots organisations to reap, long- term, Turkey's leftist secular feminists' support.

In retrospect, the analyses of women in conservative right-wing movements by Turkey's leftist secular feminists turned out to be prescient.[10] The secular feminists on the left did not approve of the exclusionary politics of the Turkish secular state or the headscarf ban. But they also called attention to the limits of women's empowerment within a religious and nationalist framework. They were in a sense both inclusive and critical. I wish hardline Turkish secularists could have learned something from them long ago. The hardline secularist repression of the headscarf turned the garment into a symbol of victimisation and a rallying point for conservative right-wing religious politics. I sometimes wonder if things could have been different had Turkish hardcore secularists been less restrictive about the headscarf. My mind keeps looking for a point in the past where things could have been set on a different course. From what point could Turkey have moved forward to become a fully democratised country with strong checks and balances, with a free and independent media reflecting the diversity of opinion in the country, with citizens who respect ethnic, religious, sexual minorities and women's rights. A place where there is no room for the rise of fascism, sexism, racism and homophobia. A place where all citizens are seen as equals and "essentials."

When I start searching for that imaginary point in the past, my mind usually lingers around my years at the Boğaziçi University and Göle's atelier. I am thankful to the welcoming atmosphere that Boğaziçi University's Sociology Department had accorded me despite my difference. Our theory proved wrong but I still have a very good reason to believe in the power of inclusion.

Ferruh Yılmaz and Soli Özel read an earlier draft. I would like to thank them for their comments and suggestions.

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NOTES

[1] Nilüfer Göle (1991) *Modern Mahrem*. Istanbul: Metis Books (appeared in English in 1997, *The Forbidden Modern: Civilisation and Veiling*, Ann Harbor: University of Michigan Press. Göle re-wrote the book herself in English.)

[2] The book is not published in English. Yet, more information about the book and the authors can be found at the publisher's website in Turkish: http:// www.metiskitap.com/Catalog/Book/4340<accessed in Jan.13.2017>

[3] I wrote my MA thesis on the same topic. Özcan, Ayşe Esra (2000). *The new configurations Islam in Contemporary Turkey: The case of Yaşar Nuri Öztürk*. Unpublished thesis: Boğaziçi University. http://seyhan.library.boun.edu.tr/record=b1198805~S5

[4] Women interacted initially with the secular left. *Birikim*, a socialist monthly, published interviews with women and their writing in September 2000. Ruşen Çakır, a liberal secular journalist published interviews with women wearing headscarf, mostly opinion leaders and intellectuals in 2000 (*Direniş ve İtaat*, Istanbul: Metis Books). Interviews with these women in the mainstream media started to appear more often after the mid-2000s. *Hürriyet*, a famous secular daily, published interviews with the popular female columnists of the Islamist newspapers, Ayşe Böhürler and Nihal Bengisu Karaca in 2006 and 2007 respectively. Karaca's piece titled "Bir mütesettirin tatil güncesi" (The diary of a woman with headscarf on vacation), published in the secular newspaper Radikal in August 11, 2007, generated a lot of discussion and interest in the secular mainstream media. In that piece, Karaca reflected on the hurdles of her beach holidays, where very few women-only beaches existed for women like her to enjoy the sea. Her archived piece can be accessed at http:// www.radikal.com.tr/hayat/bir-mutesettirin-tatil-guncesi-867464/<accessed in Jan.13.2017>Since Karaca's piece, numerous women-only beaches were opened by the municipalities run by Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party. Radikal was shut down in 2016 under both financial hardships and the growing hostility of the President Erdoğan towards the oppositional media.

[5] Ronnee Schreiber (2008) *Righting Feminism: Conservative Women and American Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[6] I could count only two exceptions in the internet media since July 2016. Özbudun (2016) criticized Turkey's "Islamist 'feminists'" for running to the defense of Islam and remaining silent on the face of ISIS's violence against women in Iraq (Sibel Özbudun (2016). *Kadınlar: İslam*, AKP ve Ötesi [Women: Islam, AKP and Beyond]. Ankara: Ütopya, pp. 137-144). Arat analyzed Islamist women's columns between 2011 and 2013 and reported that the women "usually avoided criticising the government" (Yeşim Arat, 2016. "Islamist Women and Feminist Concerns in Contemporary Turkey: Prospects for Women's Rights and Solidarity". Frontiers, 2016, 37(3): 143). Arat argues that "Despite differences, there are grounds for solidarity between Islamist and secular women concerning women's rights," (2016, p. 145). Yet, I believe there is less and less space for such solidarity under AKP's increasing authoritarianism. For secular women and feminists "resistance" has become the main priority and they find the Islamist women on the side of the government that encroaches on their rights and freedoms.

[7] See, Esra Özcan (forthcoming) Conservative Women in Power: A New Predicament for Transnational Feminist Media Research. In *Through a Feminist Kaleidoscope: Reflections on Media Research and Theory*. Editors: Dustin Harp, Jaime Loke, Ingrid Bachmann.

[8] For articles that use the term "pious woman" see, Berna Turam (2008), Didem Unal (2015). Canan Aslan Akman (2013) uses "Islamic women" and "feminist Islamic women" interchangeably. Berna Turam (2008). Turkish women divided by politics: Secularist activism versus pious non-resistance. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 10(4), 475-494. Didem Unal (2015). Vulnerable Identities: Pious Women Columnists' Narratives on Islamic Feminism and Feminist Self- identification in Contemporary Turkey. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 53: 12-21. Canan Aslan Akman (2013). Islamic Women's Ordeal with the New Face(s) of Patriarchy in Power: Divergence or Convergence over Expanding Women's Citizenship, in *Gendered Identities: Criticising Patriarchy in Turkey*, ed. Rasim Özgür Dönmez and Fazilet Ahu Özmen. Lanham: Lexington Books, pp: 113–45.

[9] Ayşe Saktanber interpreted Islamist women's activism as "the symbolic feminisation of right-wing politics in Turkey" in *Right-wing Women: From Conservatives to Extremists around the World* ed. by Bacchetta, Paola, and Margaret Power. Routledge, 2013. p. 82. I argue that, situating the Islamist women within right-wing politics in Turkey,

as Saktanber did, makes the limits of their political activism for women's empowerment more visible.

[10] I have Özbudun and Koç's work in mind while writing. Please see Sibel Özbudun (2016). *Kadınlar: İslam*, AKP ve Ötesi [Women: Islam, AKP and Beyond]. Ankara: Ütopya. Handan Koç (2015). *Muhafazakarlığa Karşı Feminizm* [Feminism against Conservatism]. Istanbul: Güldünya Yayınları.

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THE NECESSARY LINKAGE BETWEEN JUSTICE AND EQUALITY: TURKEY

MARGOT BADRAN

Abstract: I presented this paper at the International Women and Justice Summit organised by the KADEM (Kadin ve Domokrasi Derneği), an NGO, and the Ministry of the Family and Social Policy in Istanbul, November 24-25, 2014. The paper was assigned to Session Two on Social Justice for Women: Different Dimensions of Oppression: Gender! Justice? Or Equality? At the conference in which the President of Turkey Recep Erdoğan in his opening speech spoke against the idea of equality as alien, laying claim to justice without equality. At the Summit opening President Recep Erdoğan gave a speech setting the tone for advocating justice over equality. A small selection of his statements illustrates his position. "You cannot place women and men into equal positions. Their creation, nature and very constitution are different." "What women need is not equality, but rather equity, in other words, justice." "Our religion, Islam, puts women in a special position. What is this special position? Motherhood. Motherhood is unique to women. It is something that cannot be attained by men. It is the highest level." The paper makes an Islamic argument for gender equality grounded in the Qur'anic affirmation that all human beings (insan) are created equal observing that this is reflected as well in universal instruments. The paper points out that equality is not to be confused with sameness or uniformity. References to biological difference are found in the Qur'an but it does not ordain different social roles for women and men. This paper examines the idea and practice of multiple social roles that may be freely chosen. It insists that there can be no justice without human equality.

Keywords: gender equality, gender role, Islamic feminism

As evident from the title of my presentation I argue that justice and equality are intrinsically linked. There can be no justice without equality By equality I mean the equality of all human beings (*insan*) in principle and practice. Equality of human beings does not mean the absence of difference; equality does not mean sameness. There are biological

distinctions between women and men. There are constructed social, cultural, religious, ethnic, race, economic, and political differences among women and among men and between women and men fabricated in time and place. With equality comes the dismantling of patriarchy which insists on the hierarchy of *insan* whereby some individuals and groups are elevated above others in a regime of deference and obedience, of ranked social prestige and alleged worth. Women can never be men's equals within a patriarchal order. Justice cannot thrive within a patriarchal framework.

I would like to read from the communication I received from the Summit organisers concerning the panel on Gender! Justice? or Equality? Quote: "Gender justice is based on an approach that stipulates the equitable distribution of gender roles, going beyond gender equality. Equality, in some cases, may form the basis for injustice. Discussion of equality in the values of dominant groups always results in the disadvantaged groups losing out. In this regard, it is important that all human beings are allowed to take on roles based on their natural disposition and characteristics. By removing all obstacles, gender justice ensures that women are able to realise their capacity. In this session these issues will be discussed while taking into consideration our own references; the role of women will be discussed in relation to the values of equality and justice."

I repeat my assertion that justice and equality must go hand in hand. There can be no justice without equality. Without equality there can be no democracy worthy of the name. Equality as a principle and practice must be protected. It must be protected across the spectrum of the private/family and public/society. It may be noted however, that in classical *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) there is no public/private distinction (and accordingly no such terms in the classical lexicon) This distinction is a strictly modern invention. The notion and practice of complementarity of gender roles within the family--applied most stringently to female spousal roles—thwarts the principle and practice of equality: the equal rights of female and male human beings to choose roles and practices. In the session statement announcing that issues will be discussed in accordance with "our own references," to what does this refer? I make my equality arguments within the framework of Qur'anic *tafsir*, which contemporary universal or United Nations instruments reflect.

Many insist that Islam prescribes differential family roles for females and males and employ the notion of complementarity (*takamliyya* in Arabic; *tamamlayici* in Turkish) which is a modern idea. "The family" (*ailain* Arabic and *aile* in Turkish) is a modern construction. The neologism first appeared in the late 19th century to signify what may best be understood as an emergent extended nuclear family in the context of the

modernising reforms in late 19th century Ottoman Turkey. The Tanzimat reforms introduced a new legal framework for the family on a French model that assigned different but complimentary roles, rights, and responsibilities for women and men.

“Complementarity” and “(nuclear) family” are not concepts and terms found in the Qur’an. The words “husband” and “wife” are likewise absent and accordingly, prescribed gender roles are non-existent. The Qur’anic uses the term zawj or partner/spouse signifying both female and male and *zawjain* indicating pair of partners or two spouses. The Qur’an employs both gender and sex terms: *al-ma’ra and al-rajal* (woman and man), and *dhakar* and *untha (*biological male and female) interchangeably when addressing rights and responsibilities. The Qur’an points to the procreation activity of females, a form of labor only they can perform, and the balancing responsibility of males to compensate with additional material support. Instead of reading this (balancing) as an egalitarian device, religious scholars constructed a system of religiously mandated gender roles within a patriarchal framework.

The Turkish state in its Civil Code consecrates the principle of equality casting the two spouses as equal heads of family. Yet, the Summit statement argues for gender roles based on “people’s (women’s) natural disposition and characteristics.”

It is ironic to see the embrace in many Muslim societies of a now- outmoded idea and practice of gender complementarity in the family taken from the secular West during modernisation and the rejection of an Islamic paradigm of *gender equality* which moreover, is proclaimed as a Western secular import. Gender complementarity as a pillar of patriarchy and the hierarchy it sustains is too precious for those whom it benefits to be easily relinquished. Today, however, revolutions in various Muslim societies, even if recently stalled or suppressed, have shaken the foundations of the old inegalitarian orders. Whatever the present predicaments, time is on the side of equality and its partner justice.

Postscript

The day after the Summit ended women from some seventy associations signed the declaration: “We reference the Turkish Constitution, not religious ideas that support women's subordination and gender inequality. Women and Men Have Equal Rights!” They published it in *Hurriyet*, November 26, 2014.

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