

Increased Religiosity Among Women in Muslim Majority Countries

Annotated Bibliography

(To be read in conjunction with the [Issues Paper](#))

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Aim of this bibliography

This bibliography is written for those that want a more in-depth understanding of issues introduced in the Issues paper and have time for further reading. It draws on a wider range of literature, nuances the debates around particular topics and includes more country examples.

Because the intention is to broaden the scope of the Issues paper, but not introduce entirely new topics, the extracts given do not attempt to summarise whole books or articles. Reading the complete text of articles and books cited will therefore yield a great deal more information than the portion summarised here.

One thing to note in making this transition from the Issues paper to the wider literature is the use of terminology. In the Issues paper we drew on Azza Karam's distinction between 'secularist', 'Muslim feminist' and 'Islamist' positions. However, many authors use only two categories. They combine the positions of Muslim feminists and Islamists and refer to them as 'Islamic feminists'. Secularist writers are most inclined to ignore the distinction between Islamists and Muslim feminists on the basis that both groups use the framework of Islam to couch their arguments so distinguishing them is unnecessary. However, as will now be clear, our own position is that this distinction between Islamists (as activist traditionalists) and Muslim feminists (as religious modernists) is very relevant indeed, and fundamental to understanding women's rights debates and movements in MMCs today.

The aim in the first part of this paper – on approaches to gender equality – is to look in detail at the arguments made by Muslim feminists. This is because it is likely to be the position least familiar to most DFID readers but also because, in our view, it is complementary and not antithetical to the secularist one. The goals of both approaches are broadly similar even though the frame of reference used to argue them is different. There is every reason for collaboration.

1. Approaches to Gender Equality

1.1 Interpreting religious texts

In the Issues paper we discussed how Muslim feminists are revisiting religious texts and stripping out cultural/patriarchal interpretations that represent women as second-class citizens. We note that interpretations of the hadith (the authenticated sayings of the Prophet) are seen as particularly prone to patriarchal and cultural interpretation. In fact, some Muslim feminists, notably Fatima Mernissi, argue that the authenticity of many hadith relating to women is doubtful, as many of these were formulated well after the Prophet's death and often with the interests of the male-dominated elite in mind. This section outlines the views of a wider range of authors and discusses other aspects of the Islamic tradition (e.g. shari'a and fiqh), which are central to the interpretation debate.

Many authors highlight the gap between Qur'anic principles and shari'a formulations. They argue that whilst the former are transcendental in spirit, the latter have been influenced by human thinking, which itself was the result of the prevailing social conditions of the time, in this case, the 8th century, many years after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. Women held a subordinate position in the patriarchal societies of this time, and this position was reflected in subsequent shari'a formulations.

Mir-Hosseini, Z., 2006, 'Muslim Women's Quest for Equality: Between Islamic Law and Feminism', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 32, No. 4, pp. 629-645

<http://www.smi.uib.no/seminars/Mir-Hosseini/Questforequality.pdf>

Ziba Mir-Hosseini argues the crucial distinction between this human thinking, or legal reasoning (fiqh), and Shari'ah has become distorted in modern times:

“In Muslim belief, sharia – revealed law, literally “the way” – is the totality of God's will as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. Fiqh – the science of jurisprudence, literally “understanding” – is the process of human endeavor to discern and extract legal rules from the sacred sources of Islam – that is, the Koran and the Sunna [...] In other words, while the sharia is sacred, universal, and eternal, fiqh is human and – like any other system of jurisprudence – subject to change [...] It is essential, I maintain, to highlight this distinction and to draw attention to its epistemological and political ramifications. It underlies the emergence of various schools of Islamic law and within them a multiplicity of positions and opinions and also enables me – as a Muslim – to argue for gender justice within the framework of my faith.” (pp. 632-633)

The article argues that it was the ideological, theological, theoretical and practical problems brought about by the experience of using premodern interpretations of fiqh that led to the emergence of a reformist movement in Iran. When the Ayatollah announced the restoration of shari'a law in the area of family law, women found that their husbands could divorce them without obtaining their consent. Women could be commonly heard asking the judges in family courts “Is this how Islam honours women? Is this the justice of Islam, that he can dispose of me now that I have lost my youth and replace me with a younger wife?” In this way, the return to Shari'ah became a major cause of marital breakdown as well as a huge increase in divorce rates. Because of this, and the uproar that the new laws created amongst women, the government was forced to reform the laws in 1997, requiring a man to either obtain his wife's consent to divorce or pay her substantial compensation. For the author, this ‘accentuated the gap between the patriarchal assumptions by which marriage is defined in *fiqh* and the egalitarian marriage lived and experienced by most people today” (p. 636).

The article also highlights the emergence in Iran in the 1990s of a discourse known as ‘New Religious Thinking’. This approach aimed to make a distinction between religion and religious

knowledge, and argued that while the first is sacred and immutable, the second - which includes Islamic law – is human and results from the interplay of forces which are external to the religion. Both the reformists who argue for a gradual withdrawal of religion from state authority, and Islamic feminists have been inspired by this approach. The article does not highlight the work of particular Iranian activists or scholars but describes the approach of Islamic feminists as based on focussing on historical context and re-reading textual sources in order to show that patriarchal assumptions of *fiqh* are not the manifestation of God's will, but rather, human constructs. Furthermore, these assumptions contradict the egalitarian spirit of the Qur'an.

The author argues that such a feminist discourse - i.e. one which derives its legitimacy from Islamic texts - has the best chance of effectively challenging gender inequality. This is even though it operates within a closed legal system like *fiqh*, and without much support from the traditional power base in that system. This is for three reasons:

1. The current reality of the Muslim world is that the Islamists are taking a leading role in defining the terms of political and gender discourses, and it is only by engaging with Islamic texts and legal traditions that change can be brought from within.
2. The emerging feminist voices in Islam have the potential to overcome the false and arbitrary dichotomy between "Islam" and feminism, according to which feminism is seen largely as a secular Western construct. Not only does this put Muslims on the defensive, it also denies the moral and intellectual utility of secular and Western discourses.
3. Only elite women have the luxury of being able to choose to accept or reject patriarchal beliefs and laws. Working to separate patriarchy from Islamic ideals and to give voice to the ethical and egalitarian spirit of Islam will empower Muslim women from all walks of life.

1.2 Understanding the Qur'an in historical context

Munir, L. Z., 'Islam and Gender: Reading Equality and Patriarchy', in Nathan, K. S. and Kamali, M. H., 2005, 'Islam in Southeast Asia: Political, Social and Strategic Challenges for the 21st Century', Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore

A preview of this book is available at:

http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=6Js6QXUbmjYC&printsec=frontcover&dq=women+equality+quran&lr=&source=gbs_summary_r&cad=0

This article provides an excellent overview of the need to understand the Qur'an in terms of the historical context in which it was revealed; Islamic principles of equality; and the treatment of gender issues in Islam.

Women in pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula. In order to understand the Qur'an's position on women and gender, and why it is considered a revolutionary breakthrough for women's liberation and empowerment, it is important to understand the social, cultural and historical context of its revelation. The author argues: "A total breaking from the past, however hard it is attempted, may not be possible. Similarly, the history of Islam also reveals that whatever was reformed or prohibited by the Prophet Muhammad that prevailed during the period of jahiliyya (ignorance) in the advent of Islam, crept back into Islamic shari'a through adat (that is, pre-Islamic traditional practices.). In fact, in many cases, the shari'a provisions were based on the adat in the absence of other provisions." (p. 192)

So what was the status of women in pre-Islamic society? It is commonly noted that women enjoyed few rights - they could be inherited like property, female newborns were buried alive, and a man could take as many wives as he pleased. The Qur'an forbade or restricted these practices. The author argues that the permission to marry up to four wives must be seen as a drastic reduction in a context where there were instances of men marrying hundreds or tens of women. Other justifications include the needs of widows and orphans in time of wars. However, these are: "all contextual justifications and not a normative one and, hence, its

applicability must be seen as contextual and not universal" (p.193). In this light, the permission for polygamy is seen as a pragmatic solution:

"...abolishing polygamy and giving women equal status with men in every respect was not a practical proposition in that type of society. Thus, the Qur'an applied the middle-way solution, in what is term "pragmatic-ideological" course [...] While it hinted at equality directly as well as inferentially, it sought solutions more acceptable to the society that was dominated by men." (p. 200)

The Qur'an and Equality. The author argues that there is no evidence in the Qur'an that women are considered to have more or less limitations than men. She quotes Asma Barlas (2002) who argues that although men and women are biologically different, they are "...ontologically and ethically-morally the same/similar inasmuch as both men and women originated in a single Self, have been endowed with the same natures, and make two halves of a single pair". There is also no support in the Qur'an for the idea that woman was created from man's rib and is hence, subordinate to him.

In addition, the Qur'an makes no distinction between men and women in relation to their rights and duties: they are to be equally rewarded or punished for their actions. The following verses make their spiritual equality clear:

"Muslim men and Muslim women, believing men and believing women, devoutly obedient men and devoutly obedient women, truthful men and truthful women, patient men and patient women, humble men and humble women, charitable men and charitable women, men and women who fast, men and women who protect their chastity, and men and women who remember God frequently, for them God has prepared forgiveness and a great reward." (Qur'an: 33:35)

"Never will he suffer to be lost the work of any of you, be ye male or female; ye are members, one of another." (Qur'an 3:195)

1.3 The equity vs. equality debate

One of the most common debates within Islam is between those who believe that women and men have different roles and responsibilities, but these should be viewed as having equal value, and those who argue that Islam provides for complete gender equality in all areas of life. Often called the 'equity and equality' debate, the implications of this for women's involvement in Islamist movements are explored by Amina Wadud below.

Wadud, A., 1999, 'Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective', Oxford University Press, New York & Oxford

Like Mir-Hosseini, Amina Wadud begins by laying out a framework for the interpretation of the Qur'an:

"The text was revealed to the inhabitants of the earth, while they inhabited the earth, and we are all on earth as we read and discuss the text. As such, our earthly existence transforms our perceptions of the text, and is equally potentially transformed by the text [...] Hermeneutics of any text must confront three different aspects in order to support its conclusions: 1. the context in which the text was written (in the case of the Qur'an, in which it was revealed); 2. the grammatical composition of the text (how it says what it says)' and 3. the whole text, its Weltanschauung or world-view. Often, differences of opinion can be traced to variations in emphasis between these three aspects." (pp. 62-63)

In Chapter 4 'Rights and Roles of Women: Some Controversies', she goes on to argue that functional distinctions included in the Qur'an have been used to support the idea of the superiority of men over women. She aims to answer the following questions: To what extent

does the Qur'an determine functions for each gender: Are there certain exceptions and exclusions for either males or females? Does the Qur'an value certain functions above others? Wadud then makes a detailed analysis of Qur'anic passages which have been interpreted to imply the superiority of men over women to argue that:

1. There is no inherent value placed on 'man' or 'woman' in the Qur'an. In fact, there is no arbitrary, pre-ordained and eternal system of hierarchy.
2. The Qur'an does not strictly delineate the roles of women and the roles of men to such an extent as to propose only a single possibility for each gender (that is, it does not say women must fulfil this role, and only this one, and men must fulfil that role and only men can fulfil it).

1.4 A hierarchy of categories of revelation

What is commonly referred to as the Islamic "tradition" is made up of a variety of sources, notably the Qur'an, Sunnah, fiqh and Shari'ah. These sources are not identical and nor do they carry equal weight. The Qur'an, as the revealed word of God, is of course, the most important source. Accordingly, its proclamation of gender equality is argued to constitute a higher principle than the various legal prescriptions revealed to govern the first Muslim society, including the various restrictions placed on the Prophet's wives. This argument is also used in relation to various hadith which are seen to enshrine the subordination of women.

Hassan, R., Are Human Rights Compatible with Islam? The Issue of Rights of Women in Muslim Communities'

<http://www.iemed.org/documents/novesrealitats/Strawson/a.pdf>

This article emphasises that the Qur'an, which is considered the most authoritative source of normative Islam, affirms certain fundamental rights which:

"...all human beings ought to possess because they are so deeply rooted in our humanness that their denial or violation is tantamount to a negation or degradation of that which makes us human. From the perspective of the Qur'an, these rights came into existence when we did; they were created, as we were, by God in order that our human potential could be actualized. Rights created or given by God cannot be abolished by any temporal ruler or human agency. Eternal and immutable, they ought to be exercised since everything that God does is for "a just purpose"."

These rights include the right to life; to respect; to justice; to freedom; to acquire knowledge; to sustenance; to work; to protection from slander, backbiting and ridicule; to develop one's aesthetic sensibilities and enjoy the bounties created by God; to the "good life"; etc. These are further discussed in the article.

1.5 Verses of the Qur'an that particularly affect women's status

There are various issues, arising mainly from verses in Surah An-Nisa ('The Women') which have prompted much debate about the status of women and have been widely used by Islamic jurists in determining Shari'ah law formulations. Verse 34 of this Surah addresses the subject of marital relations and has thus sparked much debate. Eissa (1999) provides the following common translations of the verse:

"Men are in charge of/ are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah hath made the one of them excel the other/ given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they spend of their property (for the support of women). So good women are the obedient, guarding in secret that which God hath guarded. As for those of whom ye fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and scourge

them/beat them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Lo! God is ever High, Exalted, Great.” (Qur’an 4:34)

The three terms in this verse that have sparked most debate are ‘qanitat’ (traditionally interpreted to mean the requirement for wives to be obedient to their husbands); ‘qawwamuna’ (men as guardians of women); and ‘nushuz’ (disruption of marital harmony – with the associated permission for husbands to hit their wives). Modern Islamic feminists argue that these verses have been interpreted out of textual context. Each is examined below.

(i) The Obedience of Wives to their Husbands

Eissa, D., 1999, ‘Constructing the Notion of Male Superiority over Women in Islam: The Influence of Sex and Gender Stereotyping in the Interpretation of the Qur’an and the Implications for a Modern Exegesis of Rights’, Women Living Under Muslim Laws

<http://www.wlumf.org/english/pubs/pdf/occpaper/OCP-11.pdf>

This paper highlights that some traditional jurists interpreted the use of the word ‘qanitat’ in verse 4:34 (‘So good women are the obedient [qanitat]...’) as meaning ‘obedience to husbands’. These schools also argue that a wife’s obedience must be seen as being given in return for her right to maintenance during the marriage. However, Dahlia Eissa argues these jurists did not consider the term with reference to other Qur’anic verses or ahadith (plural of hadith) to substantiate their position.

The same term is used to describe both men and women in several other verses – and the sense in which it is used in these other instances makes clear that it refers to a state of obedience to God - “Good women are therefore God-fearing women.” (p. 42). Eissa further states:

“Al-Hibri argues that the contention that ta’a (obedience) is owed by the wife to her husband is contrary to the concept of tawhid, or the unity of God, which is fundamental in Islam. Ta’a is owed to God, and only God, in the form of self-discipline, collective organization, and mutual responsibility, as opposed to being owed to a husband as a result of hierarchy and oppression. If the Prophet’s relationships with his wives is an indication of any gender hierarchy that was decreed by God, jurists cannot find any recorded instance of the Prophet (pbuh) restricting his wives’ access or participation in any instance, for any reason. His wives enjoyed unfettered mobility and participation in public life, subject to the requirement that they aspire to moral conduct fit for the mothers of the umma. Good women therefore are women who are obedient to God. There is no requirement that women obey their husbands.” (p. 43)

(ii) Male Guardianship over Women

Wadud, A., 1999, ‘Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective’, Oxford University Press

In Chapter 4 of this book, the author discusses the concept of ‘faddala’, where the Qur’an explicitly favours some of creation over others. This idea is also also contained in Verse 4 of Surah An-Nisa, and, according to traditional interpretations, is strongly linked to the idea of men’s authority over women, i.e. “Men are (‘qawwamuna ‘ala’) in charge of/ are the protectors and maintainers of women, (‘bi maa faddala Allah ba’d hum ala ba’din’) because Allah hath preferred some of them over others/ made the one of them excel the other/ given the one more (strength) than the other...”

This verse is classically seen as the single most important statement with regard to the relationship between men and women and is traditionally interpreted to mean that men have authority over women because they have been preferred by God. However Wadud argues that men can be regarded as ‘qawwamuna ‘ala’ women only under two conditions: 1. that a

preference for men over women does in fact exist; and 2. that men support women from their means.

With regard to the first condition, 'what Allah has preferred', Wadud argues that the Qur'an does not assert an absolute or unconditional preference for either men or women: the verse states that Allah prefers 'ba'd (some) of them over ba'd (others)'. All men do not excel over all women in all matters. Some men excel over some women and some women excel over some men. "So, whatever Allah has preferred, it is still not absolute." (p. 71).

This leaves the second condition - that men pay out of their wealth for the support of women. Wadud argues that the only instance in the Qur'an where men are preferred over women - the area of inheritance - is linked to this. It is commonly argued that it is because of men's obligation to maintain women that they are granted a double share of inheritance. Therefore, there exists a reciprocity between privileges and responsibilities.

Ultimately however, Wadud argues that the verse 4:34 is read too narrowly and that the concept of qawwamuna 'ala should actually be seen as providing a broader societal principle, with its main consideration the responsibility and right of women to bear children. With regard to this, "(t)he Qur'an establishes (the male's) responsibility as qiwamah: seeing to it that the woman is not burdened with additional responsibilities which jeopardize that primary demanding responsibility that only she can fulfil" (p. 73). Wadud's methodology is to view the verse in the context of the spirit of the Qur'an and the fundamental principles on the relationship between men and women that are outlined elsewhere in the text. Therefore, she argues: "the Qur'an must eternally be reviewed with regard to human exchange and mutual responsibility between males and females. This verse establishes an ideal obligation for men with regard to women to create a balanced and shared society. This responsibility is neither biological nor inherent, but it is valuable" (p. 73).

(iii) Wife Beating

Ammar, N. H., 2007, 'Wife Battery: A Comprehensive Understanding of Interpretations', Violence Against Women, Vol., 13, No. 5, pp. 519-523

This article offers a discussion of Islamic interpretations of wife beating. It looks at four schools with varying Islamic perspectives on the issue and provides literal, patriarchal, and feminist interpretations of the Qur'anic text.

Most of the discussion on this is based on verse 34 of Surah An-Nisa of the Qur'an:

"As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill conduct (nushuz), admonish them, refuse to share their beds, and scourge them/ beat them (idribhunna)."

The four interpretations of the verse are as follows: a) wife beating is permissible if a wife does not obey her husband; b) wife beating is permissible but is restricted by conditions as to her safety; c) wife beating is generally unacceptable given the general spirit of Islamic sources, and verse 34 addresses only exceptions where it is allowed; and d) the Qur'an's use of the Arabic word 'idribhunna' does not translate as beating and therefore, wife beating is not permissible.

It is worth looking more closely at the third and fourth schools that argue for the unacceptability of wife beating. The reasoning of the third school is as follows:

- In several hadith, the Prophet directly discouraged the practice of wife beating;
- The sunnah indicates that the Prophet did not view wife beating as desirable. He is reported never to have hit a woman or a servant;
- Qur'anic principles and its general spirit protect the status of women, support family values, and promote marital equity, and all these are diametrically opposed to the act of wife beating.

The reasoning of the fourth school is based on the textual context and linguistic analysis of the Qur'anic text. It argues that when taken together with verse 35 of Surah An-Nisa, verse 34 should be seen to have a reconciliatory spirit with the purpose of restoring marital harmony. In addition, the word 'idribuhunna' cannot be taken to mean 'hit/beat/strike lightly' given the general spirit of the Qur'an, hadith and Sunnah. The three letter origin of the word is 'daraba' and a list of meanings can be attributed to this word, only one of which means to hit. Other meanings include: to travel the earth, to set up, to give examples, to take away, to condemn, to seal, to cover, to explain, etc. Fatima Mernissi (1991)¹, for example, highlights a historical example of the use of the word from the Prophet's life, where the word means to stay away from, or to divorce.

1.6 Muhammad's wives as ideals for womanhood

A key element of the Islamic tradition is the example of the Prophet's wives as an ideal for womanhood, as described in the Qur'an and hadith. The Prophet's wives were some of his closest advisers and confidantes. His wife Khadija was a wealthy businesswoman who supported him in the early years of revelation, and made available her considerable wealth and influence to the cause of Islam. After her death, A'isha, his favourite wife, became his closest confidante. A'isha was a politician and warrior and is respected as one of the most reliable transmitters of the hadith. The specific guidance in the Qur'an for the Prophet's wives, in keeping with their special status as the 'Mothers of the Believers' has always been seen as trying to create a model status for women. It is the hadith on these women's lives however that have played the greatest role in subsequent Shari'ah formulation on women. Today, a reinterpretation of these traditional sources is leading to changes in the essence of how the role of women is viewed.

Stowasser, B. F., 1996, 'Women in the Quran: Traditions and Interpretations', Oxford University Press, US. A preview of this book is available at:

http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=IMg5NR11LvMC&printsec=frontcover&dq=women+equality+quran&lr=&source=gbs_summary_r&cad=0

Chapter 10 of this book looks at the role of the Prophet's wives in providing ideals of womanhood to Muslim women today. According to the modern Islamist version, the Prophet's wives embodied two important roles: on the domestic front, primarily in their God-given roles as wife and mother, in which context Muhammad's first wife, Khadija, emerges as the most prominent figure; and as activists, by supporting the Prophet's struggle for the cause. The author cites the ideas of Bint Al-Shati, the author of a 1984 study on the lives of the Prophet's female household members, about the modern equivalent of the virtues embodied by the personae of the Prophet's wives. These include: "constancy in worship; charity; living for the husband's contentment; bringing up the children herself in order to free the husband for participation in the jihad; self-control, dignity and pride; courageous defense of Islam; knowledge of the doctrines and laws of Islam; and wise counsel in religious matters. The ideal also includes the women's commitment to "stay in their houses"" (p. 126). According to the author this modernised image of the Prophet's wives "symbolizes that women are not just men's followers and wards but are the very support structure of man, family and society; they are, themselves, prime guardians of cultural and spiritual values, Islam's most precious heritage". (p. 131)

The chapter also highlights Fatima Mernissi's² model of the Prophet's wives rights and roles, which is based on an interpretation of the Qur'an and hadith that takes into particular account the time-frame and socio-political context of the revelation, and the subsequent interpretation of the tradition. According to Mernissi, the Prophet's wives were dynamic, influential and innovative, and played active roles within the community. They were Muhammad's intellectual partners and advisers, and accompanied him on raids and military campaigns.

¹ Mernissi, F., 1991, 'The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam', Addison-Wesley, New York

² Ibid.

They were also the leaders of various women's movements, and actively argued for equal status in Islam, as well as for other social, economic and political rights, for example, in inheritance, participating in warfare and the sharing of the spoils, and in personal/marital relations.

Mernissi also argues that the Prophet's vision for Islamic society was essentially egalitarian, as is seen by the way in which he lived his life. However, the male members of the Islamic community at the time were not able to accept such dramatic changes in the relationship between men and women and organised a strong opposition movement. It was during times of Islam's political and military weakness (i.e. the period between the third and eighth year after migration to Medina) that the Prophet was forced to compromise his egalitarian vision in order to maintain social cohesiveness, in the interests of the Islamic cause. For Mernissi, the seclusion of his wives from public life is an example of such a compromise.

1.7 Veiling

(i) *Veiling in the Qur'an*

In discussing its Islamic basis, it is not possible to separate the issue of veiling from the related concepts of modesty and seclusion. The Islamic concept of 'hay'a' denotes the internal aspect of modesty, and is expected to inform all the permissible actions of Muslims, both men and women. This is considered to include, for example, humility in faith, speech, thought, and action. Traditionally, however, it is the physical modesty of women that has received the most attention. While requirements of an 'Islamic dress' find considerable support in the Qur'an and hadith, there remains disagreement about the meanings of some of the key terms used, and the true scope of their application. In addition, while some of the Qur'anic injunctions regarding modesty and seclusion seem to have been directed specifically at the Prophet's wives, they have historically come to be interpreted as applying to all women. The following article outlines some of these arguments:

Syed, J. And Ali, F., 2005, 'A Historical Perspective of the Islamic Concept of Modesty and Its Implications for Pakistani Women at Work'
<http://www.historians.ie/women/syed.PDF>

This article argues that the Qur'anic concept of modesty applies to both men and women, and that the specific provisions for women in the Qur'an were introduced in light of the prevailing conditions of the time. The authors believe that these 'protective' provisions were reinterpreted within various patriarchal cultures and contexts, particularly during the middle of the 8th century, and this led to the institutionalisation of the practices which entailed the complete seclusion of women from public life, such as the 'harem' and 'purdah'.

Textual basis. The article examines the Qur'anic roots of Islamic notions of modesty, seclusion and veiling. The verses most commonly cited in this regard are as follows:

"And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their (sexual) modesty; and that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty save to their husbands, or their fathers or their husbands' fathers, or their sons or their husbands' sons, or their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or make servants free from physical desire, or small children who have no sense of sex; and that they should not stamp their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. And O believers! Turn together towards Allah, that you may attain bliss." (Qur'an 24:31)

"O Prophet! Tell thy wives and thy daughters and the women of the believers to draw their gown or outer garments close around them (when they go out). That will be better so that they may be recognised and not annoyed. Allah is forgiving, Merciful." (Qur'an 33:59)

The first verse lays out a code of conduct for Muslim women in terms of guarding their modesty. With regard to their dress, they are required to cover the upper part of their bodies with 'khimar' – which the authors translate as 'cloth', but 'khimar' is also commonly translated to mean 'head covering'. There is mixed opinion about whether the concept of 'awra', translated as 'sexual modesty' above, but also as 'private parts' more commonly, requires women to cover their face and hands. While the authors of this paper do not highlight this, there is also some disagreement about whether the verses above require women to cover their heads. This position is based on questions about the intended meanings of the terms 'khimar' and 'jilbab', and also on observations of how the practice of veiling developed historically. Scholars such as Leila Ahmed, for example note that during the Prophet's lifetime, veiling was only practised by the Prophet's wives.

There are also verses in the Qur'an which are addressed to the Prophet's wives specifically. The following verse established protocol for visiting the house of the Prophet:

“And when ye ask of them (the wives of the Prophet) anything, ask it of them from behind a curtain. That is purer for your hearts and for their hearts...”
(Qur'an: 33-53)

The authors argue that this verse constitutes the only unambiguous reference from which the requirement for women to veil their faces or seclude themselves is inferred. The verse regulated the interaction of the Prophet's wives with strangers, in light, it is argued, of their special status amongst the Muslim community of the time. However, it has been interpreted by orthodox scholars as applying to Muslim women generally.

Historical development. The expansion of the Islamic empire which took place in the mid-eighth century led to the interaction of Islam with Persian and Byzantine traditions. These had a profound influence on the status of women. Local traditions of secluding women into harems were absorbed into Islam, and the Qur'anic verses directing the Prophet's wives to stay in their homes were eventually applied to all women, and used to justify these practices. The paper cites Leila Ahmed's argument: “The egalitarian voices (of, for example the Prophet's wives, A'isha and Umm Salma who were key transmitters of hadith) were largely silenced under the suffocating influences of “the various patriarchal cultures” of the conquered lands where the Muslim Arabs were assimilated and adopted the mores and attitudes of the dominant classes.” (p.12)

Implications for women's work and the need for reinterpretation. In Pakistan, chador (the veil) and chardiwari (the four walls of the house) are often proclaimed to be the appropriate domains for women. When outside the house, a woman is expected to remain in chador as a sign of modesty. Her mobility outside the chardiwari is also restricted on the basis of concepts such as modesty, family honour and tribal traditions. A woman entering a male space is considered “provocative and offensive”. A Muslim working woman therefore is, to society and probably to herself, “a symbol of defiance to religious and social norms [...] She searches for a workable balance between defiance and compliance, while knowing that her every single move is being constantly watched and discussed in private conversations”. (p. 4)

The article cites the work of Aftab Hussain, ex-Chief Justice of Pakistan's Shariat Court, on gender issues in Pakistani society. He critiques what he terms “a double standard” of modesty, one for men and another for women by examining verses 24:30 and 24:31 which, he argues, establish a uniform standard of modesty and chastity for both men and women. Both are ordained to guard their private parts, and to lower their gaze. The Qur'an thus treats both genders as “free agents in the achievement of the goal of maintaining his/her chastity”³.

³ Hussain, A., 1987, 'Status of Women in Islam', Law Publishing Company, Lahore, p. 11

(ii) Veiling - general

As the Issues paper notes, the prevalent western view about the veil is that it is oppressive of women, and that it is usually adopted because of familial or societal pressure. However, increasing instances of women adopting the veil or hijab, especially among educated, university-going women, have demonstrated the limitations of this perception. Here we look first at an article that summarises the wide range of motivations given for adopting the veil and then at studies that discuss motivations in Bangladesh and Turkey respectively.

Bullock, K., 2002, 'Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil: Challenging Historical and Modern Stereotypes', The International Institute of Islamic Thought, London/ Herndon, VA

Sample chapters are available from: <http://www.iiituk.com/docs/pdf/preamble-veiling-v3.pdf>

This book explores the colonial roots of Western perceptions about the veil, and presents an alternative viewpoint based on the experiences of Muslim women themselves. In doing so, the author aims "to add a perspective that has hitherto been marginalized, namely the point of view of the believer. This allows for a different reading of women, Islam and the veil". (p. xxix)

"In colonial times, Muslim elites accepted the Western version of the meaning of the veil, and they also saw its disappearance as essential to the 'modernization' of their countries [...]. Historians and anthropologists, in particular, have challenged Orientalism and modernization theory in relation to Muslim women by urging a focus on the specificity of Muslim women in order to understand them better. They have challenged viewing Muslim women only through the eyes of a deterministic religion, and demonstrate in their work that other institutions in society make an impact on women's lives: local customs, and political and economic forces. Marsot⁴ argues that economic and political exigencies are what count, and religion/ ideology is used to legitimate whatever has been required." (p. xix)

Chapter 3 of the book explores the multiple meanings of hijab. The author identifies seven main motivations:

- *Revolutionary protest*: The most dramatic instances of re-covering are considered to have occurred during the anti-colonial and revolutionary struggles in Algeria and Iran. Colonial regimes and native elites had sought the elimination of the hijab, and so it became a powerful symbol of resistance.
- *Political protest*: Several studies of re-veiling found that in some cases women adopted the hijab as a way of indicating their dissatisfaction with state policies and the political/ social/ cultural encroachment of their countries by the West. The 1967 Arab defeat by Israel, and the subsequent re-covering movement in Egypt is an example of this.
- *Religious*: Women adopting the hijab make a religious choice. They consider Islam to constitute an alternative political, social and economic system which can counter increasing Westernisation and secularisation of their countries; they believe covering to be an obligatory religious duty (fard) for Muslim women; and they cover in order to practice Islam better. They also see it as a way of making society better. In some case, hijab represents a levelling of the social classes, and allows women from different socio-economic backgrounds to adopt a new Islamic ideology.

⁴ Marsot, A. L. A., 1996, 'Women and Modernization: A Re-evaluation', in Sonbol, A. E. A. (ed.), 'Women, the Family and Divorce Laws in Islamic History', Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, NY

- *Continued access to the public sphere*: Adopting the hijab is a way for women to negotiate the dilemma of benefiting from modernisation, i.e. working for wages, while keeping the benefits allotted to them through a traditional conception of Islamic rights as a wife and mother. The author cites a study by Macleod: "...veiling is primarily women's idea and women's decision; the new movement is a voluntary movement initiated and perpetuated by women. Its popularity rests in this ability to resolve the question of whether women can work outside the home, yet resolve it in a way that satisfies the economic values of lower-middle-class families and pacifies disturbed gender beliefs."⁵ (p. 100)

The issue of female employment is still a contested one in many Muslim communities, with many people believing that it compromises their modesty and honour. As a result, some women have taken the hijab in order to signal their respectability and commitment to protecting their honour.

Many women believe that the hijab results in greater respect from men. This means they are less vulnerable to harassment from men, and thus more able to travel through public space in peace. The author highlights the argument that: "...this is a challenge to the traditional Islamic and Western association of veiling with seclusion. Women who adopt al-ziy al-shar'i are severing Islamic law from customary practice, and demonstrating that they can participate in public life, while maintaining the Islamic dress code." (p. 103)

- *Statement of personal identity/ social status*: This mostly applies to second- and third-generation Muslim women in non-Muslim countries, who choose to wear hijab as a protest against the culture of their parents, as well as against the prevalent Western view that the hijab is a sign of oppression.

The author also argues that another way of asserting personal identity is by asserting one's social status. This was how covering was traditionally used, with different social classes using different styles, patterns and materials. "The new covering initially was a rupture in this kind of social meaning since it was a sort of uniform, stressing the egalitarian aims of the Islamic movement" (p. 108). It has been suggested that, in Egypt for example, the new hijab is partly an expression of the lower middle classes desire to differentiate themselves from the lower classes. The author suggests: "Wearing the new hijab as a mark of middle-class status represents a dramatic change from earlier decades. Then, middle-class status was achieved by wearing Western dress..." (p. 109).

- *Custom*: The author argues that Western perceptions that women are forced to cover by their culture are to "mistake a coercive environment with the normal processes of socialization that exist in any society about proper dress" (p. 109). In addition, they also assume that in these societies clothing is worn unreflectively. The veil is a matter of great debate in Oman, Yemen and Saudi Arabia, and veiling practices have been undergoing gradual changes in recent decades. An additional but important point is that, by covering, many women feel proud that they are honouring their family's and culture's traditional practices.
- *State law*: In some countries, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, covering is required by state law.

⁵ Macleod, A., 1993, 'Accommodating Protest', Columbia University Press, p. 121

(ii) Veiling - Bangladesh

Rozario, S., 2006, 'The New Burqa in Bangladesh: Empowerment or Violation of Women's Rights?', *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 29

In this article, the author discusses the increasing number of women, including university students, adopting the burqa, a form of covering associated with Islamist movements, and previously non-existent in Bangladesh. The author argues that there are four types of reasons that women choose to adopt the veil (pp. 376-377):

- *Strategic-Instrumental*: women choose to veil not out of a particular commitment to Islam but for instrumental reasons, i.e. persuading parents to let them attend university; avoiding harassment from men in the street; finding suitable marriage partners.
- *Personal identity issues*: women's adoption of Islam gives them a meaningful framework within which they can live their lives at an individual and family level.
- *Collective or national identity*: women see Islam as a counter-culture to the decadent and immoral West, as well the corruption and violence of modern Bangladeshi society. "Adopting the veil can thus be a statement of commitment to a different kind of society." (p. 377)
- *Status concerns of middle class women*: middle class women are unable to take advantage of economic opportunities in Bangladesh in the same way as lower-class women. In order to justify their position vis a vis the social changes around them, they adopt a more overtly Muslim identity.

For this author, re-veiling in Bangladesh is not the result of a critical engagement with Islamic principles, but a signal of rejection of Western notions of modernity. In addition, veiling amongst the middle class represents a signal of support for Islamist parties such as the Jama'at-i-Islami - support which is motivated primarily by disillusionment with the current political climate of corruption and insecurity in Bangladesh, to which the Jama'at seems to offer an alternative. Many of the university students interviewed by the author aligned themselves with groups such as Jama'at-i-Islami and Tablighi Jama'at – the author's concern is that these groups espouse fairly conservative views on the role of women in society, namely that they should remain within the home. She further argues:

"(T)he newly-veiled Muslim women in Bangladesh are lending support to a cause which is in the long run detrimental to their own interests. If these women begin to develop a critical orientation to Bangladeshi Islam, and start to bring about some changes from within, as has happened to some extent in countries like Iran, Egypt or Morocco, this could lead to real empowerment and transformation for the Bangladeshi women as a whole." (p. 378)

(iii) Veiling - Turkey

This article captures the idea of an 'alternative Islamic modernity'. While the issue of the veil retains its strongly religious and political character in Turkey, Muslim Turkish women are also creating new meanings of veiling. The increase in fashion for veiling indicates that far from being a sign of oppression, women are using the veil to express their individuality.

Kilicbay, B. and Binark, M., 2002, 'Consumer Culture, Islam and the Politics of Lifestyle: Fashion for Veiling in Contemporary Turkey', *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 17, No. 4, pp. 495-511

The authors argue that in addition to the two main motivations for taking the veil in Turkey, i.e. adherence to an important principle of Islamic faith, and a symbol of political Islam, the veil should also be seen in a third context: the consumption culture. The 'fashion for veiling' should be considered part of this process. The authors argue "the practice of veiling is inseparable from consumption, commodity, even pleasure patterns, and is stimulated by global and local trends of the market economy" (p. 499). They further argue:

“While political Islam empowers and promotes the return of Muslim actors, ethics and aesthetics to the public sphere, the lifestyles of Muslim actors are correspondingly changing due to their encounter with modernized lifestyles [...] Since the 1990s, with the aim of presenting alternative consumption strategies to the westernized and dominant ones, new consumption practices are being developed by the newly formed Islamic middle classes, such as Islamic fashion and the Islamization of urban ways of life like patronizing restaurants, supermarkets and hotels.” (p. 499)

The authors go on to describe the popularity of the hotel Caprice, which offers summer holidays that conform to Islamic principles, such as separate beaches for men and women and respect for praying hours. “Leisure is ‘Islamicized’ but in line with the market system, and as a consequence, the lifestyles of Muslim subjects are transformed. In other words, the subjects of the periphery are assimilated into the centre. Muslim women are at the core of all these alterations, because of the shifting meaning of the practice of veiling” (p. 499).

The article includes an analysis of Islamic women’s magazines, looking particularly at the discourses of news and articles on fashion, as well as the emergence of ‘fashion for veiling’ in the fashion advertisements. The authors find that the discourse evidenced in the articles sees fashion as contrary to Islamic principles on waste (*israf*), as well as part of an imposed lifestyle of modern capitalist societies. The advertisements, however, introduce the products of fashion for veiling. This contrast is important as it demonstrates the perceived conflict between an Islamic lifestyle and one based on modern capitalist principles.

Ultimately, the authors aim to demonstrate that “Turkish Muslim women use the veil in multiple ways according to their relation to the practice of veiling either as a purely religious practice or a traditional practice, as a political symbol, as a symbol of status, as a marker of difference or as a new form of consumption. A woman who wears the veil refuses to be included in the dominant definition of modernity and civilization. On the one hand, she experiences a feeling of being ‘privileged’ and of being different from the others; on the other hand, she reproduces the new meaning of veiling, which in this article is defined as the consumption context of the practice of veiling.” (p. 509)

1.8 A DFID supported initiative executed through the British Council: ‘Promoting Women’s Rights to Gender Equality through Shari’a in Northern Nigeria.’

In the introduction to the Issues paper we noted that donors normally take a secularist approach to gender equality, including in Muslim majority countries. This initiative in Northern Nigeria is different. A number of states in Northern Nigeria have introduced laws based on Shari’ah and the document referred to above describes its mission thus:

“Muslim women in Northern Nigeria, like others across the world, have been subjected to practices that violate their rights. The expansion of Sharia in most states in Northern Nigeria provides the opportunity to question and address these practices by subjecting them to the scrutiny of Sharia. It also opens an avenue for concerned Muslims to embark on projects that seek to promote positive practices and challenge harmful and negative ones, relying on an authentic understanding of Sharia. Addressing these negative practices is important because they constitute barriers to women’s rights and hinder Muslim women’s ability to access justice in Nigeria. In addition, they have a generally negative impact on the religion.” (p. 1)

The paper therefore asks for “an authentic understanding of shari’a” to determine women’s rights, thereby implicitly suggesting that custom and patriarchy have, in the past, been responsible for the injustices done to girls and women but now, with Shari’ah, there is an opportunity to get rid of these practices. It does not couch its argument – as Muslim feminists do – in terms of the need for *reinterpretation* of religious texts but rather for an *authentic understanding* of them. To give an example: Section 10 of the commentary document

addresses the exclusion of women from participation in decision-making in Nigeria. The position of Shari'ah is explained as follows:

“The principle of consultation in the Sharia permeates all segments of Muslim society for private, family and community matters. Referring to the Muslim community the Qur'an describes the members as those who '*...conduct their affairs by mutual consultation...*' (42:38) [...] In another verse talking about decision-making within the family the Qur'an says '*let each one of you accept the advice of the other in a just way*' (65:6). Consultation is one of the qualities of the Prophet (SAW) which he exhibited in his dealings with his family, friends and community at large.” (p. 30)

The result is an authoritative commentary, produced by well-respected theological scholars, that strongly condemns harmful practices to girls and women as being against Shari'ah. The way the document is phrased, and the extensive process of consultation undertaken by the authors, means it is not likely to antagonise male religious and political leaders – indeed it seems to have their wide support. The scope of the document is also impressive – it covers a very wide range issues of importance to women: practices relating to the girl child, marital relations, divorce, economic rights, inheritance, property ownership, access to health and health reproductive services, women's political participation and access to justice.

The project aims to use the commentary document as the basis for a wider set of activities that include:

- Incorporating women's issues in mosque sermons and other preaching engagements;
- Establishing women's forums where they can freely discuss their views, and contribute to the development agenda;
- Organising communication skills workshops for women to help them convey their messages in a manner that is appropriate to the cultural context;
- Incorporating women's rights issues into the curriculum of primary, secondary and Islamiyya schools.

In our view this project is an excellent example of the practical use and usefulness of what we are calling (although the authors do not) a Muslim feminist approach to women's rights. It is not in opposition to, but highly complementary with, secularist approaches. CEDAW is not mentioned in the commentary document, not because the advice given is not consistent with the spirit of CEDAW (it definitely is) but because Qur'anic sources have so much more legitimacy, authority and meaning in northern Nigeria.

The commentary on Shari'ah is based on the Maliki school of thought. This means it cannot be simply translated and used in other countries. It would need to reflect the positions of schools of Islamic thought used in the country concerned and address aspects of women's rights of most relevance there. Nonetheless, it is an excellent model to follow.

2.0 Women's political participation

The Issues Paper looked at women's participation in Islamist parties and asked whether the policies and practices of Islamist parties are gradually shifting to accommodate and respond to women's concerns. Here we look at literature focusing on a wider range of issues and countries. For example, at how religiously framed reform agendas on gender have influenced state reform (the Maghreb, Malaysia), on state and NGO responses to global discourses on Islam (Egypt, Pakistan), and how Islamist parties are positioning themselves on women's issues (Jordan, Yemen, Egypt).

What is interesting in reviewing the literature is that an increasing number of commentators, from apparently different starting positions, are now arguing that the record of women's activism in Muslim majority countries is gaining its widest appeal when movements are justifying their actions in terms of Islamic principles and teachings.

2.1 Islam-based gender reform – the Maghreb

Archer, B., 2007, 'Family Law Reform and the Feminist Debate: Actually-Existing Islamic Feminism in the Maghreb and Malaysia', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 4, pp. 49-59 <http://www.bridgew.edu/SoAS/jiws/May07/Archer.pdf>

This article argues that the success of the influential Islamic feminist movement in the Maghreb in lobbying for family law reform, has led to the model being adopted by women's movements in Malaysia. The author says: "Although secular feminists in the West frequently criticize the aims of this Islamic feminism as an oxymoronic anti-feminism, the Maghreby movement serves as proof that only an Islamic feminist reform model can serve as a pragmatic challenge to discriminatory laws" (p. 1).

The third section of the paper analyses the recent family law movement in the region, and in particular the activities of a women's advocacy group, Collectif 95 Maghreb Egalite (Collectif), whose report 'One Hundred Measures and Provisions for an Egalitarian Codification of the Personal Status Codes and Family Law in the Maghreb' (One Hundred Measures) is considered by the author to have laid the foundation for the success of the reform movement.

'One Hundred Measures' aimed to challenge discriminatory family laws in Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria. It was based on four sources of authority: Qur'anic principles; national constitutional law; international human rights law; and sociological studies looking at interactions within Maghrebi families. In this way it was able to form "a holistic and complete argument for family law reform." (p. 56) The author argues:

"Not only is this reform model theoretically sound, it has also been demonstrated to be an efficacious instrument of change. Morocco's parliament and King Muhammad IV relied heavily upon the One Hundred Measures and the Guide to Equality as they met to discuss potential family law reforms, and the resulting family law cites the multi-faceted framework outlined in these texts as the basis of its authoritativeness. In Algeria, this model has stimulated dialogue among the ulema, or Islamic scholars, who are currently amending the nation's statutes. Some of these men are now openly questioning the divinity of Shari'a law, creating the possibility for a progressive Qur'anic exegesis to replace the traditional, conservative one. Thus, these successful efforts of the Collectif demonstrate that an Islamic feminist voice is a much-needed and powerful agent of change in the ongoing debate on family law reform." (p. 56)

2.2 Muslim women's challenges to Shari'a - Malaysia

The Issues paper used a three-fold categorisation to describe women's activism on gender issues in MMCs: secularist feminist; Muslim feminist; and Islamist, noting significant differences of opinion between them. Whilst Islamists and Muslim feminists look to a reinterpretation of Islamic traditions as the basis for their modernist conceptions of the status of women in Islam, they differ primarily from each other in that Islamists see the relationship between men and women as based on 'equity', whereas Muslim feminists argue for an approach based on 'equality'. The former view the roles and rights of men and women as being different but of the same value, while the latter argue for total equality, in terms of the role of men and women in all areas, as well as in rights and responsibilities. Is there potential for collaboration between them? The article below shows that in certain instances the demands of both groups do converge and when they do they can have significant influence on public law and policy.

Foley, R., 2004, 'Muslim Women's Challenges to Islamic Law: The Case of Malaysia', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Vol. 6, Issue 1, pp. 53-84

This article has three main sections. The first is an overview of Muslim women's position in Malaysia, including a consideration of their relationship to Islam and the space available for their activism. The second section looks at the strategies that Muslim women use, and the concluding section aims to draw out the lessons that Muslim women's activism holds for feminist theory.

The article discusses two different strategies for reform, which depend on different interpretations of Islam, and result in the allocation of different rights to women. The author defines these as 'equity' and 'equality' strategies. The Islamic equity strategy is based on a more conservative interpretation of the Qur'an and Sunnah. According to this view, women have different natures, based on innate characteristics, and these result in different roles. While female and male rights are conceptualised as being different, they argue that women, as mothers and wives, should be equally valued as men for their contribution to the ummah. In general, most Malaysian women subscribe to the equity strategy, an approach which is mirrored by the state. The Islamic equality discourse, on the other hand, argues for the complete equality of the sexes, and is usually based on a modern interpretation of the Qur'an and Sunnah, as well as Shari'ah. It argues that men and women should be seen as equal in all areas of life, and share all responsibilities, including those in the home. This approach is most notably espoused by the well-known women's group, Sisters in Islam. The Sisters in Islam call for a reinterpretation of syariah (Shari'ah), which they argue is man-made and therefore subject to change. Yet, few in Malaysia accept the Sisters' methodology and their resulting conclusions, because few of the group's members are trained theologians. In Malaysia, as in many MMCs, only the ulema are considered capable of interpreting Islam accurately. As a result, Sisters in Islam are regarded "a rather westernized group, without the appropriate credentials to engage with the Qur'an." (p. 62)

The article goes on to chart the involvement of both equality and equity activists in campaigns for legal reform. Most attempts at reform have been aimed at the level of implementation. The argument goes that while the substantive law treats women fairly, it is in practice that their rights are denied. In this area, the demands of the equality and equity actors converge. Their common demands include a uniform syariah system; imposing conditions on a man contracting a polygamous marriage; making female-initiated divorce easier; and ensuring maintenance for the ex-wife and children. Another proposal for legal reform centres on changing the substance of laws by choosing between different legal schools – what the author terms "the conventional legal reform route" (p. 67). An example of this is the call for more female judges, and the proposal that the Hanafi school - which allows female judges - be used as the primary authority. It is only the equality activists however who are involved in calling for comprehensive legal reform, which would entail reinterpreting the syariah, based on a reinterpretation of the Quran.

The author argues that the Malaysian example represents three challenges for feminism internationally:

1. The use of religion as a basis for activism by Muslim women. The commitment of Muslim women to their religion means it cannot be dismissed as false consciousness, purely a private matter, or as falling outside of the feminist framework.
2. The conceptions of 'rights' that Muslim women use. These are not based on the western liberal tradition of individualism, but rather on communitarianism: "The acceptance of communitarianism by the activists is both culturally appropriate and politically strategic: by staying within this framework the women gain access to an audience who will listen because they are speaking in the language of their culture". Furthermore: "That rights can be based on concepts other than individualism helps to break down the western grand narrative concerning human rights". (p. 70)
3. The 'separate but equal' thesis as a useful form of activism for women. While equity discourses may encounter problems related to the essentialisation of women's and men's roles, the author argues that given the strong Islamist influence in most Muslim countries, it may be the preferred strategy.

2.3 State responses to global discourses on Islam – Egypt

Hatem, M. F., 2006, 'In the Eye of the Storm: Islamic Societies and Muslim Women in Globalization Discourses', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol., 26, No. 1, pp. 22-35

This article is divided into three broad sections. The first explores some of the discourses on globalisation produced in the 1990s which have portrayed Islamic societies and Muslim women as threats or exceptions to the new world order, and argues that these discourses stand as "powerful examples of global intolerance of multiculturalism and its drive to homogenization" (p. 22). The second section shows how these discourses have provoked certain state and non-governmental responses. Finally, the article examines the multiple voices of Muslim women who are re-examining their cultural traditions from within, and developing meaningful solutions to the problems facing their communities.

On the second issue – state responses to (largely negative) global discourses on Islam – Mervat Hatem considers the case of Egypt. She argues that the state has used the clash of civilisations discourse to cement alliances with the United States in order to consolidate its political strength against Islamism and the local gender agenda, and restrict the public space available to both Islamist and independent women:

"In the face of the large-scale defection of middle-class women to social and political Islamism, the state began to compete with the Islamists in offering conservative interpretations of women's constitutional rights to public work and political representation [...] Given the state's retreat from support of women's rights, a visible minority of active middle-class women, which formed NGOs, began to develop independent agendas and public voices for women [...] Because of the state's desire to maintain its control of the gender agenda as formal evidence of its progressive social content, it adopted a particularly hostile and repressive attitude to women's NGOs. In 1991, it used Law no. 32, which governed the operation of women's NGOs to close down the Arab Women's Solidarity Association, headed by Nawal El Saadawi, accusing it of taking political positions that the law forbade." (p. 29)

The article also shows that Islamist and Muslim women have reacted to globalisation and global feminist discourses in a variety of ways. Some Islamist writers have created a binary opposition between Islam and the West. An example is Heba Raouf Ezzat, a key public voice of Islamist women of the now-defunct Labour Party in Egypt. In 2000, she argued that Western secularism was to blame for the decline in family values, and that secular feminism undermined the family by emphasising the individual rights of women and overlooking the

fact that patriarchal cultures bind men to their families by imposing important obligations on them.

Omaima Abou Bakr and Heba Elsadda, as Muslim feminists, have taken a different approach. They do not reject feminism or the insights of gender studies in their understanding of Islamic traditions and history. Instead, they aim build on the work by international scholars such as Amina Wadud and Riffat Hassan who aim to create an independent space within which methodologies and constructs developed in the West could be used to develop a more nuanced understanding of the Islamic tradition, and to reinterpret its texts from the point of view of Muslim women. However Abou Bakr differentiates “between an Islamic feminism that was part of Muslim self-definition and the new hegemonic Western concept designed to contain the “other”” (p. 12). So, for her, Islamic feminism cannot simply be constituted by a critique of the Islamic tradition – to be meaningful it also has to develop alternatives and solutions that are inspired by Islamic values.

2.4 NGO responses to global discourses on Islam – Pakistan

Jafar, A., 2007, ‘Engaging Fundamentalism: The Case of Women’s NGOs in Pakistan’, *Social Problems*, Vol. 54, Issue 3, pp. 256-273

This article highlights how NGOs in Pakistan are caught between the global, largely Islamophobic discourse current in the west, and the aggressive forms of Islamism that seeks to challenge this within Pakistan. The latter includes those prepared to use violence against any group associated with the ‘evil’ West. The article is an excellent commentary on how global and largely negative discourses about Islam in the West play into the violence perpetrated by what Jafar calls Islamic ‘fundamentalism’. One aspect of this is how NGOs tend to be branded as Western agents by ‘fundamentalists’ and therefore, as threatening Muslim identity.

“Many of my interviewees remarked that the fundamentalists’ accusation that NGOs are “Westernized,” “maghribzada” (West struck), or Western agents is one of the biggest challenges that NGOs and activists face. In light of the history of colonization, the current American presence in Iraq and Afghanistan, the recent riots in Europe over cartoon caricatures of Muhammad, and the Pope’s controversial remarks about Islam, the belief in a threatened Muslim identity is widespread. When this identity gets intertwined with notions of nationalism and authenticity, it becomes extremely difficult to question it or to question tradition, culture, and religion without being accused of spreading fahashi (obscenity or vulgarity), and of being agents of Westernization and imperialism (Khan 2005; Narayan 1997). This lands feminists and activists in NGOs in a predicament: a noncritical stance toward religion and culture, though more acceptable to society, seems to betray feminist principles, but a critical stance creates a backlash against NGOs and NGO workers, which not only swells the ranks of fundamentalists, but also sets up NGOs as a popular target of struggle and resistance.” (p. 263)

Jafar identifies the different ways in which women NGOs in particular have responded to these accusations of westernisation. These include reinterpreting the Qur’an (thereby using a frame of reference with which Islamists are familiar) and networking with the religious community on the one hand, to becoming more assertively secular or defensive and isolated on the other. She argues that the defensive posture of some NGOs is not so much a response to the ‘fundamentalists’ but rather to the wider stereotypes and vilification of Muslim cultures perceived by Pakistanis to be prevalent in the west (p. 269). She concludes that despite strategies to engage with fundamentalists most NGOs remain committed to a secular position.

“In their attempt to challenge state-sponsored repressive Islamization without jeopardizing their claims to cultural authenticity, progressive political groups in Pakistan, including women’s groups have had to organize their political and discursive interventions in a tension between an Islamic framework or an

avowedly secularist framework. Although they resort to Islamic texts for support on particular positions, liberal progressives in Pakistan tend to identify themselves as 'secular'."

There is however a general feeling that women's NGOs do not do enough to engage with religious groups. There are exceptions: some NGOs recognise the influence of religious groups and work hard to establish ties with them. The author offers an example of an NGO in Baluchistan which consults with local imams on issues of gender, human rights and family planning. Despite this, 'a communication gap' still remains.

Note: The language used in this essay, particularly the terms 'fundamentalist' and 'extremist' is not commonly used by feminist scholars in other countries. The author uses the term 'fundamentalist' to describe Islamic positions that: i) emphasise an authentic, universal, and ahistorical "Muslim identity," which is perceived to be under constant threat; (ii) view women as repositories of this identity; (iii) collapse the concepts of religion, tradition, and nationalism; and (iv) use and interpret religious texts selectively. In doing so she blurs the distinction between those who are traditionalist-conservative in their way of thinking and those who use violence and perpetrate terrorist attacks. In Pakistan feminist academic discourse seems to have been influenced by the War on Terror discourse that is so prevalent in Pakistan.

2.5 Islamist party positioning on women's rights issues

Where they are allowed to participate in the political process, Islamist parties have begun to enjoy an increased visibility and some modest success in elections in many Muslim-majority countries. Is there evidence that, as a result, there has occurred a shift in the policies on women of these Islamist parties in order to widen their voter base; and perhaps to present a more 'moderate' image? Does such a shift allow the moderates within these parties to push for more progressive agendas?

There is very little literature available on the evolving discourses of political parties on women's rights in general. What there is focuses mainly on the status of women within the organisational structures of the parties themselves. The two case studies below largely reinforce the point made in the Issues paper, i.e. that while there have been significant shifts in the statements of political parties in the Middle East in recent years, the reality has not yet caught up with the rhetoric, and women's involvement remains very circumscribed - restricted to the activities undertaken by separate women's wings.

(i) Jordan and Yemen

Clark, J. A. and Schwedler, J., 2003, 'Who Opened the Window? Women's Struggle for Voice within Islamist Political Parties', *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 35, No. 3

The Islamic Action Front (IAF) in Jordan, and the Yemeni Reform Group or Islah party in Yemen have more women in their highest decision-making bodies, as well as in their general membership than any other party in either country. This article aims to explore why the participation of women in these two highly conservative Islamist groups, has increased so significantly in a relatively short period of time. In response to explanations that focus on strategic or ideological considerations, the authors argue "...neither the IAF nor the Islah party has a program for the promotion of women. There is no articulated strategy at play, nor has party ideology evolved to include more progressive roles for women. In fact, neither party has even sustained debates or agreed upon the appropriate role for female party members" (p. 294).

They offer some examples of the experiences of women in Jordan and Yemen:

- Neither the IAF nor the Islah have increased their support for women's political participation. In fact, heavy-handed criticism and slander of women in high-profile political positions remains commonplace.
- Both parties have supported increased roles for women within the parties. However, this has been within separate women's wings. The leadership of both parties remains reluctant to endorse the candidacy of women in elections.

- Only in terms of women in high party committees has there been significant change across both countries.

The authors argue *that internal party divides have played the most important role in determining the status of women in these parties*. One particular tension that has, unintentionally, resulted in creating space for women, is between the extent to which the parties should participate in a pluralist political system (accommodation) and the appropriate readings of Islamic texts (contextualisation).

These lines of contention created space for the mobilisation of women around the 1993 elections in Jordan and the 1997 elections in Yemen. On one occasion during the 1997 elections in Yemen when Zindani, the supreme religious authority of the Islah party, criticised the promotion of the highly respected Amat al-Alim as-Suswah to deputy minister of information, the highest position for any woman at the time, on the grounds that women were emotional and thus not suitable for leadership. The authors describe the controversy that followed: "While public debate focused on as-Suswah's promotion and the role of women in politics, the real debate within Islah concerned the degree to which ideology should be compromised for votes and, more to the point, whether Islah was indeed a political party" (p. 305). The party's subsequent loss of seats was attributed to the deterioration of Islah's alliance with the General People's Congress (GPC) and to Zindani's legalistic ideological position which is thought to have frightened away female university voters. Subsequently, there emerged a sense of recognition within the party of the need to behave like a political party and formulate specific policies on issues like the economy, democracy and women. In the following months, seven women were elected to the party's consultative council.

(ii) Egypt

Abdel-Latif, O., 2008, 'In the Shadow of the Brothers: The Women of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood', Carnegie Endowment, Washington DC

This paper highlights that Islamist women are becoming more and more dissatisfied with their subordinate status and are looking to increase their representation inside the Brotherhood and their participation in politics in general. Currently, the Sisters' division is a separate entity that is completely isolated from the activities of the Brothers. There is no direct exchange between the two bodies and communication is conducted through "middlemen". In addition, the women's division is not represented in all decision-making bodies. However, the author finds that despite the women's demands for a deeper and more meaningful role, as well as access to positions of power, they are not willing to go so far in their demands as to compromise the movement's unity or cohesion.

The paper notes that the Brotherhood's public rhetoric on women at least, has progressed somewhat in recent years. A 1994 document addressed their roles and rights from an Islamic perspective, such as women's right to ownership, their financial independence, and the issue of forced marriages. It also stated that women were entitled to participate in elections as voters and candidates, and could occupy all state posts except for al-Imaama al-kubra, the equivalent of the caliphate. The Brotherhood's electoral platform for the 2005 parliamentary elections stated that women should be able to strike a balance between their social duties and their work in the public sphere and the 2007 party platform included a vision based on "complete equality" of men and women, while preserving their different social roles.

However, these principles have "yet to be translated into either actual policies adopted by the movement or a consistent vision embraced by its rank and file, perhaps because the movement is split on the issue" (p. 9). While a group of reform-minded Brothers are in favour of giving women equal status within the organisation, the leadership has adopted a more conservative stance. This is in line with the support base of the movement, which subscribes mainly to the Salafist view that women's activism should be limited.

For the author, there are a number of barriers to women's advancement in the movement:

- there is no overarching vision on women's activism;

- the existing leadership is unwilling to change its traditional vision of women's roles being limited to traditionally accepted ones;
- the conservative base of the movement is opposed to developing women's structures and allowing them a broader role in politics; and
- the regime itself continues to suppress dissent and opposition actors.

However, as indicated above, the article also highlights the debate that is currently taking place between reformers and conservatives within the movement on the issue of women's rights, as well as the emergence of strong, dynamic and highly visible activists who are demanding greater rights. These, the author argues, will be the key factors in the struggle for a more well-defined and integrated role for women within the Muslim Brotherhood.

3.0 Civil Society Activism

The Issues paper has already highlighted that many Muslim women in MMCs regularly attend Qur'anic study circles as a means of accessing religious knowledge, which they apply in their personal and family lives. Here we look at country studies that address questions raised in the Issues paper: Are these study circles empowering for women, and if so, at what level? How is this empowerment manifested? Can it, in certain circumstances, translate into support for political parties? Examples are taken from Bangladesh, Yemen, Indonesia and Shi'a Lebanon.

3.1 Piety in Dhaka – 'an alternative modernity'

Huq, S. and Rashid, S. F., 2008, 'Refashioning Islam: Elite Women and Piety in Bangladesh', *Contemporary Islam*, Vol. 2, pp. 7-22

This paper explores the development of Islamic identity amongst a group of elite women in Dhaka through attendance of a weekly Qur'an reading class. The authors find that the women adhere to a literal translation of the Qur'an and Sahih Hadith literature documented in the 9th and 10th centuries AD. The authors argue that this understanding reinforces traditional gender roles. However, the Islamic movement also offers an 'alternative modernity':

“...(T)he changes incorporated in personal and social lives make the women more modern in their own language, a modernity that is non-western, better informed, better thought out, chosen as opposed to followed, and divinely and not socially guided [...] The elite women's modernity is considered to be non-western in its ideals of modesty, absolute faith and non-traditional in its rejection of religious practices that are tantamount to shirk, the most grievous sin and crime in Islam where partnership is associated with God.”

In attending these classes, the women also carve out 'spaces of independence and authority' for themselves:

“New found knowledge, the feeling of being divinely guided and introspection provides women with the ability to exercise agency in situations which they did not contest (or felt ill-equipped to contest) in the past [...] (T)he agency through which the elite women assert their sexuality, their desire to have and educate their children in a particular manner, their opinions on rituals, on what is permissible and prohibited, represent their resistance to forces of power inherent within the system.” (p. 20)

3.2 Piety in Pakistan – an alternative hegemonic discourse?

Ahmad, S., 2008, 'Identity Matters, Culture Wars: An Account of Al-Huda (re)Defining Identity and Reconfiguring Culture in Pakistan', *Culture and Religion*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 63-80

This article argues that for many years the Pakistan state has actively propagated a hegemonic religio-nationalist discourse which explicitly connects the creation of Pakistan to Islam, and this has been internalised by many Pakistanis. This internalisation (particularly by the urban middle classes) has facilitated their acceptance of the Islamic ideology of Al-Huda, a network of study circles – an ideology which “highlights their Muslim identity, disowns the land's history prior to the first Muslim conquest in 712 CE, and criticises all things 'unIslamic'” (p. 76).

In recent years, increasing numbers of middle- and upper-class urban women in Pakistan have turned to Al-Huda, which offers a range of courses in various areas of Islam. Its

success is evidenced by the way in which women alter their behaviour in accordance with the religious teachings they imbibe whilst at the school, as well as the enthusiasm with which they work to spread its ideology into mainstream society, through da'wa and other religious activities. On the latter, Al-Huda students are formally trained to influence others. For example students are given summer assignments where they have to offer a three-day course to friends or neighbours. In fact the most common means by which Al-Huda's discourse is disseminated is via students taking back what they have learnt to their families, neighbours, and communities. This process, the author argues, has "taken on a life of its own, as many of those who learn from others also begin spreading the ideology. It is like a domino effect, and it is within this context that [...] Al-Huda has turned into a social movement, albeit an informal one."

The author points out that while Farhat Hashmi, the founder of Al-Huda, offers her own commentary on the Qur'an and denies affiliation with any particular sect or group, she is heavily influenced by Mawlana Maududi's teachings, which also inform the position of the Jamaat-e-Islami, Pakistan's largest Islamist party. Like Jamaat-e-Islamic, Hashmi also draws upon a literal interpretation of the Qur'an, relies upon the Sunnah, and promotes an idealised vision of the first Muslim community. She is critical of cultural practices and traditions, and places great emphasis on the importance of rituals.

While all of the women who attend Al-Huda classes have faith - i.e. they believe in God, and in Muhammad as his Messenger - many have not studied the Qur'an before:

"Women's lack of scriptural knowledge, when combined with a lack of access to an alternative discourse [...] facilitates the school's impact on women and gives their faith concrete form [...] Taking the analytical tools provided by Al-Huda leads them to see the literal, and what is perceived to be timeless, interpretation of the Qur'an as 'truth' as opposed to seeing it as one of many of ways of engaging with the text. Ideological closure occurs in most cases" (p. 70)

As noted above, learning an interpretation of Islam based on a set of certain beliefs and practices leads many women to change their everyday behaviour and lifestyle. The increase in *purdah* or veiling in urban areas is the most visible sign of this change. Other changes include avoiding films, music, cultural festivals and celebrations, on the basis that these are unIslamic and/ or foreign. The author argues that in avoiding these things women negate the religious experiences of other Muslims, as well as the history of the land they live in; they are also in the process, "creating a culture based on beliefs and practices that originate from outside the land" (p. 71). This is because, perceived as the truth, Al-Huda's Islam is believed to transcend cultural influences: "When Farhat Hashmi uses the term 'Muslim way', she first tells her students that there is only one way to be a Muslim, and then elaborates upon which activities a good Muslim must not engage in" (p. 73). The emphasis on eradicating cultural practices is seen as an attempt to replicate Middle Eastern countries. " 'Social hierarchy underscores the Arabia-centredness of Islamic identity' [...] and Muslims in the Middle East occupy a high position because of their proximity to Saudi Arabia, their earlier conversion to Islam, and their fluency in Arabic" (p. 74).

Ultimately, however, the presence in Pakistan of a range of ideological systems, keeps Al-Huda from creating a monolithic culture informed by a set of certain values and behaviours. However, the author argues, "it is nevertheless attempting to accomplish just that. How successful it will be in this project will depend upon how successful it is in creating subjects infused with a unitary 'Islamic' consciousness. While this is largely dependent upon the strength and nature of women's prior religious beliefs, the strength of alternative ideologies in their life, and their motives for engaging with this religious discourse, Al-Huda's success is already visible in its national and international expansion, in the manner in which women transform their ideology, their behaviour and their lifestyle, and later those of others" (p. 77).

3.3 Piety in Yemen – religiosity and politics: a seamless system?

The Issues paper finds that the study circles in Egypt are not part of a politicised movement but focus mainly on the social lives of women. However, Islamists often argue that for Muslims, the public and private spheres cannot be separated as Islam constitutes a complete system, encompassing all areas of private life and public organisation. Do study circles in other countries function differently, and can we discern any particular political or economic conditions that may explain this difference?

Clark, J. A., 2003, 'Islam, Charity and Activism: Middle-Class Networks and Social Welfare in Egypt, Jordan and Yemen' in Wiktorowicz, Q. (ed.), 'Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach', Indiana University Press, pp.164-184

This chapter looks at how social movement organisations (SMOs) in Yemen use women's Qur'anic study groups, known as 'nadwas' for recruitment and financial support. Clark seems to utilise a broad definition of 'social movement organisations' – in this chapter they appear to include both charitable organisations and Islamist political parties. She does argue that SMOs are the component parts of larger, amorphous social movements: "Social movements, especially in less open political systems, often do not operate in a hierarchical fashion with an identifiable leadership, system of order, or "direction". Rather, movements comprise numerous organizations, (each with its own agenda), networks of participants, and informal institutions. In Yemen, nadwas function as 'intermediary institutions' between these SMOs and the public:

"Nadwas provide a forum for recruitment and message dissemination in an environment and manner that accesses deeper layers of society than is possible via the formal mechanisms of the SMO. Because they are embedded in both the social fabric of society and preexisting social networks, nadwas provide SMOs a seemingly nonpolitical, socially reinforcing institution through which organization members engage women on an ad hoc, regular, or consciously committed basis in the name of da'wa activities. The informal and embedded nature of nadwas not only grants SMO members access to new audiences; it also enables women to participate in Islamist activities without membership." (p. 165)

For Islamist women in Yemen, therefore, "there exists a seamless web between religion, politics, charity and all forms of activism. All of these realms should reinforce each other and promote public virtue and personal piety." (p. 169)

In addition, nadwas are particularly useful as they allow Islamists a nonpolitical setting where they can recruit without raising the suspicion of the authorities; they are replicable in other areas; and they act as a nonverbal model of the Islamist message, i.e. students aim to emulate desirable Islamic qualities. This last point is important, as the author points out that in linking up with nadwas in this way, SMOs break down pre-existing social networks and create new ones in order to foster communities which become supportive of them through the acceptance and internalization of a particular set of values, and not necessarily through formal membership.

The chapter also describes the links between two major SMOs in Yemen – the Islah party and the Islah Charity – and nadwas. The author states that while the Islah *party* and *charity* are technically independent from each other, anecdotal evidence shows that they overlap in terms of membership and financial funders.

However, despite this association Clark implies that it does not automatically follow that attendance at nadwas will necessarily translate into political support for Islah because women's involvement in political parties in Yemen remains low. That said, nadwas may provide women with a 'gradualist' entry point:

“The violent political history in Yemen, the conservative tribal customs, and women’s relatively small role in public life all serve to dissuade women from overt political activity. Overt references to political parties or ideologies hamper *Islah*’s success at recruitment. *Da’wa* however is a religious act. As forums that focus on the Qur’an and Islam and do not discuss politics, *nadwas* foster religious acts and more readily facilitate women’s participation on their own terms [...] (P)eople seldom initially join a movement per se; rather, they typically participate in movement activities and only gradually become members. *Da’wa* activities (which can be the *nadwa* itself or activities conducted by *nadwas*) offer women precisely this gradualist opportunity.” (p. 171)

3.4 Muslim women’s organisations as ‘incubators’ for political activism – Indonesia

Do other forms of faith-based civil society activism exist in MMCs? If so, how do they use Islamic knowledge and language and to what end? In addition, does greater access to religious knowledge translate into increased participation in other civil society fora? The following article argues that Muslim women’s organisations in Indonesia act as ‘incubators’ for their political activism.

Rinaldo, R., 2008, ‘Envisioning the Nation: Women Activists, Religion and the Public Sphere in Indonesia’, *Social Forces*, Vol. 86, No. 4

This article aims to explore how activist women’s groups use religion to mobilise in the public sphere. In fact, the author argues that “the Islamic revival is a heterogenous phenomenon that can contribute to new forms of women’s agency in the public sphere” (p. 1782). She also argues that Muslim women’s organisations in Indonesia act as ‘incubators’ for their political activism. The increasing role of Islam in the public sphere gives women an important platform, and allows for their involvement in debates on issues such as *Syariah*, pornography and abortion. Through their participation in these debates, women become involved in the ongoing re-negotiation of the Indonesian state. Pious women are thus emerging as new and legitimate public actors.

The article is based on the author’s observation of the *Fatayat*, the women’s division of *Nadhatul Islam*, Indonesia’s largest Muslim organisation, and the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), a political party which is inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood, and received 7 percent of the vote in the 2004 elections. *Fatayat* organises trainings, seminars and workshops around the country, disseminating interpretations of Islamic texts that emphasise gender equality. The PKS is especially concerned with issues such as pornography, and the Women’s Division is involved in coalitions with women’s organisations in Jakarta, particularly on voter education for women.

Rinaldo highlights two of the objectives of *Fatayat*’s Gender Analysis Training (p. 1788):

- “1. Participants understand that Islam gives women a high position. Women are viewed as the same as men, namely as full human beings, who have certain rights and obligations.
2. Participants realize that some of the teachings of Islam which deal with the relations between men and women have been wrongly interpreted so that they produce the belief that Islam legitimized gender relations that are not equal.”

The author highlights that there are multiple understandings of Islam in Indonesia and Indonesian women’s organisations advocate different political reforms. For *Fatayat*, gender inequality results from a misinterpretation of religious texts, and the persistence of patriarchal pre-Islamic cultures. The PKS, however, does not base its principles on contextual readings of the Qur’an. For PKS women, the Qur’an says that men and women are naturally different.

The author concludes:

“Indonesia is experiencing a feminization of the public sphere, with women becoming more numerous and outspoken in NGOs, religious organizations and the media [...] Islam’s role in this process derives from its relevance as a mobilizing ideology and its increasing institutionalization in the Indonesian public sphere. Yet [...] Islam is not monolithic. Scholars have observed that the Islamic revival has brought about a democratization of religious knowledge and authority in many places, including Indonesia. This means that women can now be seen as expert practitioners of Islam, and their use of religious arguments can lend them public credibility at a time of pious revival.” (p. 1798)

However, Rinaldo warns that such “democratisation” does not necessarily lead to equality: not only do all women not seek equality, it also means that the more conservative voices, both male and female, who advocate traditional practices such as polygamy for example, can also benefit from a more visible public platform, and can win new followers.

3.5 Legitimising political action through reference to Islamic frameworks – Shi’a Lebanon

The article below provides an example of how women are attributing ‘modern’ practices, such as public participation through volunteerism, to religious figures such as the Prophet’s granddaughter Zaynab, in order to locate them within an authentic Islamic framework.

Deeb, L., 2006, ‘An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi’i Lebanon’, Princeton University Press

Chapter Six of this book looks at how public piety has emerged as a new social norm in Lebanon, especially for Shi’a women, and is marked by women’s veiling; their volunteerism; and the prominence of Zaynab, the Prophet’s granddaughter as an ideal. The ‘Zaynab model’ - as Lara Deeb calls it – sets the standard of moral behaviour to which Shi’a women aspire. The author argues that the inclusion of community service within this moral construct is a new phenomenon which:

“...links the authentication process with its ideas about progress to women’s public participation in new ways. Active volunteers were seen to embody the very qualities in Zaynab that are desired – emotional strength, outspokenness, and dedication to others. Although volunteering is only one possible way of emulating Zaynab, it has become the most commonly accepted and expected way” (p. 207).

In fact, the emphasis placed on this desire for emulation has translated into the emergence of elevated social expectations for women:

“Social pressures were strongest around the most publicly visible aspects of piety – Islamic dress and volunteerism. With regard to the latter, volunteers conveyed expectations regarding participation in community service to their relatives, friends, peers, and neighbours in conversations about jam’iyya activities as well as outright attempts at recruitment. Relationships were cultivated with new volunteers, and expectations were reinforced through jam’iyya workshops and training seminars. Advocates of community service explained volunteering as a “rational” choice, clearly connected to iltizam (commitment), and drew on Qur’anic verses and hadith such as “He who sleeps full while his neighbour is hungry is not a believer.” These quotations were included in conversations, inscribed on plaques adorning jam’iyya and household walls, and printed prominently on jami’iyya brochures, billboards and invitations.” (pp. 205-6)

The author finds that the emergence of the Shi’a Islamic movement has led to volunteerism becoming increasingly more visible, and has characterised women’s public activity as an

important element of piety with the framework of an authenticated Islam. “In striving to be pious to this ideal, women faced what they cast as “traditional” ideas about their proper roles, ideas that needed to be left behind for the sake of both progress and piety” (p.208). These ideas included the need for women to ‘work’; and balancing community work with domestic responsibilities.