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Trilogy of Violence: Religion, Culture and Identity The Abused Muslim Woman in the Age of Secular Modernity

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May 2015

A THESIS

Submitted to the faculty of Clark University, Worcester, Massachusetts, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the department of International Development, Community and Environment

And accepted on the recommendation of

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Denise Humphreys Bebbington, Chief Instructor

Keywords: Islam, culture, identity, gender, development, feminism, women's rights, women's empowerment, violence against Muslim women

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ABSTRACT

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Like many religious traditions, men use Islam to justify and sustain patriarchal control of women. Islam is stigmatized as inherently violent and oppressive to women. The dominant rhetoric among Muslim feminists attributes the aggression to the misinterpretation and misreading of sacred Islamic texts. However, an on-site observation and exploration of the 2014 gathering of *Rihla* in Konya, Turkey revealed that misinterpretation is but one of many causes and justifications of cultural Violence Against Muslim Women. The purpose of this research is to explore a new dimension of cultural violence against women in the name of Islam by examining the intersection of religion, culture, identity and gender in the context of developmental studies. Development interventions seeking to address such violence treat religion as a cultural obstacle to Muslim women's empowerment, often ignoring the multiple-layers of women's oppression that state and non-state actors cause, which may be exacerbating the issue. Thus, this study outlines key themes to illustrate the blurred lines between religion, culture and identity. I argue that Muslims recognize the severity of Violence Against Muslim Women, but they contest Western efforts, based on a model of modernization and secularism to empower women and demand gender equality, which are seen as threatening and undesirable. Research findings provide a broader understanding of how religion can be a double-edge sword: cultures of patriarchy use it to justify violence, yet Muslims believe that it is the way to women's empowerment and gender equality.

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DEDICATION

To Allah, and then to my beloved Prophet Mohammed ﷺ,

Whose blessings and teachings motivate me to pursue my ambition,

To my father, my mother, my husband, my son and my yet to be born child,

Whose love, encouragement and prayers enable me to reach such success and honor,

To my professors, my mentors, my colleagues, my friends and family,

Whose inspiration and support led me to believe in myself at the hardest moments.

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The great Arabic poet, Ahmed Shawqi, has a famous verse that translates to:

"Stand up and give due respect to your educator/mentor/tutor,
For a teacher's status is akin to/is almost as high as that of a messenger."

I am deeply grateful to all the professors and mentors who inspired me with their thought provoking discussions, stimulating lectures and in-depth conversations. I wish to thank them for being more than generous with their expertise and precious time.

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Definition of Arabic words

Arabic Word	Meaning
	In the name of Allah The Most Compassionate The Most Merciful
	Used following the mention of Prophet Mohammed, translated as, "May Allah bless him and give him peace"
Dawah	The proselytizing or preaching of Islam or to understand Islam through dialogue
Fajr	It means dawn, and it refers to the first of five obligatory daily prayers Muslims perform at dawn
Fitnah	Temptation, trial, sedition
Fiqh	The fundamental principles of Islamic Law; the means of which the rules of laws and jurispurudence are inferred and exracted from their sources
Hadith	The narrations of Prophet Mohammed's saying or an act, irrespective of whether the matter is authenticated or still disputed
Imams	Leaders who perform Friday sermons and lead the community in their religious and social affairs
Jahiliyya	Days of ignorance of pre-Islamic Arabia
Khimar	A piece of cloth which is used by a woman to cover her head or Hijab
Mahram	A male relative whom it would be unacceptable to marry *(Father, husband…etc.)*
Mufassirun	The plural of *mufassir*: the authors of *tafsir*, which is the Arabic word for exegesis (interpretation) of the Qur'an.
Masjid	Mosque
Musawah	'Equality' in Arabic
Nafs	Self, psyche, ego or soul
Qur'an	The Islamic sacred book, believed to be the word of Allah as revealed to Prophet Mohammed by the archangel Gabriel in Arabic
Sacred Islamic Text	Islamic scriptures which are: The Qur'an, the Hadith and the Sunnah
Sharia	Islamic laws and regulations, jurisprudence
Sunnah	The way of life which Prophet Mohammed taught the people in theory and practice
Ummah	Nation or community, the global community of Muslims

INTRODUCTION

> "In our approaches to removing injustices, we should not create further injustices."
> Sheikh Abdallah Bin Bayyah, RIS, Toronto, Canada 2014

> "How may 'equality' not reduce the Other to a version of the Same?"
> Abdal-Hakim Murad, Contentions 17, 2011

> "Prophet Muhammad is the first human being to articulate the equality of men and women. I've never found anybody in the history of humanity before him to ever articulate that men and women are essentially the same: before their Lord they are both spiritual beings with the same rights."
> Sheikh Hamza Yusuf, 50th Annual ISNA Convention, Jun 10, 2014

Abused in the name of Islam?

In 2007, I was a journalist with *Arab News* based in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia when the story of a 19-year-old Saudi teenager, known as the Qatif girl, rocked Saudi society and the world. Along with her non-*mahram* male companion whom she was meeting, the girl was kidnapped and gang-raped by seven Saudi men. Instead of harshly criminalizing and persecuting the perpetrators, the Saudi court sentenced the rape victim to six months in prison and 200 lashes for being alone in the car with a man who was not her relative (Setrakian, 2007 abcnews.com). This horrific act of legally and socially violating a woman's dignity and basic human rights is not unique to the Saudi community. In 1999, the Taliban performed the public execution of a woman, known as Zarmeena, in Kabul, Afghanistan after being accused of killing her abusive husband. In 2012, Fakhra Younus jumped from the sixth floor of a building after losing hope in finding relief or remedy from the constant abuse from her spouse (Abbot, 2012 huffingtonpost.com). No justice was granted to the 33-year-old Pakistani woman who no longer had a human face due to a male perpetrator attacking her with acid in 2000. The Demographic Health Survey in Egypt reported in 2008 that the widespread rate of

Female Genital Mutilation or Female Circumcision among women from ages 15-49 is 91.1 percent, with 74 percent of girls age 15-17 being circumcised[1]. In April 2007, members of the Iraqi community in Kurdistan stoned to death Du'a Khalil Aswad. The 17-year-old Yezidi girl was punished because she eloped with a Sunni Muslim man (Clarke, 2007 dailymail.co.uk). In 2010, English and Arabic news agencies reported that an Islamic court in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) ruled that husbands are allowed for to beat their wives and children – as long as they do not leave any physical marks. "Chief Justice Falah al Hajeri said the law allows a man to 'use his rights to discipline' but he cannot abuse that power by beating so hard he marks his family" (Newling, 2010 dailymail.com).

What is the crosscutting theme among these brutal stories and others that women might report to authorities or not? The state's justification of violence against women is causing real harm and injustice to Muslim women. State policy and power, such as the one endorsed by UAE has "normalized" gender-based violence in the name of Islam, and is permitting and turning a blind eye to Violence Against Women. Consequently, individuals and communities use religion, Islam, to justify, legitimize and reinforce cultural practices of patriarchy, including gender-based violence to subjugate and discriminate against women. In *Speaking in God's Name*, Professor of Islamic Law in University of California Berkeley Khaled Abou El Fadl presents legal cases involving Muslim women that "demonstrate the misuse and abuse of God's authority in order to impose a suffocating patriarchy upon Muslim society…gender-

[1] "FGM/C in Egypt: Prevalence Rate and Prospects." *United Nations Population Fund, Egypt*. N.p., n.d. Web. 27 Dec. 2014. <http://egypt.unfpa.org/>.

related issues present some of the most difficult and complicated challenges to contemporary Islamic law" (El Fadl, 2001 p.x). From a young age my family, my teachers and the larger society made sure I understood that Islam says I was created from a crooked rib. I was taught that it is a sin to raise my voice, and that it is my religious duty to unquestionably please and obey my husband – for his satisfaction is my gateway to Paradise. I never believed that Allah created me to be a second-class, submissive human being or that my existence was mainly to fulfill my husband's demands. After all, the fourth chapter of the Qur'an carries the name "Women" when there is not a chapter titled men. Prophet Mohammed ﷺ used to stand up whenever his daughter Fatima entered the room to greet her with love. There is no mention in any book or bibliography of him ﷺ once laying a finger on any woman. "Women are the twin-halves of men" he ﷺ said 1436 years ago. His wife, Khadijah bint Khuwalid, was the first person to become a Muslim. A shrewd entrepreneur, she was rich, smart and powerful. Not only did she hire The Prophet ﷺ to run her business affairs, but she also proposed to marry him. She embodied economic autonomy, empowered independence and political and civil activism. However, patriarchy was aggressive in pre-Islamic Arabia. Infanticide was a common cultural practice among the Arabs. The birth of a female infant angered and shamed Arab men so they buried the newborn alive.

> "And when the news of (the birth of) a female (child) is brought to any of them, his face becomes dark, and he is filled with inward grief! He hides himself from the people because of the evil of that whereof he has been informed. Shall he keep her with dishonour or bury her in the earth? Certainly, evil is their decision" (The Qur'an, 16:58-59).

Islam prohibited this practice and promised parents who take care of their daughters the ultimate rewards in Heaven. "Whoever has three daughters or sisters…and lives with

them in a good manner, and has patience with them, and fears Allah with regard to them will enter Paradise"[2]. Women in Islam were also acknowledged as having an equal role with men and as having equal rights to participate in all social spheres (Al Khayat, 2003 p.5). How then could it be that the same religion that elevated the status of women is used to subjugate and abuse them? Is religion the root cause of injustice and Violence Against Women? The type of violence I refer to is not limited to domestic violence or physical abuse. The United Nations defines Violence Against Women as:

> "Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life." (UN Women, 2013 p.2).

Today, extremists manipulate Islam to serve the patriarchal agenda and persecute women politically, socially, legally, financially, emotionally, psychologically, and intellectually. My choice here of the word extremists, and not fundamentalists, is deliberate. Emerson and Hartman problematized the conceptualization and understanding of "religious fundamentalism" in response to how commonly and loosely the term was being used arguing that "Sometimes the term fundamentalist is used to describe any group that takes religion seriously" (Emerson & Hartman, 2006 p.128). I know I take religion seriously and so are the people I interviewed for this study. And that prompts a question about religion and violence against Muslim women: is the solution, to addressing the structural problems of gendered power relations and inequalities in Muslim communities, destroying religion?

[2] A Hadith reported by Abu Dawud, Al-Tirmithi and others.

Questions about the complex and intertwined relationship of culture, religion, identity and gender intrigued me. I wanted to understand the problem in order to find viable ways forward. I have been struggling with my identity as a Muslim woman and with the unjust patriarchal practices committed against women in the name of Islam I have both experienced and witnessed all my life. My lack of knowledge, about the complexity of this chronic violence, misled me to think that the core issue is the misinterpretation and patriarchal misreading of sacred Islamic texts that reference women. Although a crucial factor in justifying violence against women, misinterpretation is but one of multiple roots of the problem. After reading, researching and analyzing the paradoxical connection between religion, culture, identity and gender in light of developmental studies, I realized the risk of the false, oversimplified views of violence against women. Curious and serious feminist researchers must recognize the multiple-layers of women's oppression that state and non-state actors cause whether locally, globally or both combined.

From the 1970s onward, the concepts of women's empowerment and later gender equality remain highly debatable issues in academia and development practices. The third Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of 2015 is to promote gender equality and empower women. However, the Western dominated secular discourse that development scholars and practitioners adopt and promote in regards to violence against women in Muslim communities is problematic. The secular notion of universalizing gender equality and women's empowerment is deeply flawed. "Approaches which focus on religion as an obstacle to women's development are discordant with aspects of women's own experience of religion where it can provide

women a space which is absolutely their own and a means of self affirmation and social participation" (Haar, 2011 p.225). Secular narratives do not capture the treatment of women in different societies and cultures, nor do they understand how dominant groups may receive the messages of individually empowered, independent women. Educating and employing women is a good way to empower this disadvantaged group, yet it leaves them subject to the implications and consequences of the multi-faceted cultural and religious practices and belief systems each community lives by. Does the focus on access to education and economic empowerment for women and girls contribute to eradicating the multiple layers of oppression they face in their patriarchal communities? Can the endorsement of non-religious Western approaches to gender equality be effective in creating transformational social change for Muslim women? Unless Western discourses take seriously and include all actors and agents that intersect and shape individuals' and communities' norms and practices as well as identities, not much progress will be made to eradicate the roots of gender-based violence and injustices committed against Muslim women.

> "The women of the Addis Ababa Women's Muslim Council…point out that discriminatory practices against Muslim women are rooted in custom rather than Islamic teaching…their main source of inspiration and strength is their faith. They experience Islam as a liberating religious tradition" (Haar, 2011 p. 225).

In this paper, the three most important factors I am interested in discussing are religion, culture and identity with religion being the focal point. I pose the question: How do Muslim men and women construct the meanings of Qur'anic verses and *Hadith* addressing women's rights in relation to their cultural settings and identities? In much of the neoliberal paradigm of development work, religion has been a neglected, if

not an ignored, topic (Marshall, 2001 p.339). The marginalization of religion in development discourse is due to the fact that "development has been seen as part of larger processes of 'modernization' and 'secularization' in which societies are supposedly moving further away from religion and other traditional structures of authority towards a more economically advanced and secular system" (Marshall & Rakodi in Kirmani & Philips, 2011, p.88). But what if secular modernity produces a backlash against women's empowerment and gender equality within Muslim communities? Could it be that taking religion seriously as part of any development intervention is key to eradicating violence against women?

> "Engaging with religion, and understanding its role and significance in women's and men's lives, is useful when this leads development policy-makers and practitioners to challenge the notion that 'development' can be reduced to the pursuit of economic prosperity alone, at the expense of other indicators of well-being" (Tomalin, 2011 P. 1).

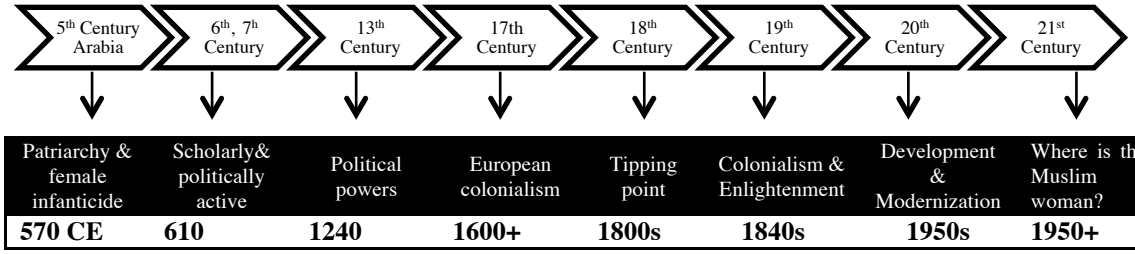
With these questions in mind, the purpose of this research is to explore the intersection of gender, religion, culture, and identity to deepen our understanding of violence against Muslim women, in the context of current development discourse and practice. I will examine the meanings these concepts embody and how each dimension views, interacts with and shapes the others as discussed in literary works and as expressed in the interviews I conducted with Muslim men and women. I will achieve this through examining selected sacred texts from the two primary sources of Islamic laws: the Qur'an and the life and sayings of Prophet Mohammed ﷺ *Hadith*.

In the following sections, I provide a brief overview of the literature review that discusses the meaning of religion, culture and identity and how these concepts intertwine. In the same section, I highlight the controversy of modern religious

violence, the problem of cultural violence against women in the name of Islam and the emergence of Islamic feminism. Next, I describe my research design and methodology including the process of data collection, methods and field site, interviews, participants and data analysis. I then move to a discussion of the key findings that emerged from the research. I conclude the paper with a brief discussion of the importance of taking Islam seriously as a powerful means to both understand and address cultural violence against Muslim women.

6th century to 21st century: Where are the Muslim women?

> "Reading historical sources throughout the centuries of Islamic history, we find lots and lots of women active in all areas of life, and then suddenly it stops. What happened? How and why have things changed in the last three hundred years to the extent that it is unusual to find women involved in Islamic sciences and, unlike in the past, very few Muslim men would even consider being taught by a Muslim woman?" (Bewley, 1999 p. 2).



5th Century: Pre-Islamic Arab men practiced infanticide: burying newborn females alive.

6th Century: The rise of Islam in the 610s.

7th Century: Aisha bint Abu Bakr was the intelligent, quick-witted and well-informed wife of the Prophet Mohammed ﷺ. He ordered Muslims to "take half of their religion" from her. After his death, she transmitted his sayings and commented on the Qur'an. Her authoritative pronouncements have decisively shaped the later Islamic legal tradition (Ghadanfar, 2001).

Al Shifa bint Abdullah was well-known for her medical abilities. After embracing Islam and migrating to Medina, Al Shifa continued to practice and teach the preventive medicine. As she was recognized for her intellect and counseling skills, Caliph Umar appointed Al Shifa as the market manager of Medina. As a public administrator, her responsibilities included ensuring that all business practices were consistent with Islamic laws and values (wisemuslimwomen.com).

13th Century: Razia, daughter of Shams al Din, was appointed as the Sultan of Delhi in India. She was trained to lead armies and administer kingdoms. She established schools, academies, centers for research, and public libraries that included the Quran, books of hadith and books of philosophers (Gray, 2013).

17th Century: The European colonial period and Enlightenment extended from the 17th century to the mid-20th century. Cultural and intellectual forces in Western Europe emphasized reason, analysis and individualism rather than traditional lines of authority and the infiltration of western ideas that women are inferior were brought with the colonizers to occupied territories (Bewley, 1999).

18th Century: Nana Asma'u was the daughter of Usman dan Fodio, founder of Sokoto Caliphate which was one of the most powerful kingdom's in northern Africa. She was a prolific writer, a leader and an educator who developed a system of learning that spread traditional Islamic knowledge throughout the cities and into the villages in West Africa (Gray, 2013).

19th Century: In *Islam and the English Enlightenment 1670-1840*, Humberto Garcia argues that some of England's notable and leading writers of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries were impressed by Prophet Mohammad's ﷺ socio-political achievements in Makkah and Madinah in the 7thcentury. "These writers looked at the achievements of Muslim empires at the time such as the Ottomans who Lady Mary Wortley Montague regards as progressive in granting women greater rights compared to Britain." (Garcia, 2012).

20th Century: Develop, modernize, secularize and industrialize the underdeveloped. Islam is traditional, outdated and barbaric, yet Western customs and traditions are modern and civilized.

21st Century: "The period between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries is the lowest period of Islamic scholarship for women in our history. Issues of political exclusion, marriage and divorce laws, and independent accountability have become relevant, the reasons for the declaration of sentiments in the United States have become rampant for Muslim women and – though original texts encouraged political and social activism, fair and safe marriage and divorce laws, and individual accountability towards God – Muslim women found themselves in oppressive situations, both publicly and privately" (Gray, 2013).

To include all the names of prominent Muslim women I found in the literature in different eras I would need to write more than one book. The examples here are selected to illustrate the status of Muslim women in certain time periods. A quick glimpse at the history of women between seventh century Arabia until today provokes a series of questions. One must ask what has changed and what has not changed? Where was the Muslim women and where is she now? What happened? What are some of the major events that were influential in creating these changes? How do these changes contribute to cultural violence against women in the name of Islam? The literature on these topics is still relatively underdeveloped and this is linked to the fact that there are very few female Islamic scholars investigating such questions. My hope is that this research can contribute to increasing our understanding of how to answer them.

BLURRED BOUNDARIES: RELIGION, CULTURE AND IDENTITY

> "To accuse religions of bearing the greatest responsibility for the debased position of women would without doubt be unfounded. Women's subordinate status is primarily a cultural phenomenon and extends, in both temporal and geographical terms, far beyond religions, at least those which are traditionally blamed for keeping women in an inferior position. If accusations are to be made, criticisms should be leveled against men for having been unable or unwilling to change cultural traditions and prejudices, whether religion-based or otherwise."
>
> Abdelfattah Amor, UN Study on Freedom of Religion and the Status of Women, 2009

What is religion?

Would it be fair to restrict the definition of religion to what is Godly, holy or sacred? Or can it encompass all types of beliefs whether in materialism, alcoholism, consumerism, nationalism, feminism, capitalism, state governance, or individualism? It seems that in earlier literature, religion has always been linked to the divine. The

German Philosopher Immanuel Kant defined religion as "the recognition of our duties as divine commands" (Kain, 2005 p. 128). The founder of British anthropology Sir Edward Burnett Tylor stated, "Religion is the belief in spiritual beings" (1871 p.1). A complicated but classical definition of religion is what French Sociologist Émile Durkheim described as: "A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden -- beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them" (1954 p.47). Durkheim's complex exploration of religion is what Clifford Geertz reacted to creating a revolution in the concept of culture within the field of anthropology. Geertz' definition moved religion away from the divine arena widening its scope to include any group that believes in something; each group has some universal framework its members share to make sense of their world and to codify their behavior (Geertz, 1973 p.90).

> "A religion is: (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic" (Geertz, 1973 p.90).

But why is Geertz' definition important and especially in relation to gender and development? The reason is its significance to the set of beliefs and practices that create and shape the community - which are not necessarily sacred or holy. These beliefs and practices are what unite individuals and hold the bits and pieces of a single social community together or as Geertz calls it "a moral community" (Geertz, 1973 p.90). Having said that, development projects that aim to eradicate gender-based violence and inequalities within Muslim communities must thoroughly understand,

engage with and give priority to the cultural, religious and moral values of any community for they guide the way these societies understand the world, interact with and respond to it. UN Women published a report in 2013 analyzing the gender MDG progress and constraints stating that:

> "In response to the fact that many countries are struggling to meet their MDG obligations towards gender equality and women's empowerment, many national reports explain that cultural and social norms constrain their ability to produce sustainable change around the gender target and indicators. Even when countries strengthen the legal framework to protect women and girls through the implementation of new laws, change on the ground is challenging due to the entrenched cultural and religious practices that perpetuate gender inequality, such as early marriages in Liberia" (UN Women, 2013 p.16).

However, engaging with religious practices and cultural beliefs does not necessarily require destroying the social fabric and replacing religion with secular modernity and economic growth. Gerrie ter Haar argues in *Religion and Development: Ways of Transforming the World* that despite the efforts made by Western academics to discuss the relationship between religion and development, there still remains a gap because the discussion does not seem to take religious ideas seriously. "Many scholarly works on religion and development regard religious thought as representing something else, generally some social quality or economic trend" (Haar, 2011 p.3). She adds that the book aims to advance a general understanding of how a religious worldview or a particular spiritual vision "can help resolve complex issues regarding development" (Haar, 2011 p.4). Sociologist Frank W. Elwell (2003) argues that Émile Durkheim's concept of religion, quoted earlier, stems from the way modernity affected and weakened the collective conscience through the division of labor, which left individuals without much moral guidance. Erica Bornstein also argues that ideas of economic

rationality and perpetual growth, which are at the core of classical and neoclassical economics and development programs, "can also be seen to function as a religious system" (Bornstein, 2005 p.2). The German philosopher Walter Benjamin addressed capitalism not as something similar in ideology to religion, but as a religious cult.

> "One can behold in capitalism a religion, that is to say, capitalism essentially serves to satisfy the same worries, anguish, and disquiet formerly answered by so-called religion. The proof of capitalism's religious structure – as not only a religiously conditioned construction, as Weber thought, but as an essentially religious phenomenon – still today misleads one to a boundless, universal polemic"(Benjamin, 1921).

One belief system, capitalism, cannot replace another, religion, in hopes of achieving gender equality and justice. Faith and religion can serve as catalysts for action to improve lives when embraced, or a source of conflict and restrain on change when marginalized and fought. Equally, the push for modernization and economic progress can develop nations or destroy them. Take away people's religious beliefs and create instead a capitalist system of materialistic demand, the result is a "free market economy" that provides supply in exchange for wealth and power. If we examine Geertz' (1973) "system of symbols," we can see that symbols could stand for the global economy or universal faiths. How so? Designer brands, famous fast food chains, and popular gadget logos are all symbols that people swear and live by. When someone buys a $3000 Louis Vuitton bag, the person knows that this means belonging to the ivory tower of the elite. A Christian wearing a cross or a Muslim woman wearing a scarf also resembles a belief in the sacred assumptions or worldviews these symbols carry even if the Christian or the Muslim do not know how to articulate them. In either case, the community believes in a "religion" and that governs the way they think,

behave and act.

Religion, sacred or secular, exists and is part of development discourse and practice, whether it is acknowledged or not. Mainly in Muslim communities, religion is extremely relevant to the policy and practice of development. And because gender issues are both religious and political concerns in many Muslim societies, "any attempt to reform gender relations that exclude religion will likely to fail" (Hale & Mernissi in Adamu, 1999 p.56). So how does faith play into the lives of women from different backgrounds, statuses, ethnicities and faiths? How could faith-based engagement be used and integrated into development goals to penetrate deep into the fundamental causes of gender inequality and discrimination? The answer lies in the post-2015 development agenda recognizing religions, cultures and social structures of each community as unique and extremely important to progress and social change.

> "Development policy-makers have generally dismissed or ignored the religious dimension of the lives of individuals and communities on the assumption that secularization is not an inevitable by-product of the modernization process. Such a policy is no longer realistic at a time when religion has become a significant social and political force in the world. It is more convincing to suppose that religion will shape the development of many countries in the non-Western world in the years to come. The mere fact that religion, in whatever forms it manifests itself, constitutes both a social and a political reality requires a reconsideration of its role in development" (Haar, 2011 p.6).

For the purpose of this research, I will use the word religion and Islam interchangeably. But which Islam am I referring to? Is it the form of religion that promotes violence against human beings claiming lives of innocent people in the name of Allah? Or is it the message that Prophet Mohammed ﷺ spread in 6th century Arabia calling people to believe that there is no deity except Allah, that Mohammed ﷺ is His

messenger, and that men, women, white or black are all equal and will be judged based on their morals, conduct and obedience to Allah. Authors Sachiko Murata and William Chittick (2001) produced a series on religions as worldviews including one about Islam. They explain that a common assumption behind many attempts to study religions is the notion that there is something called "religion" that could be dealt with and written about in accordance to agreed-upon subdivisions. "Systems identified as religions are then fitted into a prescribed format without considering whether the format is suited to the particular system under consideration" (p.14-21). Contrary to this assumption, the series the authors compiled recognizes that there are many religions, and "the more they are studied, the more each one manifests itself as equally profound, nontrivial, and adequate unto itself. Each volume will be an attempt to take each religion on its own terms" (Murata & Chittick, 2001 p.14-21). They approached Islam in their work "not as an alien, third-world, outdated enterprise, but as one of the several, currently living worldviews that give meaning to the lives of billions of people" (Murata & Chittick, 2001 p.93-94). The Islam that I refer to in this paper is the traditional message that was revealed 1400 years ago with its rationality, balance and intellectuality, not extremism and superficiality. Contrary to widespread Western belief, Islam is the religion that John Walbridge argued in favor of proposing, "that Islamic intellectual life has been characterized by reason in the service of a non-rational revealed code of conduct" (2011 p. 3).

What is culture?

When we think of any culture, the things that come to mind are the way people dress in that culture, their authentic cuisine, their language(s), their social festivities,

their music and arts, their literature, their ancestors and heritage, and the characteristics that make a person part of their union. But is it really that simple to define culture? Similar to what constitutes a religion, a culture is dynamic, varied and complex. Anthropologist Edward Taylor defined culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (1871 p.1). Chairman of the Board and Scholar-in-Residence of Nawawi Foundation[3] Umar Abd-Allah gave a comprehensive definition of culture in his article *Islam and the Cultural Imperative*:

> "Culture weaves together the fabric of everything we value and need to know—beliefs, morality, expectations, skills, and knowledge—giving them functional expression by integrating them into effectual customary patterns. Culture is rooted in the world of expression, language, and symbol…and extends far beyond the mundane into religion, spirituality, and the deepest dimensions of our psyches…. Family life and customs surrounding birth, marriage, and death immediately come to mind as obvious cultural elements, but so too are gender relations, social habits, skills for coping with life's circumstances, toleration and cooperation or the lack of them, and even societal superstructures like political organization" (Abd-Allah, 2013 p. 3).

In referring to gender relations, social habits and societal superstructures, Abd-Allah highlights the fundamental role culture plays in shaping the lives of women and gender in general: power relations. Cultures establish certain ideas, ideologies, practices and rules that define what is feminine, what is masculine, what is appropriate for men to do, what is appropriate for women to do and what is not. Listed in their report as a key idea to understanding gender and development and its implications for policy and practice, the Institute of Development Studies defines culture as: "The

[3] Established in 2000, Nawawi Foundation provides relevant, meaningful Islamic teachings to America's growing first and second generation Muslims.

distinctive patterns of ideas, beliefs, and norms which characterizes the way of life and relations of society or group within a society" (Reeves & Baden, 2000 p.2-4). Can culture be another worldview or framework that community members agree on and share? What would be the difference then between what constitutes a culture or a religion? "The role of culture is thus key to explaining the discrimination suffered by women at the hands of religion…Every religion necessarily remains imprinted in a cultural setting, just as each culture necessarily has a religious dimension" (Amor, 2009 p.8).

By analyzing the negative influences of culture on women I do not mean to characterize culture as a negative whole. Unlike in the West that treated "non-European cultures as different and inferior" (Hall, 1996 p.188), there is always the good and the bad in every culture. However, the attempt to degrade non-Western cultures was critical to the creation of Western Enlightenment and provided the language that defined and formulated the basis of "modernity". "The West was the model, the prototype, and the measure of social progress. It was *western* progress, civilization, rationality, and development that were celebrated" (Hall, 1996 p.221). Modernizing and economically developing the underdeveloped equated culture with backwardness and savageness. In explaining the "development of culture," Taylor explains that civilizations exist in different "grades" where "the educated world of Europe and America" sets the standard at the higher end of the equation in contrast with "savage tribes" (1871 p.23). This superior and arrogant discourse of development was and remains a defective and deeply discriminatory approach. Especially that Islam "did not look upon human culture in terms of black and white, nor drastically divide human

societies into spheres of absolute good and absolute evil" (Abd-Allah, 2013 p.4). Yet preserving traditional and cultural practices must not stop one from criticizing and rectifying unjust and irrational constituents of any culture that are oppressive and especially toward women.

Using a women's human rights approach, Holtmaat and Naber raise the question of how can we enhance a fruitful dialogue about women's human rights and culture? (2011 p.3). To them the term "culture" encompasses religion, custom, and tradition. They differentiate, however, between what they call the objective factors of culture and the subjective or ideological factors of culture. The former stands for language, art and institutions, and the latter represents beliefs, political ideologies, religion, and normative structures. The authors argue that within discussions that surround the difficulties of implementing women's rights, "culture is being blamed for bad behavior". However, they explain that not only individuals use culture as an excuse to violate women's human rights, "but also governments who refuse to implement women's human rights standards, arguing that their culture forces them to accept limited interpretations of international human rights obligations, or to reject such obligations altogether" (2011 p.1). The authors elaborate that resistance usually comes from male representatives or leaders of religious, ethnic or cultural groups that blame culture for not embracing women's equality. But what does women's human rights mean to people with multicultural backgrounds and diverse religious worldviews? How do they understand women's empowerment or gender equality? Did we ever consider that imposing foreign concepts on Muslims instead of reconciling whatever

development has to offer with their own cultures and religions might actually build bridges instead of opposition?

The ways in which culture and religion are defined can be paradoxical, complex, intertwined and ever changing. For the purpose of this study, I am concerned with the constructed ideas, prevailing attitudes, belief systems and shared values of culture that define women's rights within Muslim communities. In cases of cultural violence against women in the name of Islam, the ideologies or the ethical and social values underlying a particular social unit is extreme patriarchy: a system, a religion, a worldview or a moral community, which is a "set of symbols and ideas that make up a culture embodied by everything" (Johnson, 1997 p.29).

> "If we see patriarchy as nothing more than men's and women's individual personalities, motives, and behavior, for example, then it probably won't ever occur to us to ask about larger contexts – such as institutions like the family, religion, and the economy – and how peoples lives are shaped in relation to them" (Johnson, 1997 p.25).

I am also concerned with both structure and culture and the relationships between them. Feminist and gender analyst Cynthia Enloe emphasizes the complex link between the two concepts and how both shape each other.

> "Cultures shape structures (what lines of authority are effective because they feel "natural," what proposed rules are resisted because they are branded "alien"). Likewise, structures shape culture (lawmakers hope that passing new laws making sex, age, and race bias in hiring illegal and punishable will, over time, alter most people's understanding of what constitutes "fairness" and what constitutes the grounds for workplace "trustworthiness")" (Enloe, 2013 p.59).

In the end, as Abu-Lughod said, "Whether conceived of as a set of behaviors, customs, traditions, rules, plans, recipes, instructions, or programs, culture is learned and can change" (1991 p.470). The question is how can we achieve that change? Only by

initiating serious conversations that honor and engage with local Muslim cultures can we understand the challenges women face and start to change them.

> "Some foolishly or ahistorically regard Islamic culture to have been chief causes of Muslim decline and fall in history. Their mindset reflects the general malaise of the modern period and the breakdown of traditional Muslim cultures, leaving chronic existential alienation and cultural dysfunction in its wake. Such cultural phobia is untenable in the light of classical Islamic jurisprudence and is antithetical to more than a millennium of successful indigenous Islamic cultures and global civilization" (Abd-Allah, 2013 p.11).

What is identity?

The online Merriam-Webster dictionary defines identity as either "who someone is: the name of a person," or "the qualities, beliefs, etc., that make a particular person or group different from others." It is indeed mind boggling that the latter explanation overlaps with everything discussed so far about religion and culture. It is evident that these big concepts intersect and intertwine with one another, challenging theories and assumptions that generalize or universalize any given facts or characteristics of a specific culture or religion. For example, if I were asked what is my identity, I would say I am a Muslim feminist. But what does that mean? Does it mean that I identify with the women's liberation and feminist movement of the 1960s-70s? Or with Islamic feminism(s)? What does each specifically stand for? What would be the similarities or the differences? Or does it mean that I see myself more as a defender of Muslim women's rights? How can we quantify Muslim women's rights? Many questions come to mind as I think of what being a Muslim feminist really entails. But that is how I define myself and how I connect with other women and men who share the same beliefs. But this identity was not created in a vacuum. As I think more about

this, I ask myself, why do I not say I am a Saudi feminist? Perhaps because the experiences that shaped my past, especially as a woman in an extremely conservative, patriarchal country, alienated me and prevented me from developing a sense of patriotism toward Saudi Arabia. Indeed this part of my identity impacts my "belonging" to groups of Saudi men and women. I can also say that part of me held deep contempt toward men for a long time – which had members of my community label me as an anti-male advocate. My experiences as a woman, a Muslim and a Saudi, influenced and shaped who I am and what I stand for. This in turn characterized the groups, institutions and organizations I relate to.

I am not a psychologist, so my concern with understanding the social aspects of identity – individual or collective – is to determine the effects culture and religion have on building and shaping people's identities, their sense of judgment and behaviors. Analyzing the construction of neoliberal identities in the globalized world, Castells highlights the ways in which new social movements are reshaping the power of identity "(gender, religious, national, ethnic, territorial, socio-biological), and the institutions of the state" (2009 p.2). He emphasizes the importance of language and other cultural elements that contribute to our concept of identity. He says that identity is people's source of meaning and experience.

> "By identity, as it refers to social actors, I understand the process of construction of meaning on the basis of cultural attribute, or related set of cultural attributes, that is/are given priority over other sources of meaning. For a given individual, or for a collective actor, there may be a plurality of identities…Identity must be distinguished from what, traditionally, sociologists have called roles, and role-sets. Roles (for example, to be a worker, a mother, a neighbor, a socialist militant, a union member, a basketball player, a churchgoer, and a smoker, at the same time) are defined by norms constructed by the institutions and

> organizations of society…identities organize the meaning while roles organize the functions" (Castells, 2009 p.7).

Although Castells' work is focused on collective identities, he states that from a sociological perspective "all identities are constructed" (2009 p.6). Thus, he raises the questions of how are they constructed, from what, by whom and for what. "From history, from geography, from biology, from productive and reproductive institutions, from collective memory and from personal fantasies, from power apparatuses and religious revelations" (2009 p.7). He elaborates that meanings derived from the above mentioned sources are redefined according to social and cultural elements "rooted in their social structure, and in their space/time framework" (Castells, 2009 p.7). Therefore, culture, religion, belief systems, worldviews…etc. are instrumental in shaping individual and collective formation of "me" and sense of self. But does this mean that similar backgrounds and experiences construct identical identities? Can a single religion or culture influence a group of individuals to develop violent and oppressive views against women? Put differently, can a single theory about a particular system or group of people be generalized to analyze the identities of every member of that group? The Nobel-winning economist and philosopher Amayrta Sen says that identity can be a complicated matter. During a period of Hindu-Muslim riots in India, Sen questions the murder of a Muslim by Hindus he witnessed as a young boy. He raises questions about this shift that made Hindus see the victim as having only one identity – that of being Muslim. "The violence of identity was extraordinarily hard to grasp. It is not particularly easy even for a still bewildered elderly adult" (Sean, 2007 p.173). For what he coins a "solitarist approach" to human identity, which views all people as members of exactly one group, Sen argues to "be a good way of

misunderstanding nearly everyone in the world" (2007, p.174). He explains that human beings cannot be identified as only Muslim or only violent or only extremists. Individuals have multiple identities that they choose to associate with at given times and circumstances.

> "Unfortunately, many well-intentioned attempts to stop such violence are also handicapped by the perceived absence of choice about our identities, and this can seriously damage our ability to defeat violence…Our shared humanity gets savagely challenged when the manifold divisions in the world are unified into one allegedly dominant system of classification— in terms of religion, or community, or culture, or nation, or civilization (treating each as uniquely powerful in the context of that particular approach to war and peace). The uniquely partitioned world is much more divisive than the universe of plural and diverse categories that shape the world in which we live" (Sen, 2007 p.xiii).

In his brilliant work on religious violence and extremism, Mark Juergensmeyer argues that no study suggests that people are terrorist by nature. But that they are "caught up in extraordinary communities and share extreme worldviews" (2002, p.8). Whether in the form of bombing unarmed civilians, massacring innocent children, or physically and emotionally abusing women, violence remains the same but manifested differently. In cases of violence against women, I can argue the same: that no study suggests people are inherently violent towards women. They are caught up in tangled identities shaped by global, local, political, socio-economic, and maybe patriarchal forces that initiate violence responses. I want to clarify that this is not an attempt to defend, make excuses for or otherwise justify the actions of perpetrators of cultural violence against Muslim women in all its forms. The aim is to provide a comprehensive picture of the persisting predicament and the multiplicities of agents influencing this analysis and understanding of gender-based violence in Muslim communities. We must

recognize that for Muslims the 21st century has been the most challenging and confusing for their identities, religious and cultural perceptions.

> "Much of the cultural creation taking place over recent years around the mosque, school, home, and campus has been without direction, confused, unconscious, or, worse yet, subconsciously compelled by irrational fears rooted in ignorance of the dominant culture and a shallow, parochial understanding of Islam as a counter-cultural identity religion. The results—especially if mixed with culturally predatory Islamist ideology—may look more like a cultural no-man's-land than the makings of a successful indigenous Muslim identity" (Abd-Allah, 2013 p.2).

The myth of religious violence?

Central to the trilogy of Islam, culture and identity is the theme of violence. In this discussion, I will focus on the notion of condemning Muslims or a 1400 years old religion because of the radical and violent actions of a few, and because of others' narrow-minded approach to analyzing and understanding the problem of religious violence. In a recent controversial debate on Bill Maher's[4] HBO "Real Time" show on Friday, October 3, 2014, Sam Harris[5] claims, "Islam at the moment is the mother lode of bad ideas." He categorizes Muslims into two groups: Jihadists who wake up wanting to kill apostates, and Islamists who support the ideologies of Jihadists "wanting to foist their religion on the rest of humanity." Meanwhile, the host of the show Bill Maher implored his audience to stand up for "Western liberal principles" including women's equality, although no females were present among the four guests he had that night. There seems to be this consistent theme of associating religion with violence only when

[4] American political satirist, writer, producer, political commentator, television host, actor, and stand-up comedian.

[5] American author, philosopher, neuroscientist, and the co-founder and chief executive of Project Reason, a non-profit that promotes science and secularism.

events involve individuals or groups who identify themselves as Muslim. One of the other guests, *The New York Times* Columnist Nicholas Kristof explained to Harris' that "the great divide is not between Islam and the rest, it is between the fundamentalists and moderates in each faith." But, as American politician and analyst Michael Steele explains during the show, secular liberals in the West deliberately marginalize and ignore the voices of the majority of moderate and balanced Muslims who condemn and oppose violence and oppression. While Harris claims that jihadists and extremists represent the "strongest voices and a bigger piece of the pie" of Muslims, Steele argues that there are voices oftentimes raised in opposition to the jihadists and to extreme acts, "but, guess what, they don't get covered, they don't get exposed. And they're not given the same level platform that we see jihadists get."

It might be questionable why am I talking about jihadists in the context of violence against women. First, it makes me wonder how do conversations that go viral on mainstream and social media, such as the one that took place on the Bill Maher show, affect and shape Muslims' cultures and identities? Also, as discussed earlier, in any setting violence can only be defined as a force or a behavior intended to hurt, damage, control, break or kill someone or something. Individuals, groups, state or non-state agents use violence to either gain or retain their power.

> "Violence might be casual and perpetrated by individuals or be highly structured and politically organized. While violence is generally thought of as illegitimate and illegal, by contrast with the 'legitimate' *force* exercised by the state, the most destructive and extensive instances in recent history have been state organized and sanctioned. States have organized violence both as a means of punishment but also of entertainment and glorification of its power" (Ray, 2011 p.2)

It is crucial to understand that the idea of religion promoting violence, against women, Muslims or non-believers, is not accurate and only serves to further spur the drivers of violence against women. In his book *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict*, William Cavanaugh challenges the conventional wisdom of regarding religion as violent and the secular nation-state as the natural and universal alternative to the dangers of religion. "I challenge this… by arguing that ideologies and institutions labeled "secular" can be just as violent as those labeled "religious"…the myth of religious violence helps to construct and marginalize a religious Other" (2009 p.4). Cavanaugh also argues that it is impossible to separate religious from economic and political motives. He then asks, to illustrate, how could one separate religion from politics in Islam, when most Muslims themselves make no such separation? "The very separation of religion from politics is an invention of the modern West" (2009 p.5). If Muslims consider Islam to be a code of conduct and a guideline to codify people's behaviors whether socially, culturally, politically morally or intellectually, how might the imposition of Western ideologies affect their relationship with religion? How would they feel and react when they are being pushed to abandon their religion or think of it as violent? Could it be possible that the modernization and secularization of the West led the "Others" to become violent? "Secularization theory failed to anticipate something: that the demystification of the world provided with it the seeds both for the re-mystification of the world and resistance to the demystification" (Emerson & Hartman, 2006 p.128). The more the modern West pushes Muslims for gender equality, the more violnet the response

against these pressures. The more violent these responses to gender equality efforts, the more the West denounces Islam as the problem.

No rationalization is acceptable to justify violence and violent behavior. But before labeling Muslims as violent oppressors toward women and other religions, we must consider all factors and influences that led some to resort to brutality. For instance, Juergensmeyer argues that there were remarkable similarities between the various radical religious movements he studied. Although they come from different religious backgrounds, they perpetrate and support violence in the name of religion to fight against secular liberal values of the West.

> "They have rejected the compromises with liberal values and secular institutions that were made by most mainstream religious leaders and organizations…I was struck with the intensity of their quests for a deeper level of spirituality than that offered by the superficial values of the modern world…To be abandoned by religion in such a world would mean a loss of their own individual identities…They longed for a life of dignity and quiet pride." (p. 221-239).

The mainstream binary of "us and them" is not creating avenues for solutions. It is making things more complex and dangerous. Also, the deliberate effort to present a one-sided, single-minded discourse that promotes Muslims as savages, violent and tyrannous is not helpful either.

> "And yet we, the vast and still far too silent majority, have ceded the public arena to this extremist minority. We've allowed Judaism to be claimed by violently messianic West Bank settlers. Christianity by homophobic hypocrites and misogynistic bigots, Islam by suicide bombers. And we've allowed ourselves to be blinded to the fact that no matter what they claim to be Christians, Jews or Muslims, militant extremists are none of the above. They're a cult all their own, blood brothers steeped in other people's blood. This isn't faith. It's fanaticism, and we have to stop confusing the two" (Hazleton, 2013, TEDGlobal).

Adopting a modified version of Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilizational taxonomy, Naveed Sheikh conducted a quantitative study of the human death toll of religious and political violence throughout the last two millennia. The author identified the 276 most violent conflicts in history from a collected data list of over 3000 violent clashes in history, 0 – 2008 ce, all with estimated human death tolls over 10,000, and ranked them by death toll. Findings show that, using the entire data set for the period 0-2008, politically and religiously motivated violence has cost between 449.38 million and 708.61 million lives. The Christian civilization's share of this is the largest with between 119.32 million and 236.56 million victims (median 177.94 million). In second place is the Antitheist civilization which has contributed with a median figure of 125.29 million deaths. The Islamic civilization came in Sixth with 31.94 million deaths (Sheikh, 2009 p.20). If I am to engage in this narrow-minded dialogue about violence and religion, based on this study Christianity must be condemned as inherently violent and not Islam based on the rankings. Why is it that when a handful of rotten apples who identify as Muslims commit horrific acts of violence a population of 1.6 billion Muslims[6] is stigmatized and their religion is considered harmful? And when mass school shootings take place the media often ascribes the events to mental health issues and not the perpetrator's religious affiliations?

During the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting held on January 21, 2015, a panel discussion hosted Rabbi and International Director of Interreligious Affairs at American Jewish Committee, David Rosen; President of Zaytuna College, Sheikh Hamza Yusuf; and two other guests. The title of the talk was "Religion: A Pretext for

[6] Pew Report, 2012.

Conflict?" Yusuf quoted William Cavanaugh saying that religion does not play the central role in violence. "Much of the violence is about the socio-economic political scenario". When panel guest Tony Blair, Middle East Quartet Representative, proposed adopting a global educational system that promoted tolerance, Rosen pointed out that there are a number of reasons that must be addressed about religious violence, and that education is a critical one. But Rosen goes to explain that the problem of "religious violence" is not just a fundamentalist worldview. Rosen gives examples of groups that some might label as extremists who do not pose a physical threat, such as the Amish in America and some of the ultra Jewish orthodox community.

> "There are elements whose worldviews would be very much opposed to ours, but who do not pose a physical threat…there has to be a combination here of an insular mentality together with socio-political and economic conditions that can nurture violence. And that does not just mean impoverishment and alienation, political and economic, which obviously facilitates these aversions, but there is also the psychological dimension...The perpetrators of 9/11 were not uneducated people. Osama bin Laden was not an uneducated person. There is the place paradoxically precisely, where people are more exposed to a more developed, more sophisticated world where they feel they are not respected, they are humiliated, they are disregarded and are seeing in their own mind as somehow part of historic victimhood…The more people feel welcome within society, the more they have a stake in it. The less they feel they have something to live for, the more easily and readily they will see they have something to die for" (Rosen, 2015 WEF)

In the wake of the sad shootings on January 7, 2015 in France, where Algerian-French Cherif and Said Kouachi killed 12 people including the editor and four cartoonists of *Charlie Hedbo*[7], American activists and editor of *Tikkun*[8] Rabbi Michael Lerner wrote a column "noticing the hypocrisy" of western media in reporting the

7 A French satirical weekly magazine.

8 A quarterly interfaith Jewish left-progressive magazine published in the United States.

events. The attacks were related to the French magazine publishing cartoons mocking Prophet Mohammed ﷺ. As a Jewish interfaith journalist, Lerner says that he has a very good reason to fear "being a target for Islamic extremists." But then he raises questions about the "over-heated nature" of the Western media's depiction of the tragedy and "how problematic that framing really is."

> "Yet the violence is an inevitable consequence of a world which systematically dehumanizes so many people who are made to feel powerless and despairing and deeply depressed about the possibility of finding the milk of human kindness anywhere…None of this is reason to stop mourning the horrific murders in Paris or to excuse it in any way. But it is reason to wonder why the media can never tell a more nuanced story of what is happening our world." (Lerner, 2015, *The Huffington Post*)

The media, scholars, researchers, analysts…must try to tell a more nuanced story of what is really happening to Muslims around the world. Let there be a shift in the analyses and rhetoric addressing violence so that it becomes less of a justification for perpetrators to commit more evil in the world.

Cultural VAW in the name of Islam

"I'm not proud to be a Saudi woman. Why should I be proud of a country that is not proud of me?"
A Saudi woman (name withheld), HRW Report, December 2006

Within the boundaries of the "Kingdom of Humanity"[9] Saudi Arabia, men of the state established a system of *Sharia*, which they claim it implements Islamic laws and regulations. "The first article of the kingdom's basic Law of Governance elevates the Qur'an and the Prophet's traditions *Sunnah* to the status of a constitution" (HRW, 2010 p.7). Based on this, the male-dominated religious establishment plays a primary role in Saudi jurisprudence, and especially regulating the mobility, political

[9] As referenced in the website of the Ministry of Higher Education www.mohe.gov.sa/EN/STUDYINSIDE/ABOUTKSA/Pages/default.aspx

participation, education, governance and bylaws of Saudi women. According to the Permanent Council for Scientific Research and Legal Opinions (CRLO)[10], a woman's choice to delay marriage until after high school or university is seen as against religion, because educating women is something the country has "no need for." CRLO also states that God commanded women to remain in their homes and that leaving to work is condemned because "their presence in the public is the main contributing factor to the spread of *fitna*" (HRW, 2010 p.8-9). In what he describes as "faith–based assumptions and determinations demanding to women," El Fadl explains that CRLO's analyses relate to "the nature of women, the role of women, or even the fate of women" (2010 p. 210). Referencing the citations of CRLO, he argues, from an Islamic legal viewpoint, that these patriarchal literal interpretations of the sacred texts "have grave theological, moral, and social consequences. They do not only support CRLO's determinations mandating obedience to husbands, but they also contribute to the general denigration of the moral status of women" (2010 p.212).

Looking at the man-made rules that determine women's roles, statuses and fates in Saudi Arabia, one could imagine the extent men use religion to form sexist regulations that perpetuate all forms of violence against women. And if the state legitimizes the subordination of Saudi women in public life, male citizens automatically get the stamp of approval to enforce the culture of patriarchy on women in all aspects of their private life. The perfect example of the practice of abuse is male guardianship over Saudi women of any age – where a *mahram* has to sign off a consent

[10] The all-male, part of the State religious institution in Saudi Arabia that issues Islamic legal opinions based on Wahhabi interpretations of the Qur'an and the Sunnah; literal reading of Islamic sacred text that rejects logic and difference of opinion.

form to allow a woman to conduct any affair in her personal or professional life. Every woman, regardless of her economic or social status, "is affected by these guardianship policies and the deprivation of rights that their enforcement entails…Saudi women are similarly denied the right to make the most trivial decisions on behalf of their children" (HRW, 2010 p. 2).

Gender-based violence does not necessarily mean violence against women, as men and boys, and non-conforming gender identities are also victims of violence. But "given the disproportionate numbers of women and girls that experience violence," the UN Women chooses to focus on females" (UN Women, 2013 p.2). The UN Women report lists the ways in which violence against women manifests in different settings, countries and regions "as physical, sexual, emotional and economic." The universally common forms of violence include domestic and intimate partner violence, sexual violence, marital rape, sexual harassment, and emotional and psychological violence. "Other widespread forms around the globe include: sexual exploitation, sexual trafficking and harmful practices such as FGM, forced and child marriage" (UN Women, 2013 p.3). The less documented forms of violence include: honor crimes, female infanticide, economic abuse, political violence, elder abuse, dowry related violence, and acid throwing (UN Women 2013, p.3). According to the previously cited definition of gender-based violence, the Saudi male guardianship over women is a form of violence against women. But Islam does not play a role in institutionalizing patriarchal abusive systems against women. Islam is not the problem. The historically selective, subjective, patriarchal and cultural interpretation, analyses and implementation of the word of God are the roots of all evil. Oxford University

Professor Tariq Ramadan affirms in his book *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation* that "no scholar has ever approached the texts without being, in one way or another, influenced by the culture in which she or he lived." (2009 p.191). In his call for the need of "contemporary fiqh", he references a number of prominent male scholars from different historical time periods, who wrote about women, and asserts to the reader yet again that these scholarly observations are:

> "All clearly bear the influence of their surroundings and times. It is important to do a thorough critical analysis of those influences on respective interpretations but also, at the source, on how texts are read and subsequently understood and categorized. This will make it possible to identify more precisely the nature of historical cultural projections and therefore the possibilities of new reinterpretations" (Ramada, 2009 p.191)

When Allah revealed the Qur'an to Prophet Mohammed ﷺ, it was in the form of rich, poetic classical Arabic language, and that was for a reason. The Prophet ﷺ was illiterate during the times that classical Arabic reached the pinnacle of expression, richness, vocabulary and poetic value in seventh century Arabia. The first words that Allah reveled to him were, "Read! In the Name of your Lord, Who has created (all that exists)" (The Qur'an, 96:1) Muslims in seventh century Arabia understood the Qur'an, because it was written in the same language they used in their daily lives. However, Murata and Chittick explain that although "the form of the text was fixed, the meaning was left with fluidity and adaptability. People who did not know Arabic were forced to learn the Arabic text and then understand it in terms of their own cultural and linguistic heritage" (2011 p.207-210). The authors elaborate that no one's interpretation of the Qur'an could be final, and that throughout the history of Islam Muslims have disagreed over the most accurate interpretations of the Qur'an's verses, a situation similar to other religions.

> "One of the sources of the richness of Islamic intellectual history is the variety of interpretations provided for the same verses. Muslim thinkers often quote the Prophet to the effect that every verse of the Koran has seven meanings, beginning with the literal sense, and as for the seventh and deepest meaning, God alone knows that…The language of the Koran is synthetic and imagistic—each word has a richness having to do with the special genius of the Arabic language. People naturally understand different meanings from the same verses"(Murata & Chittick, 2011 p.196-197).

Today, the use and comprehension of the Arabic language has drastically shifted, making things more complicated. A Modern Standard of Arabic (MSA) is used in Saudi Arabia, for example, as the country's national and official language. "Dialectal variations among native Arabic speakers reflect socioeconomic status, educational level, and nationality. In business, religious, or academic settings, formal versions of MSA are utilized" (Martinez et al., 2014 p. 6). Throughout my twelve years of school education, teachers made sure I met the basic requirements of reading and writing in this form of Arabic. But in the majority of my teenage and adult life, I spoke, and still speak, a dialectical informal or colloquial form of Arabic – that is grammatically, syntactically and linguistically incorrect and very distant from the Arabic language of the Qur'an. These changes affect one's understanding of Islamic scripture, and this is especially important because these sacred texts serve as the main sources for Islamic laws and regulations. To illustrate the point, for non-Arabic speakers, think about Early Modern English in William Shakespeare's writings. He is regarded as the greatest writer of the English language, and yet today not everyone can read and understand his work. Students must develop certain linguistic and analytical skills in order to make sense of Shakespeare's plays. The same is applicable to understanding the sacred Islamic texts; Muslims need linguistic, theological and analytical skills in their attempts

to try to comprehend what the Divine is saying. “Before you understand the Qur’an, you have to give twenty years of your life to study…There are twelve knoweldges that you have to master before commenting on the Qur’an” (Yusuf, 2010). Muslims also need to pay close attention to the historical and contextual background of every verse; why was a particular verse revealed? Was it addressing a single, specific situation or generalizing to the public? How does the verse relate to the science of Hadith? How did the Prophet ﷺ behave, react or comment on the verse and how can scholars make a connection between both? This is not a task that common people who have limited knowledge of the sciences of religion can perform. It requires years of rigorous theological and dialectical education and training. “Those who try their hand at interpretation have to undergo a great deal of training to enter into the Koran’s world of discourse” (Murata & Chittick, 2011 p.221-222). In this case, what is the relationship between misreading Islamic texts and violence against women? How can the misinterpretations of meaning make individuals, institutions or the state use the sacred texts to violate Muslim women?

In his study on *Freedom of Religion or Belief and the Status of Women in Light of Religion and Traditions* presented to the United Nation’s Commission on Human Rights, Amor (2009) tackles many cultural practices such as FGM, infanticide, honor killing, rape and sexual abuse and their persistence and justification using religious and cultural means. The author explains that some verses of the Qur’an are interpreted out of context as symbols of male preference, which some countries’ patriarchal cultures and non-religious factors exacerbated. He argues that this preference can consciously or

unconsciously give rise to practices that are harmful to women and a source of discrimination.

> "Misinterpretation, exploitation and, in some cases, manipulation of religion can create social mechanisms that control women's status, sometimes denying them the most basic rights…Such mechanisms are intensified by the fact that women's representation in spheres of public life, including religion, is limited and sometimes non-existent…in most religions, misinterpretations detrimental to women are due to men" (Amor, 2009 p. 26).

In earlier revelations to the Prophet Mohammed ﷺ, Tariq Ramadan explains that for years the Qur'an used the masculine plural form in Arabic to refer to human kind – which means men and women. Words such as "believers" and "Muslims" were used in the masculine form in the Qur'an. At the time, women asked the Prophet ﷺ why they were not explicitly mentioned in the feminine form (2009, p.190). Allah then changed the language of the Qur'an to accommodate the Muslim women's request. Al Khayat argues in *Women in Islam and Her Role in Human Development* that the language of the Qur'an differs from other languages in that it has two grammatical genders; the feminine and the masculo-feminine[11], which addresses both males and females at the same time "unless a specified qualification exempts women from inclusion" (Al Khayat, 2003 p.7). The etymological and dialectal complexity of the text was and remains an excuse for patriarchy to make discriminatory and oppressive assumptions that empower men, and subordinate women. "Numerous means, including selective interpretation of key religious texts, have been used to deny women their rights" (Al Khayat, 2003 p.5).

[11] Masculo means male in Latin.

A classic example that illustrates the manipulation of God's words by men to sanction women is when the Islamic court in the United Arab Emirates ruled that it is allowed for husbands to practice domestic violence (Newling, 2010, dailymail.com). This ideology stems from the patriarchal misinterpretation of one of the most controversial verses in the Qur'an that has been coined by many scholars, lawyers and activists as the "hitting verse." It is verse 35 from Chapter 4 in the Qur'an, and one of the verses I included in my interview questions to find out what it means to the research participants. The verse's translation, which differs from the one I included before says:

> "Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth. So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in [the husband's] absence what Allah would have them guard. But those [wives] from whom you fear disobedience - [first] advise them; [then if they persist], forsake them in bed; and [finally], strike them. But if they obey you [once more], seek no means against them. Indeed, Allah is ever Exalted and Grand" (The Qur'an, 35.4).

This verse addresses the obligation that falls upon men to provide financial support to their wives, and the steps toward resolving conflict between a husband and a wife within the marital relationship. It includes several Arabic words that have been manipulated to legitimize the superiority of men over women and violence against women. One of the words is where the verse says, "strike them." In Arabic, the word is *idribuhunna* and it is derived from the verb *daraba*, which translates to beat and that is just one of several meanings of the word in classical Qur'anic Arabic. In a lecture about domestic violence, Hamza Yusuf explains that all of the *mufassirun* agreed that the word here does not in anyway mean to beat the wife. He mentions other verses in the Qur'an where the word *daraba* appears and where the meanings differ: strike the world or travel, suffer humiliation and impoverishment and many others (2010). But in this

verse, he says it means that you let your wife know that you are angry and that the situation is serious. And this goes both ways according to the Qur'an Yusuf says, so even if the wife gets angry she should let her husband know that this is serious (2010).

> "Allah revealed the verse to eliminate domestic violence, and that is why it is great irony to be used to justify domestic violence…Anybody that tells you that abuse of your spouse is justifiable in Islam is a liar…The messenger of Allah never struck a woman, or a child or a servant ever. We are making the religion a hell for women. I heard *imams* preaching this stuff: that the only thing could fix a woman is beating. To say that it is okay to strike a woman, leave marks on her body… that's not Islam, that's *jahiliyya*. When men use this verse as a means to express their anger, rage and their vengeance on a woman then it is the time for the authorities to come in" (Yusuf, 2010).

In a fact sheet the Asian and Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence produced, a survey of 63 Muslim leaders showed that 10 percent of Muslims experienced physical abuse in their homes. Another study of nine domestic violence organizations serving Muslim women stated that out of a 1,962 women served annually, 82 percent experienced emotional or verbal abuse, 65 percent financial abuse, 49 percent spiritual abuse, 74 percent physical abuse, and 30 percent sexual abuse (Fact Sheet, 2011 p.2-3). These statistics represent a small segment of the reality of violence against women in Muslim communities because data collection about the different acts of violence is a challenge. "There is relatively little data about the incidence of domestic violence among Muslims. Often, Muslims are part of studies of particular ethnic groups (Arab, South Asian) but may not be identified specifically as Muslims. Also, due to the taboo nature of the subject, Muslims are often reluctant to report or speak out about their experiences" (Abugideiri, 2010 p.1). Despite the underreported incidents and lack of sufficient data, violence against women is a serious crime that still persists in Muslim and non-Muslim communities in the world. But in relation to Islam,

under no circumstances that any form of physical, psychological, emotional, verbal, political, or cultural violence against women is encouraged, tolerated or accepted. That is because Allah stated clearly that He neither allows Himself to oppress people nor does He accept people oppressing each other. The Prophet ﷺ narrated Allah's words saying: "O My servants! I have forbidden oppression for Myself, and I have made it forbidden amongst you, so do not oppress one another." [12] If Islam is accused of promoting violence against women, it is because of the behavior of abusers who use religion to justify the culture of violent and dominant patriarchy.

> "In the abusive mindset…males misquote two specific verses and one hadith to justify complete control of females. The worst interpretations go so far as to assert that a woman is mentally, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually permanently disabled, and is prone to immorality, putting her in constant need of male supervision" (Alkhateeb, 1999 p.52).

Islamic Feminism

In defiance of the dominant patriarchal religious discourse within the Muslim world, as well as Northern secular feminisms, Islamic feminism emerged in the 1990s "in efforts to achieve reform of family laws that are religiously framed and also in preventing a rolling-back of equal rights in society as conservative patriarchal forces try to impose their own version of Islam" (ME Program, 2010 p.1). With growing speculations and accusations of Islam being inherently violent and oppressive toward women, Muslim feminists contested this conviction and asserted that Islam is a religion of gender-equality and that patriarchy created the discrimination and violence in order to maintain domination and control over women. "We hold the principles of Islam to be

[12] A hadith reported by Muslim.

a source of justice, equality, fairness and dignity for all human beings…The teachings of the Qur'an... demand that relations between Muslim women and men in both the private and public spheres be governed by principles and practices that uphold equality, fairness and justice" (Sisters in Islam, 2009 p.2).

But dominant Western theories and discourses often ignore the scholarly work of Muslim feminists who argue against labeling Islam as oppressive toward women and opposing to modernity and development.

> "The pervasiveness of the West in the conceptualization and implementation of development projects is only one part of western influence. This influence rangers from the most common definition of development, which rely heavily on western science thought and reflect western cultural and religious norms (such as equality)" (Visvanathan et al., 1997 p.9).

Women working within the Islamic framework for gender equality also oppose efforts to frame debates that victimize and diminish the agency and voices of Muslim women. Mernissi calls on all Muslim women in her book *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry* to walk into the modern world with pride "knowing that the quest for dignity, democracy, and human rights, for full participation in the political and social affairs of our country, stems from no imported Western values, but it is a true part of the Muslim tradition" (1991 p.viii). In the same way, and years later, Gurel rejects Western imperialism and the representation of the Third World Muslim Woman as in need of saving. She says that this type of discourse "often reproduce that dynamic, assuming a monolithic and eternally oppressive Islam" (2009 p.68). Gurel argues that Western discourse insists on rejecting Islamic feminism that promotes "Islam as a moral code involving gender justice" (2009 p.68). Voice and agency are vital for the fight against all forms of violence and especially gender-based violence. But the

victimized representation of Muslim women that solely blames culture or religion for their oppression or the calls for saving the Muslim woman from the injustices of Islam are in fact disempowering Muslim women, depriving them of agency and silencing their voices. In an article titled "Do Muslim Women Need Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others," Abu-Lughod raises several questions concerning this Western ideology. She analyzes two sources to construct her argument where one of them is First Lady Laura Bush's radio address to the nation in November 2001 post 9/11. Abu-Lughod concludes:

> "The discussion of culture, veiling, and how one can navigate the shoals of cultural difference should put Laura Bush's self-congratulation about the rejoicing of Afghan women liberated by American troops in a different light. It is deeply problematic to construct the Afghan woman as someone in need of saving. When you save someone, you imply that you are saving her from something. You are also saving her to something… Projects of saving other women depend on and reinforce a sense of superiority by Westerners, a form of arrogance that deserves to be challenged" (Abu-Lughod, 2002 p.788-789).

In trying to understand what went wrong in the Muslim world that was once at the forefront of human civilization and achievement, Bernard Lewis touches on the status of Muslim women. He argues that Westerners tend to naturally assume that freeing Muslim women from legal, social and political restrictions "is part of liberalization, and that women will consequently fare better in liberal than in autocratic regimes. Such an assumption would be false, and often untrue" (Lewis 2002 p.73).

In October 2005, Muslim feminists from different parts of the world organized the first International Congress on Islamic Feminism in Barcelona, Spain. With very little information available about the congress, the cited source states that over 400 delegates met for three days "with the intention of internationally disseminating the

emergent movement of Muslim women for human rights, known as "gender jihad" (oozebap.org[13] 2005). Another priority for the Congress was to "initiate a collaboration between Muslim women and the global feminist movement." Muslim feminists discussed topics such as diversity, feminism, and Qur'anic hermeneutics so it became clear to the attendees that "feminism is a reality in many countries with a majority Muslim population" (oozebap.org, 2005). Some of the recommendations the congress made include:

> " – Islamic feminism is an emergent reality which must be seen as an alternative to the dominant sexist readings. – This form of feminism derives from the Koranic revelation and is based on the conviction that the Koran does not justify patriarchalism. – Islam can liberate women and change their current status. But for this, the doors of ijtihad (interpretation work) must be opened, taking into account the context of 21st century societies… – Call on non-Muslim feminists not to accept the most sexist and reactionary sectors of Islam as the only possible interpretation of Islam. This practice tends to hinder collaboration between Muslim women fighting for their rights and the global feminist movement… – We can no longer accept the existence of a single, ethnocentric discourse on "feminism". It is now necessary to speak of "feminisms"" (oozebap.org, 2005).

It was not until October 2010 that the Fourth Annual International Congress on Islamic Feminism was held in Madrid, Spain. With the same goal of bringing about a positive change for Muslim women, the first question that Ziba Mir Hosseini, an Iranian legal anthropologist, specializing in Islamic law, gender and development, grappled with was: What is Islamic feminism? Hosseini says that the term Islamic feminism is, "so loaded with disputed meanings and implications; so enmeshed in local and global political struggles, that it is no longer a useful term both analytically or descriptively"

[13] oozebap is a cultural association nonprofit founded in Barcelona in 2005.

(Diana, patheos.com[14], 2010). Hosseini argues that Islamic feminists seeks gender justice, yet not all have the same voice, nor do they all agree on what constitutes justice. Despite the fluidity and complexity of defining Islamic feminism, the Congress agreed that it is the job of Muslim women to construct a religiously grounded argument against those who use the religion to promote and justify injustices against women's rights (Diana, patheos.com, 2010).

In recent years, Islamic feminism started receiving international media recognition and the two words appeared in several print and online media reports. Elizabeth Segran wrote an article in *The Nation*[15] on December 4, 2014 titled "The Rise of the Islamic Feminists, Muslim women are fighting for their rights from within Islamic tradition rather than against it" (Segran, 2013). Illustrating the historical struggle of women being torn between their Muslim identity and their belief in gender equality, the article highlights the work and achievements of the Malaysian based Muslim feminist movement, Musawah, which was established in 2009 by twelve women from Egypt, Gambia, Turkey and Pakistan. On May 26, 2014, *The Intelligent Optimist*[16] published an article titled "The rise of Islamic feminism. Islamic feminism together is often considered an oxymoron. But recently, an international Muslim feminist movement has sprouted, and is growing stronger" (Bal, 2014). Theresa Corbin shared her story converting to Islam for its "appeal to intellect…and feminist ideals," in a special report she wrote and *The Cable News Network* published on October 14, 2014

[14] patheos.com is an online portal for readers to engage in the global dialogue about religion and spirituality and explore the world's beliefs.
[15] Established in 1865, The Nation is a New York based weekly magazine.
[16] Founded as Ode in 1995 in The Netherlands, *The Intelligent Optimist* is an independent media platform focused on solutions, possibility and inspiration.

titled “I’m a feminist and I converted to Islam.” In other contexts, articles featured the rising role and voices of women in Muslim communities “redefining the role of women in Islam” and “calling for imams to denounce domestic violence” (Safi, 2014 & Bongiorno, 2014). In Septmber 2014, the *Public Broadcasting Service* (Video) offered a one month access to view the newly released documentary *Casablanca Calling* which portrayed Bouchra, Karima and Hannane as *Morchidat*, female Muslim leaders, based in Morocco. The film portrays the enthusiasm Moroccan women show for the work of the *Morchidat* and their increasing visibility and role in their communities.

> “In 2005 as part of this effort, King Mohammed VI introduced an innovative - and controversial - programme to train women as religious leaders or Morchidat. 50 Morchidat are selected for the rigorous training each year and on graduation, each Morchidat is assigned to a mosque. In their teaching, these women preach a balanced and tolerant version of Islam, and they provide important support and guidance to their communities…to see girls getting an education, an end to early marriage, and young people developing their full potential and choosing to build a better Morocco rather migrate to the West” (www.casablancacalling.com).

Bringing women to the forefront of Islamic debate and theological education to reform the patriarchal discourse about Muslim women’s rights in Islam is important. Yet Muslim feminist focused largely on the interpretations of sacred texts, especially to combat all forms of violence against women, ignoring other factors that are crucial to address in this context such as cultural causes or identity problems.

> “Muslim feminists have directed a great deal of energy to debating the interpretation of controversial Quranic verses. This is important intellectual work, as perpetrators, their victims, and friends and neighbors who witness violence but fail to act must all be disabused of the idea that the Quran permits abuse. But scriptural analysis cannot be the only or primary tool for combating domestic violence in Muslim communities” (Grewal, 2009 p.13).

Islamic feminism(s) emerged in response to the extreme patriarchal religious discourse, laws and practices that went beyond tolerable limits in subordinating and oppressing Muslim women in the name of God and His Messenger. The movements also needed to assert their beliefs in Islam as a faith that empowered women and promoted gender justice. However, neither the sole focus on reinterpreting sacred Islamic texts from a feminist's perspective, nor the dichotomy between Muslim and secular feminism(s) are helpful to understanding and combating violence against Muslim women. Feminists must examine all forces that contribute to the persistence of violence against women on a local and global level, culturally, socially, politically and economically without emphasizing one over the other. After all, these debates and discussions are intended to assist the violated women and "when we ignore how people choose to name themselves, their work, and their struggles, we necessarily do some epistemic violence to them" (Kynsilehto, 2008 p.22).

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

> "I am sure most of you are aware that it is a myth…and that is the idea that has somehow crept into Muslim culture, that boys are better than girls or actually more preferable. I think part of the problems that we have in our Muslim communities have to do with cultural problems, and I would say that if they are universalized they just manifest differently according to different cultures."
>
> Sheikh Hamza Yusuf, Men and Women in Islam, Saudi Arabia, 2006

My culture, my religion, my cause

This research is of great importance to my own personal and spiritual wellbeing. I am passionate about understanding, in depth and with careful attention to detail, both context and nuance, what is it that makes Muslims, individuals and institutions, enforce oppressive societal traditions on women in the name of Islam. Until today, many Muslim communities justify gender-based violence such as Female

Gentile Mutilation (FGM), child marriage, bride burning, acid attacks, honor killings, marital rape, male guardianship, and unjust divorce and custody laws using a perverted patriarchal version of religion, "which has been made oppressive only by male clerics who have built up rigid traditions in their own favor-more often than not basing themselves on cultural traditions that have nothing to do with Islam" (Haar, 2011 p. 225). These religious leaders justify the discrimination against women under the guise of Islamic obligations to discipline women by the authority God invested in men as providers for and maintainers of women. For instance, I would not be conducting this research if it were not for my husband's consensual signature. The law in Saudi Arabia does not allow any woman to request/obtain a personal ID card or passport or request permission to travel, study, get married, work…etc. without the written consent of a *mahram*. The state promotes a discourse that these rules are derived from Islamic laws. But some Muslims construct laws based on selective and subjective interpretation of the Islamic scriptures. "Inasmuch as religion, culture and tradition are [malleable] constructs which can be defined, used and (re)interpreted depending on the interests involved" (Wyttenbach, 2008 p.229). Grounded intellectual understanding of Islam and especially women's issues requires much more than a religious outlook, as I discussed earlier. Understanding what Islam texts say about women depends upon profound knowledge of Islamic sciences and a deep reading of the texts – the very thing denied to the majority of Muslim women. "The few studies of Islam that attempt to reveal the depth of Islamic thinking demand too much knowledge of the religion for beginning students and are usually couched in language that is primarily a derivative of the Western tradition" (Murata & Chittick, 2011 p.99-101).

Despite my sincere efforts to bring this paradox to light, it would be arrogant of me to claim that I found the answers and solutions. In many ways, I have only scratched the surface of a very large and complex problem – trying to make sense of the forces that enable some to use Islam to perpetuate patriarchal and discriminatory practices and belief systems against women. Understanding the depth and complexity of the problem encourages research, dialogue and hopefully spurs more appropriate programs, projects and development interventions that address violence against women within Muslim communities. Muslim women's organizations in different parts of the world, such as *Musawah* for Equality in the Muslim Family, Women Living Under Muslim Laws and Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality (WISE), have been taking initiatives to amplify the voices of Muslim women on gender issues. The goal is "to counter cultural/religious discourses that are used to disempower women and legitimate the violation of their bodies and rights" (Greiff, 2010 p.4).

My work here is a new attempt to make the voices of Muslim men and women heard within the academia, policy-making and development circles. After all, what is the point of "development" if we do not embrace the needs of those we claim to help?

The methodology of this research is analytical; I write as an insider to the Islamic community. It is important to disclose that I believe in the egalitarian message of Islam, the divine origin of the Qu'ran and in the prophecy of Mohammed ﷺ. I also believe that "injustice that might occur from the application of God's law must be ascribed to a faulty interpretation of the text. A faithful and accurate interpretation cannot and should not lead to empirical injustice" (Ibn Al-Qayyaim in El Fadl, 2001 p.14).

Data Collection

For this research, I used both primary and secondary resources. My secondary sources include books, academic journals, news reports and grey literature. I drew on many academic articles and debates from the literatures on Islamic feminism, progressive Islam, modernity and secularization, religious violence, faith, gender and development, culture and gender. I have relied a lot on secondary materials to understand these debates and how they bear on my research question. The aim of my inquiry is to understand the constructions that people (including myself) "initially hold, aiming toward consensus but still open to new interpretations as information and sophistication improve" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994 p.211). I selected the constructivism paradigm for my research inquiry because after reading some of the literature I soon realized that my subjectivity blurred my vision. Things could not be defined in black and white, good or bad. It is not that simple.

Drawing from the literature on feminist theory of intersectionality helped frame my research and understanding of the intersections between the systems of oppression, domination and discrimination Muslim women experience (Crenshaw in Thorvaldsdóttir, 2007 p.2). This starts from the premise that people live multiple, layered identities derived from social relations, history and the operation of structures of power.

> "Intersectionality is a tool for analysis, advocacy and policy development that addresses multiple discriminations and helps us understand how different sets of identities impact on access to rights and opportunities…People are members of more than one community at the same time, and can simultaneously experience oppression and privilege (e.g. a woman may be a respected medial professional yet suffer domestic violence in her home)" (Symington, 2004, p.1-3).

Another theoretical approach that informed my qualitative inquiry is hermeneutics, because it offers interpretive understanding or meaning with special attention to the holy texts in their cultural and historical contexts. Hermeneutics focuses primarily on the *meaning* of qualitative data, especially textual data. The purpose of using it is to aid human understanding and it helps the researcher to understand what people say and do, and why. This approach was helpful in analyzing the participants' responses to the four selected Islamic verses and sayings, which discuss Muslim men and women.

> "Interpretation, in the sense relevant to hermeneutics, is an attempt to make clear, to make sense of an object of study. This object must, therefore, be a text, or a text-analogue, which in some way is confused, incomplete, cloudy, seemingly contradictory - in one way or another, unclear. The interpretation aims to bring to light an underlying coherence or sense" (Taylor, 1976 p.153).

Methods and field site

The methods I used during the summer of 2014 to collect my primary data included structured open-ended interviews, participant observation and document reviews. As part of this research, I attended an Islamic program offered by the *Deen* Intensive Foundation[17], which has been organized for the past twelve years (Rihla 2014)[18]. It is an intensive Islamic studies program that provides students with knowledge about the foundation of faith, the sacred Islamic law, and guidelines for an ethical lifestyle among other topics. The program was an ideal research site because:

1. Eight prominent Muslim scholars, all men, taught the classes – these included Sheikh Hamza Yusuf, President of America's first Muslim liberal arts college Zaytuna College;
2. Program participants were Muslim men and women from different backgrounds, providing multidimensional views on the research topic; from 124 participants there were 9 from Australia, 7 from Canada, 6 from Jordan, 5 from

[17] Deen Intensive Foundation is a North American initiative that provides educational programs of the core sacred sciences of Islam by traditional sources and qualified scholars and teachers.

[18] Rihla 2014 is a three-week course held in Konya and Istanbul, Turkey from August 1-22, 2014.

Malaysia/Singapore, 7 from Europe, 27 from UK, 38 from US, 10 from Turkey, and 15 from the Middle East;

3. The Deen Intensive Foundation was very responsive and supportive in my attempt to conduct this research, interviews and collect data;
4. Living under the same roof and attending the same lectures with the scholars and participants for 22 days provided rich data of dynamics and interactions between men and women.

Most importantly, the reason why I chose this field site is because I wanted to understand the cultural contexts that produce the different views on Muslim women. My focus is not on the actual acts of violence against women or the "violators" or "abusers" of Muslim women. Rather, my focus is on the ideas and the communities of Muslims and the ways in which they construct meanings that support certain ideologies and acts concerning women.

Prior to conducting my primary research, my initial research question was mainly focused on the misinterpretation of sacred Islamic texts as a major cause of legitimizing and institutionalizing violence against women. I started with a different focus and hunches about violence against Muslim women, but as I conducted interviews, had email exchanges and read more on the subject, I began to see that some of my preconceived ideas did not fit with what people were telling me. Based on data collected and observations during and after the research process, I redirected my research question to explore the local and global forces that shape and influence the intersection of gender, Islam, culture and identity creating acts of violence against women in Muslim communities. Themes that emerged from analyzing the data included topics of modernization, secularization, construction of gender roles and identities, gender equity and equality, Muslim female scholarship, and the crisis of Islamic knowledge. The analysis was based on responses from interviewees,

interpretations and analysis of data collected. The original research question was: How do Muslim men and women construct the meanings of Qur'anic verses and Hadith addressing women's rights in relation to their cultural settings and identities? Yet after the data analysis process that led to the emergence of multiple themes, I believe the research question that must be asked is: How do Muslim men and women construct the meaning of gender equality and women's empowerment in relation to their Islam, cultural settings, and identities?

Other objectives of this study are:

1. To understand the relationship between violent cultural practices against Muslim women and the ways in which Muslim men and women understand Islamic discourse related to women's issues.
2. To understand how Muslim men and women perceive cultural traditions and Islamic laws, either separately or interdependently.
3. To understand the way Muslims define women's rights within their local cultural context.

In addition to the above queries, I selected two Qur'anic verses and two Hadith sayings, which discuss roles of Muslim men and women and codify their relationship and behavior, and asked my interviews to share with me their understanding of these verses and sayings. I purposefully selected these texts based on the ways in which they have been widely used not only to undermine Muslim women and control their lives, but also to justify verbal, physical and psychological abuse against them and violate their basic human rights. These texts are:

Qur'an

Chapter 4 titled Women, verse 35:

"Men are guardians over women because Allah has made some of them excel others, and because they (men) spend of their wealth. So virtuous women are those who are obedient, and guard the secrets of their husbands with Allah's protection. And as for those, on whose part you fear disobedience, admonish them and leave them alone in their beds, and chastise them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Surely, Allah is High, Great."

Chapter 33 titled the Clans or the Collation, verse 34:

"And stay (women) in your houses with dignity, and do not show off yourselves like the showing off of the former days of ignorance, and observe Prayer, and pay the Zakat, and obey Allah and His Messenger. Surely Allah desires to remove from you all uncleanness, O Members of the Household, and purify you completely."

Hadith

The Book of Miscellany: (Book 1, Hadith 273)
Abu Hurairah (May Allah be pleased with him) reported: Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "Take my advice with regard to women: Act kindly towards women, for they were created from a rib, and the most crooked part of a rib is its uppermost. If you attempt to straighten it; you will break it, and if you leave it alone it will remain crooked; so act kindly toward women". (Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim).[19]

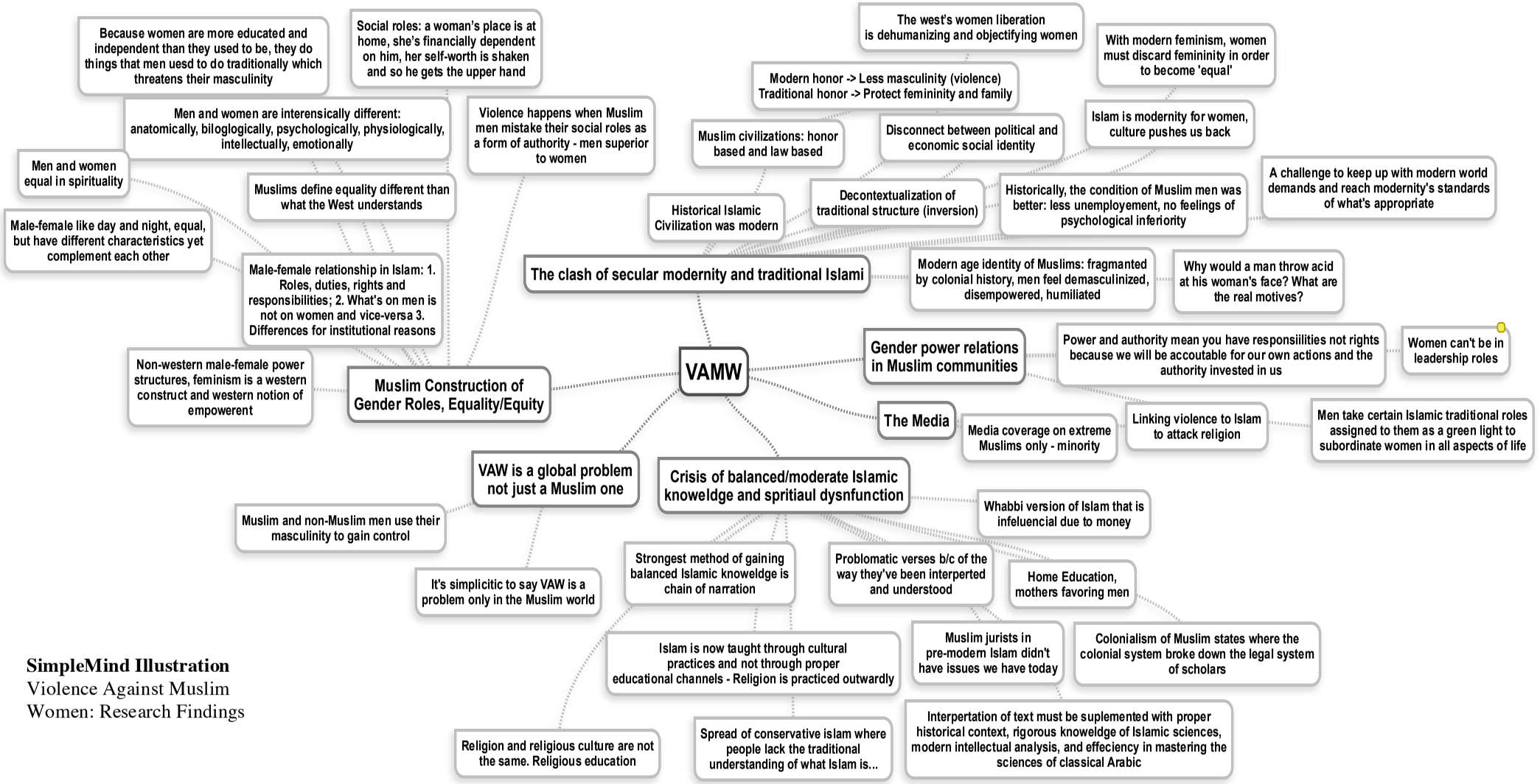
The Book of Miscellany: (Book 1, Hadith 285)
Abu Hurairah (May Allah be pleased with him) reported: The Prophet ﷺ said, "If I were to order anyone to prostrate himself before another, I would have ordered a woman to prostrate herself before her husband". (Jami` at-Tirmidhi)[20]

Data analysis

For this study, I employed the Grounded Theory Method (Charmaz 1983) and inductive qualitative research design as in grounded theory data collection and analysis move together. The process and the product are shaped from the data. Inductive analysis, which involve discovering the patterns, themes and categories in the data allowed me to approach the data with an open mind. I employed open coding to let findings emerge through content analysis and through my own interaction with the data. I manually organize my data using Microsoft Word and Excel 2011 and the mind mapping software SimpleMind (Illustration to follow). As I transcribed the interviews, I found chunks of words or phrases that added depth to my research and labeled them and these findings enriched other interviews. I asked myself: What do I see going on here? I utilized open coding and axial coding strategies to codify my data. I then

[19] Authenticated and genuine Hadith collections of prophetic traditions/sayings or Hadith based on the quality and soundness of the chain of narrators.
[20] ibid.

triangulated data collected from observations, literature, and interview coding to draw out multiplicities.



SimpleMind Illustration
Violence Against Muslim Women: Research Findings

Participants and interviews

The participants of this study include a mixture of both male and female Muslim students who attended the Rihla 2014 program. All interviewees voluntarily and willingly chose to participate. I conducted a total of twenty in-depth interviews – seven males and thirteen females. Three informal interviews with scholars teaching at the Rihla 2014 were also conducted. I was cautious and careful to ensure the anonymity of the participants and the level of comfort during the interviews. I employed a protocol to serve secure their agreement. When referenced in this research paper, the names given to the interviewees have been changed to protect their privacy. Each interview took approximately 45 minutes to 90 minutes to complete and was limited to approximately 10 questions. All interviews were conducted in English except for one that was in Arabic. Interviewees gave either their oral or written consent to participate. Despite having 124 participants attending the program, only 20 interviewees agreed to participate. A few others initially volunteered to participate, but after several attempts to communicate with them to set a date and location of the interview, I received no response. It was easy to recruit participants, but it was a challenge to set a time and a place for the interviews and get them done.

The structured open-ended interviews included questions about the participants' definition of culture, Muslim culture and whether they are the same or different, the primary sources of Islamic knowledge, the understanding of gender equality in Islam, if Islam is an egalitarian religion that promotes women's rights and gender equality, the views on violence in Islam, modernity and Islam, and the meaning of the two Qur'anic verses and Hadith sayings mentioned earlier. An overview of the participants is below:

Participant	Name	Gender	Age	Country
Participant 1	Bilal	Male	25	United Kingdom
Participant 2	Amr	Male	30	United States of America
Participant 3	Sarah	Female	18	Turkey
Participant 4	Nora	Female	30	Somalia/United States of America
Participant 5	Lina	Female	24	United Kingdom/United States
Participant 6	Dina	Female	26	United States of America
Participant 7	Imran	Male	28	United States of America
Participant 8	Faris	Male	23	Egypt
Participant 9	Hajar	Female	25	Lebanon
Participant 10	Laila	Female	33	Egypt
Participant 11	Ibrahim	Male	29	United Kingdom
Participant 12	Maha	Female	25	Palestine/Israel
Participant 13	Nadia	Female	29	United Kingdom
Participant 14	Rayan	Female	33	United States of America
Participant 15	Reem	Female	24	Libya/Canada
Participant 16	Tala	Female	32	Indonesia/Canada
Participant 17	Omar	Male	35	Australia
Participant 18	Asma	Female	26	United Kingdom
Participant 19	Nada	Female	40	United States of America
Participant 20	Reda	Male	37	Egypt/Canada

Limitations of the research

Time was a major constrain because the length and structure of the program were tight and intense. Rihla 2014 offered mandatory classes on a daily basis from 8 a.m. until 10:30 p.m. with breaks in between for lunch, dinner, prayers and short siestas. This time constraint meant that I was unable to extend my research to a larger sample group. It was also challenging to schedule interviews during leisure time, because most people dedicated that time to rest or to eat. Although I have attempted to justify my claims with significant findings and secondary data, the primary data and discovered themes are a small representation of what cultural violence in the name of Islam mean to Muslim men and women and may not be representative of multiple Muslim communities and countries. That is because the viewpoints of twenty Muslims

cannot reflect the way 1.6 billion Muslims around the world view and interpret the world.

The Abused Muslim Woman: Where do we begin? *(Findings)*

> "Religion has been used as a bullying technique to make women believe that if they have personal beliefs, desires or ambitions, even if memorizing the Qur'an or hadith, that they're being selfish because they're taking time away from their family…this isn't the example of Madina."
>
> Anse Tamara Gray, Interview, February 2014

Questioning the cause of women's unequal and oppressive treatment in Muslim societies, I focused too much on the idea of patriarchal and selective misinterpretation of scared texts that I almost lost sight of what really mattered and still matters. It was not until I interviewed the participants of this study that I realized the risk of making hasty assumptions and conclusions without careful consideration of the nuances of violence against women the way Muslims understand it, define it and deal with it. "Differentiate between causes and justifications," Imam Zaid Shaker said to me in a discussion on the subject during Rihla 2014. What causes cultural violence against women with Muslim societies? How do perpetrators, families, the media and the victims justify it? What is the connection between religion, culture and identity in relation to violence against women? Should violence against women be studied in a local context, the global sphere or combined? How do social movements and transnational feminism(s) impact the conversations?

In the literatures I read and reviewed, I was able to confirm the analyses that stemmed from the participants interviews. Conceptualizing religion, culture and identity and the ways in which they intersect, it became clear that the boundaries between the three are blurred complicating their relation to cultural violence against women in the name of Islam. It also became evident that there has been little research

that investigates the three concepts in connection with the portrayal of religious "Islamic" violence in the media, the impact of Islamic feminism(s) on violence against women and the theories and applications of development's secularized interventions in Muslim majority countries to address gender inequalities. In my humble work, I initiated a brief investigation to discover the casual links between culture, religion and the justification of Muslim women's abuse. Along with a few recent academic works and opinions, I believe that my study reflects how the debate is moving away from the need to exclude religion and employ secularization toward a greater emphasis on utilizing religion as a tool for combating violence in all its forms. "The consideration of religion for development aims can be described as a modern attempt to harness historical resources for contemporary use" (Haar, 2011 p.16). It is imperative that women gain empowerment within their Islamic traditions, and through this, in their communities. "'Modern-ness' (or development or progress) for Muslim women…is about women being in a position to practice 'public piety', which includes understanding Islam properly, dedicating themselves to self-improvement and participating actively in public life and the betterment of the community" (Haar, 2011 p.225) Let us consider what the Muslim men and women of Rihla 2014 had to say about this debate.

Equality or equity?

> "If feminism is treating women with respect, I am a feminist and Islam teaches feminism."
> Sheikh Hamza Chaudhry, Rihla 2014, Konya, Turkey

In the *Gender and Development Concepts and Definitions*, Reeves and Baden make a distinction between the terms 'gender equality and 'gender equity' because the terms are often used interchangeably. They define the former as "women having the

same opportunities in life as men" and the latter as "the equivalence in life outcomes for women and men, recognizing their different needs and interests" (2000 p. 2-10). In another report, which summarizes UNESCO's Forth World Conference on Women, the terms are defined using different phrasing.

> "Gender equality means that the different behaviour, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally. It does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equity means fairness of treatment for women and men, according to their respective needs. This may include equal treatment or treatment that is different but which is considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities" (Pavlic et al., 2000 p.5).

For Muslims, the concepts have different meanings based on their understanding of gender roles in Islam as derived from the Qur'an, Hadith and the life and teachings of Prophet Mohammed ﷺ. All twenty participants defined gender equality using the same words confirming that: Muslim men and women are equal spiritually and in the eyes of God as human beings, but they have different gender roles, rights and responsibilities, they have different characteristics and are intrinsically different; anatomically, biologically, psychologically, physiologically, intellectually and emotionally. A few men and women were even uncomfortable using the term equality due to its implications. They preferred to use the words "equity" and "parity" instead of equality, because of the latter's problematic association to Western feminism. Examine the following quotes from selected interviews:

> "I would lean more towards the idea of gender parity or gender equity as a concept. Cause I think equality has been a hijacked term with feminism...Equality means everybody does the exact same thing, and I don't necessarily agree with that. I think that Allah has provided an outline of different roles and responsibilities for both genders, and based on His wisdom we should abide with what those are" – Rayan.

> "There is a difference between equality and equity. So both men and women have their own roles, in terms of who they are in the religion. And if anything, Islam empowered women…in a lot of cases given them advantages over men" - Omar.

> "Equality, even if not within an Islamic context, is about justice and being humane. There are psychological and biological differences…but Islam gives us women justice and fairness and not absolute equality" – Maha.

> "The idea that everyone gets the same is a very western idea. It's based on this kind of allergy that oh no you can't be equal by not having exactly the same things…In the Islamic world it's obviously very different. Particularly in terms of rights and responsibilities…There are certain responsibilities that are on men, which are not on women, and there are certain responsibilities that are on women which are not on men" – Bilal.

The participants used examples to illustrate the different roles and responsibilities that men and women have in Islam. In society, for instance, some stated that it is obligatory for men to attend congregational prayers five times a day in the mosque including Friday sermons when women are given the option to either attend or not. Others used verse 35 from Chapter 4 in the Qur'an to explain that where the verse says men are the guardians or maintainers of women it means that it is a man's duty in Islam to take care of his wife and children's financial needs, protect them and provide for them a home, food and life's basic necessities. A woman can choose to help in providing for her household, but she is not obliged to do so. A few women referenced Khadijah bint Khuwalid as a role model of Muslim women who was the household provider to Prophet Mohammed ﷺ and her children. On the one hand, participants emphasized that these gender roles do not indicate that women are less important than men, men are superior to women or that women

cannot take on certain responsibilities if they choose to. On the contrary, these ascribed roles are problematic because they lead to gender division of labor, where these "socially determined ideas and practices define what roles and activities are deemed appropriate for women and men…roles typically designated as female are almost invariably less valued than those designated as male" (Reeves and Baden, 2000 p.2-10). Cultures of patriarchy within Muslim communities interpret this division of labor as a form of hierarchy and use the analogy to undermine and control women, restrict their freedom of choice and violate their rights.

> "The mainstream misogynist opinion is that the men should be in charge of the women and the women should be subservient to the men. I don't believe in that at all" – Rayan.
>
> "I think it is men who put limits on their understanding of Islam and the rights of women" – Lina.
>
> "There are traditional roles that people fall into…In Islam, traditionally, men should lead the prayer. I think the problem is that many take that as green light to just implement all these other ideas or they don't honor women's rights and they think that we are guardians and so we control you" – Emran.
>
> "Islam is the best religion for me as a woman. How I get treated by Muslim communities may often fall short off that standard" – Nada.

Of the Muslim men and women I interviewed, most were not keen on Western feminism(s) as an approach to challenge and change women's prescribed roles in pursuit of gender equity within Muslim communities. Participants explained that Muslim women feel compelled to fulfill the demands of the "modern employed woman" in order to be taken seriously as fighters for gender equity or women's rights.

> "In the western society we do have that mentality that if you're a feminist then you have to be working, you have to be like the men. And

> in our society unfortunately we have a theory that you can't do that at all; you have to stay at home or else you're not a true woman. So it's really unfair because it puts us in this black and white situation…When I look at men and women in Islam, I see we have been given different roles I won't deny that…But that doesn't limit our role or ability to do something" – Reem.
>
> "Islam does not try to take my feminism away and tell me that if I want to be a feminist I should be like a man…I have the right if I want to go out in the society or not" – Lina.
>
> "Islam creates social roles for women and men and based on these roles it ascribes certain rights and responsibilities to each…If you want to wear a suit and go everyday at eight in the morning and be a corporate shark and work 10 or 12 hours a day and smoke 20 packs of cigarettes because you're so tense, the stock market is falling or whatever, then fine do it…But I've always felt that why don't you just let each play their role and do it well…The only reason why the role of the house is perceived as inferior is because we have constructed this worldview where it is made to be inferior" – Fairs.

The reflections of the interviewees reflect ambivalence toward feminist goals. Muslim men and women uphold the values of gender equity to be fairness of treatment for men and women while recognizing men and women's different rights, roles, obligations and needs. Muslims associate strongly with an Islamic version of gender equity, dictated by Allah and Prophet Mohammed more than the concepts of feminisms or gender equality. But they do acknowledge that this version of defining gender roles can be risky; it leads to male abuse of power, dominance and "misogynistic" interpretations of the scared texts which disempower Muslim women and sanction and institutionalize their oppression.

Where is the Muslim female scholar?

> "Historically, you have a large amount of women who were interpreting Hadith, who were teaching Hadith, who were interpreting the Qur'an, who were doing all sorts of things…But those voices aren't even heard these days, their books aren't translated…It gives one the impression that only men were involved in the actual transmission of knowledge"

Despite the strong legacy of Muslim female scholars and the rise of Islamic feminism(s) in the 1990s, female leadership in Islam and the authority of Muslim women scholars have been shunned in more recent years. "Even the term shaykah, the female equivalent of *sheikh*, a teacher or religious scholar, can be seen as controversial" (Bongiorno, 2014). It is important to recognize that authority in Islam is reflected in God and His Prophet Mohammed ﷺ. El Fadl explains that authority also extends to include the sacred texts and collective consensus of opinion. "There is no question that the Qur'an regards itself and regards God as authoritative on most matters, but the Qur'an does clearly explicate the dynamics of the interrelationship and appropriate balance between God, the text, the collectivity, and the individual" (2001 p. 32). Authority is crucial for Muslims because it resembles the body of scholars that explicate rulings and laws, including the ones that concern women, from sacred texts and principles. But what the Qur'an does not say is that authority is invested only in men. However, a gender division of labor constructed social ideas and practices that frown upon Muslim women taking up the responsibility on to become religious leaders. In one-on-one discussions and during Rihla classes, one of the male scholars kept repeating and reaffirming the following statement: "Women have no duty in *dawa*. You're not obliged to do this." In the following quotes, participants expressed their frustration at the discouragement of women to become scholars. Also, female scholars have little room to reflect critically and thus conform to patriarchy.

> "Khadijah was a successful businesswoman without a man. Aisha, Queen of Sheba, all these phenomenal stories of strong women Balqis, Asma…Yet we take half the verse and half the hadith and we try to

mesh them into this really chauvinistic religion and I don't think it is." – Reem.

"We don't have enough women talking about Islam. And the ones who are talking are saying the wrong things…we don't have leading female scholars. As a young woman, I want another woman telling me that I have the right to do this and giving me Islamic examples. I don't want a woman sitting in her *Khimar* telling me that I should stay at home. I hear enough of that from the boys on the street…we tell girls you're not good enough, don't shine and if you shine no one will marry you…we created a society where women don't have options. It took me a long time to separate culture and religion and even now sometimes I kind of get confused" – Lina.

"There's this idea perpetuated that women can't be in leadership roles that I have seen that happen even in like in MSA [Muslim Student Association] groups. I have seen some clubs say that you're not allowed to have some women president" – Emran.

"Sayda Aisha was given the opportunity to exercise her intellect versus generations later when people use mostly cultural excuses to say that women are somehow less…so when a judge or legal scholar will get to the status of women, he is incapable of separating social imprints of how women are far from the potential of women and then they come up with laws based on their preconceived notion of what women are" – Dina.

Throughout the 22 days of Rihla 2014 in Turkey, 8 male scholars led and taught all the courses. Aside from female volunteers who were part of the organizing team, the director of the Deen Intensive Foundation who oversees all programs including Rihla was a female. On Friday, August 8, 2014, the men attended Friday sermon at one of the local mosques. Due to a transportation mix-up, we female participants were unable to make it to the mosque. Instead, at 01:30 p.m. the women gathered in the main hall where classes take place and the wife of one of the scholars gave a 30 minute speech about Muslim men and women.

"We've got to begin to raise our boys differently…how the men are is how we raised them…It's not Islam, it's cultural, it's colonialism, it's 9/11…Many family dynamics rest upon our shoulders because we're the

> first teachers…Support your sister and not tear down one another" - Wife of scholar.

There was a short period after the speech for questions and answers. One of the young women asked to speak up. She broke down in tears as she was saying: "We need to hear this more often about women's different roles and spirituality. Men don't say the same things to us. In fact, they use it against us to put us down." After a few comments, the meeting ended and everyone was leaving to head back to campus for the afternoon break. Several women reached out to the female speaker hugging, kissing and thanking her for her "empowering words."

In 2012, Anse Tamara Gray and a group of Muslim women volunteers launched Rabata.org, an online academic portal providing Muslim women with solid educational foundations in the Islamic sciences. Women can participate in the interactive virtual classes from the comfort of their homes, and there are multiple levels of scholarship offered every year, financial aid is provided to women from low-income backgrounds and there are multiple levels of courses to enroll in. The site also provides avenues for women to network, communicate and organize to provide a support system for each other. One of the primary objectives of Rabata.org is to amplify the role of women in Islamic education.

> "While scholarship is gender-free, there is something to be said for perspective. There are women who have worked tirelessly to bring the female voice to Islamic scholarship in this century. Here we attempt to provide access to this voice. We also interact with well-known scholarship and attempt to discuss issues of Islamic sciences in general and in specific as they are applied to the female experience" (Rabata.org)

Bringing the female voice to Islamic scholarship is crucial for Muslim women's psyche. Having female scholars empowers other women and informs them about their

rights, roles and choices from a religious feminist perspective. To celebrate female scholarship in historical and contemporary Islam, Al-Rawiya Foundation initiated Shaykah Fest in 2012 as an annual conference to revive and draw attention to the often ignored tradition of female scholarship in Islamic discourses. Founding President at Al-Rawiya Foundation, Reima Yosif, says religion is used as a way to shut women up, or push them to the peripheries. She confirms that having knowledge of faith and history enables women "to differentiate between the true essence of the religion and any cultural practices or patriarchal practices that are contrary to that essence" (Bongiorno, 2014). Rihla 2014 participant Ryan believes that empowering women through Islamic scholarship is part of addressing the problem of cultural patriarchy in Muslim communities.

> "To solve the issues of patriarchy and misogyny, we need to have female scholars so we can hear their voices. I don't think that's a solution, but it's part of addressing the problem. But men also need to learn to be gender conscious. What I found is that female scholars have internalized the misogyny and patriarchy to the point where they are speaking on behalf of men and it's more easily digestible by women. Despite the fact that people often say we don't have women scholars, why is it that they're not as popular as men? What prevents the Muslims in mass from listening to them?" – Ryan.

Gendered colonial identities

> "Colonialism…instilled in places that they ruled this idea…they know better than what the host, sort of ancestral educational cultural knowledge whatever came through…I think as far as man-woman relation is concerned, I don't blame colonialism, but that was an ideal situation to have an identity crisis where honor killings, mistreatment of women, these sort of things are bound to happen because you're not clear on what you believe in. Are you British? Are you Pakistani? Are you religious? Are you secular? Is this the modern age? What was the tradition?"
>
> Ibrahim, Rihla 2014, Konya, Turkey

Using theories of masculinities to better understand the connections between men, gender, power and violence, authors of the United Nation's Multi-country Study

"Why Do Some Men Use Violence Against Women and How Can We Prevent It?"[21] state the following: "Understanding men's own diverse experiences, within the context of deep-rooted patriarchal systems and structures that enable men to assert power and control over women, will help us target the underlying drivers of violence against women and girls to stop violence before it starts" (Fulu et al., 2013 p. iii). Carried out to assess men's own experience of violence as well as their perpetration of violence against other men and how it relates to the perpetration of violence against women, one of the study's recommendations on what needs to change is to "promote non-violent masculinities oriented towards equality and respect." This recommendation was derived from evidence-based factors that correlated with men's violence against women and are linked to "the stress of not being able to meet the expectations of being a 'real man' including low levels of empathy, economic stress and mental health issues" (Fulu et al., 2013 p. 98). Some of Rihla participants expressed similar concerns when explaining some of the causes of cultural violence against women in Muslim communities: that Muslim men feel put down, demasculanized, disempowered and struggle with inferiority complex and have an identity crisis due to the long-lasting socioeconomic and marginalizing effects of colonialism. To affirm their authority, identity, masculinity and manhood, they resort to all types of abuse and violence against their women using Islam to justify their oppression and that became normalized

[21] Through a regional joint programme 'Partners for Prevention', UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women and UNV have worked together to undertake the UN Multi-country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific. The study, which collected and analysed data from thousands of women and men across the region, provides the largest multi-country data set on men's perpetration of violence against women and can inform more evidence-based interventions to prevent such violence. The research was also conceptualized to ascertain men's own experiences of violence as victims and/or as witnesses and to assess how that may be related to men's perpetration of different types of violence.

through cultural practices. Consider the following quotes:

> "When men aren't allowed to be men, when they're oppressed in their own societies, for example, when colonizers came to these countries and the men were constantly put down everywhere, then they in turn started doing that to the women in their homes and it became the culture…because of their own oppression they're experiencing. It's like how abused children tend to do terrible things, colonization was an abuse on the entire society and then unfortunately the men in turn took that on the women in their homes" – Tala.

> "In the modern age…A lot of people don't know what their identity is…Third World Countries…not only were they not allowed to develop politically in an organic sense, their identity has been shattered by colonial powers so they've got fragments of the history they remember…With colonialism you had a generation gap…The transference of customs and social mores…is done by generation to generation and if you have a traumatic experience as colonialism...breakdown of traditional structure has led to decontextualization of knowledge so honor becomes this abstract…a means to express masculinity "my honor" rather than a progressive thing that's meant to be about protecting women and femininity. It's a complete inversion" – Bilal.

> "You get a man that feels deeply demasculinized because he's not working and the simple solution is to get out and get a job and support your wife and family…When you feel disempowered…humiliated you want an immediate fix and when you're not getting it, you're willing to lash out to get an immediate hit which is a dysfunction of the heart" – Amr.

> "The worst thing for the people who opposed colonialism is that they inserted this element of inferiority complex for places like Pakistan…colonialism ruined and destroyed their confidence and their potential for confidence within their own tradition, within their own religion, within their own intellectuals" – Ibrahim.

Not only did colonial powers have negative effects on men, but on the status of Muslim women as well. "In 1848, the colonial period began in Asia, moved to Africa and carved out the nation states of the Arab World...This colonial period brought with it great detriment to the status of Muslim women in these countries" (Gray, 2013). In her speech "Lean In-Our Feminist Manifesto", Gray gives examples of women,

empowered by Islam, who flourished in the pre-colonial period in Asia and Africa intellectually, theologically, politically, socially and economically. "When Europe ruled the Muslims, they brought with them attitudes towards women that began to change the norm for Muslims…Muslim women found themselves in oppressive situations, both publicly and privately" (Gray, 2013). In the following quote, Rihla participant Ryan expressed similar views, but asserted that neither Islam nor the Qur'an promote unfair treatment or oppression of women.

> "Islam changed the way in which women were viewed in 7th century Arabia. Now there're those people who speak on behalf of the Qur'an and I think a lot of it has to do with colonialism and their interpretations of what role women should have…In no way, shape or form did I in terms of my reading see they felt that women were disenfranchised from normal society, but I think as time went on the Muslims in different countries that were colonized, their women were told to take everything off, and that they should be completely free etc.…and then what people did to mitigate the effect is they did the opposite" – Rayan.

Secular modernity vs. traditional Islam

> "Modernity tears us from place and tears us from family…These two things out of which the system finds it very difficult to make money…Our great grandfathers are part of our cultures, that's how we know who we are…The religion whose intactness is manifested and guaranteed by our concern for historical forms of historical knowledge"
>
> Sheikh Abdal Hakim Murad, Rihla, August 2014, Turkey

Secularization and modernization were topics that Rihla scholars and participants discussed and debated a lot. The great dichotomy between the two was so vivid in the way secular modernity contested and worked against traditional Islam. For Muslims, traditional Islam, historical legacies and inherited knowledge are integral to their sense of identity, to adhering to Islam's framework of ethics and morality, and to sustaining a logical, authentic, well-balanced religion. "Given that religion is an integral part of the lives of billions of people, it can be considered a human resource of

significant importance" (Haar, 2011 p.8). Addressing the significance of organizing Rihla 2014 in Konya, Turkey, Dean of Cambridge Muslim College in UK Abdal Hakim Murad said during a class on August 4, 2014 that Muslims believe in context, specifics of time and space, historical moments, family and value of kinship, and civilization and scholarship – all of which modernization is attacking viciously and destroying.

> "We are people who believe that the stability of the soul depends on its firm awareness of its context, specification of time and space, something that modernity is determined to tear us free of…You can't really get a sense of where the *Ummah* is and how it got here without getting a sense of the history well. That's one of the necessary Islamic disciplines…to stand in the line of authentic teachers…we need to know where our claims about Allah and His Messenger and the nature of the human predicament might come from" - Abdal Hakim Murad.

In the interviews, Muslim men and women expressed their frustration with development's long history of promoting secularization and modernization. "People's ideas of 'development' are not formulated in exclusively material terms, nor is progress seen only in purely economic terms" (Haar, 2011 p.11). On the one hand, the push for globalization and secular modernity drove Muslims away from traditional Islam, which created confusion in the way Muslims should understand and relate to the roots of religion in a modern sense. Consider the following quotes:

> "Modernity…is relatively this new idea that you're making progress. That each generation is better than the next, and that progress is a good thing, and that we should abandon tradition and keep moving forward. We see the world differently in Islamic belief; the best generation that has ever lived was in the past we won't do better than them we hold on to traditions much more than people do in the modern society" – Tala.

> "The 21st century and globalization have made the situation more unique than in the past with the way things operate and move in the speed in which things change…I think we need to be more vigilant as Muslims to deal with the issues of modernity…We have to be creative about finding

ways in which the community cohesively and healthily functions in dealing with different things" – Ryan.

"In Pakistan, the elite class... they're very liberal, they follow the Western model which is un-Islamic…So the Islamic resources in Pakistan would be the local muftis, mullahs, who have a very twisted understanding of what Islam is and it's twisted because of the very rich cultural penetrations that have happened through generations…tradition and modernity has been clearly dichotomized on paper at least…90% of the people in England today, I can't speak about the world, in England today from Pakistani community don't have the skill to make that distinction…and that's primarily because of lack of education, exposure to a culture which is hodgepodge of culture and superstition, all sort of values mucked up" – Ibrahim.

On the other hand, participants, in the following quotes, associated modernity with Western ideas of women's liberation. That had negative consequences and contradicted what Islam has brought to empower women fourteen centuries ago.

"Modernity doesn't necessarily have to imply women will get more rights… Islam came 1400 years ago and women were given a lot of the rights were not given before… so when people think of modernity they think of independent women working, having her lifestyle, and these things are not new to Islam. I think there is a perception in the West especially for non-Muslims that modernity for Muslim women…Her taking off her hijab, dressing in an assertive way, not having to stay inside the house…I don't necessarily agree with that because the truth is everybody at the end of the day should have a choice if they want to cover or don't, if you want to work or if they want to be a full-time mom or a full-time wife so I think the word modernity conjures up the wrong ideas and images for people" – Emran

"With respect to women's issues, there's definitely that trend there's that liberal Muslim thing that they wanna have the women lead prayer and Sheikh Hamzah Maqubul is saying that a woman has led *Salah* before in Aqsa for 40 days…it's not like it's something new or modern…there's definitely that trend and it comes from a bit of insecurity that you're not as good as the western people and you don't do it very well" – Tala.

"Modernity is more negative than positive…I think it's a world system that's been implemented to brainwash the masses while they carry on living in this world…People see the outward value of modernity that women's freedom is walking around in bikinis and that we want that and

> we want to be able to tell our parents no…but that's just the lack of morals" – Lina.

Cultures of misogynistic ignorance

> "My husband, may Allah bless him, always tells me: 'Let me tell you a secret. Women are far superior than men but don't tell anybody I said that.'"
>
> Laila, Rihla 2014, Konya, Turkey

Add all the previous ingredients together and a patriarchal culture of ignorance is formulated to perfection. With gender division of labor, absence of female scholar's voice and achievements, disempowered men who are confused about their identities and the roles they are expected to play, a loss of a balanced, logical, authentic Islamic heritage and lack of knowledge about what Islam and what Islam is not, the culture of patriarchy is nourished to:

> "(1) sustain the privileging of certain forms of masculinity, (2) treat most women as if they naturally lack autonomy, and (3) weigh all things deemed to be feminine as of lesser value than those deemed masculine when the discussion turns to topics that matter" (Enloe, 2013 p.11).

Moroccan Muslim feminist Fatima Mernissi argues that "If women's rights are a problem for some modern Muslim men, it is neither because of the Koran nor the Prophet, nor the Islamic tradition, but simply because those rights conflict with the interest of a male elite…Islam was not sent from heaven to foster egotism and mediocrity" (1991 p.ix).

Rihla participant Lina shared the tragedy of her aunt who suffered severe mental and physical abuse by her husband for 35 years. "She tried to commit suicide twice. No one knew because she stayed quiet," said Lina. The aunt decided to leave when the abuse led to injuries that threatened her life. When I asked Lina if the husband was considered a religious person she said: "He owned a store that sells the Qur'an and prayed *fajr* in the mosque everyday." Neither men nor women, who

participated in this study, shied away from using words such as misogyny or chauvinism, confirming the crisis of Islamic knowledge, identity and culture that fuels violence against women within the patriarchal cultural systems of oppression. Consider the following quotes:

> "It obviously has a very misogynistic streak…rooted with human nature when it comes to sort of male dominated communities…the other element which is also equally strong is lack of education…and I don't mean just in secular sense, I mean in religious and secular…I think both those together make a very suitable environment that is readily accommodating to such practices" - Ibrahim.

> "It's easy-to-use religion to justify on points of view, because if you read religion on your own it's very easy to make your own conclusions and you're going to make the conclusions that would make you subconsciously at ease… you want to impose your chauvinism and worldview on the religion…that includes beating your wife by saying that religion says so-and-so" – Faris.

> "It's ignorance, and a lot of ignorance that comes back to culture. If men are brought up in a certain way, that will affect their thinking. A lot of it goes back to culture" – Omar.

> "The problem is that sometimes teachings overlap with people's traditions, and then that group of people favor their tradition over their religious teachings" – Jude.

> "Most of the people come back home whatever that is…from male dominated cultures and so that bleeds into their perspective of the faith…How men interpret it based on their egos or their cultural handicaps, I don't want that" – Nada.

> "Whenever you start a discussion about women in Libya, the first weapon that is used against you is religion…Always…And I didn't have the religious knowledge to come back at that, but also it was terrified of having the conversation because it's a huge taboo and if you use that then the first thing they go after is your "sharaf" your honor" – Reem.

Hegemonic discourses

> "Fox News took time out of four broadcasts on Saturday to apologize for four separate instances of incorrect information that portrayed Muslims in a negative light."
>
> Brian Stelter, money.cnn.com, January 18, 2015

Even though Muslims acknowledged and are appalled by the culture of patriarchy that is misusing Islam to oppress women, they did seem not to appreciate western feminism(s) or the constant negative portrayal of Muslims in western media. They feel that politically and socially dominant discourses cannot be reconciled with the religious Islamic ideas and practices derived from them. To Muslims, religion is the key to understanding violence against women in Muslim communities and exploring ways of using religious resources to solve it. Rihla participant Reem shared her experience initiating a national campaign in Libya in 2013 using Islam to combat domestic violence. The campaign's goal was to shed light on the proper treatment of women in Islam through verses from the Qur'an and Hadiths. "We are an Islamic country—not realizing that Islam could and should be used as a means to combat all forms of violence, rather than an excuse to allow it," said Reem. When I asked her if there was any resistance to the success of the campaign, surprisingly she said opposition came from the more liberal people in and outside Libya.

> "You get resistance from the more liberal, more western liberal society. 'How could you be possibility using religion?' And you have to explain and say that I can't go into community that has never had respect for laws, Libyans in general…laws have never existed in that country, they were based on the whim of one person and those laws were interchangeable with your last name and if you have influence or not…and say that you have to respect international human rights mandates, they're going to be like what are you talking about? These are western ideologies, this is their religion, and not ours so that was unrealistic…all these western organizations saying to me you're not respecting international human rights mandates…I said, I am…but unfortunately, the situation that we're in means that you're going to talk to people in a language that they understand" – Reem.

Other participants were equally upset by the western notion of empowering women, the contradiction of feminism and the way women are objectified in western

media, and the repeated news headlines associating the violent actions of a minority to the larger global Muslim community. Consider the following quotes:

> "I am against this whole idea of empowering women I'm sorry…as long as women are so desperate for the western notion of empowerment they would always be inferior in a sense…by stressing and emphasizing their individualism and their exact literal equality to men in terms of social roles" – Faris.

> "Technology and other things have taken the degradation of women to a whole new level and specifically pornography…I think it desensitizes people and it's desensitizing our youth. The video games, the Hollywood culture, things that they watch, I think desensitizes them to…Seeing women as sex objects…but in the end the responsibility is shared between the genders" – Nada.

> "It's the media, everyone is trying to link the name of Islam to violence. It's funny again because Islam is based on peace…So when you see the media it's very clear there's an attack" – Amr.

> "The culture and media, at least in my country, play a big role…when they emphasize on things to be part of an Islamic culture or part of Islamic tradition…when someone commits a crime, they wouldn't emphasize on his identity, that this wrongdoing is something that happens across cultures and it's not specific to this particular country or religion or nationality…It's not something specific to Muslim culture" – Jude.

Violence against women: a global crime

"Violence against women in the name of 'culture' is pandemic." This is the title that Rochelle Terman, Human Rights Center fellow at UC Berkeley, chose for her article. She discusses incidents of rape, stoning, honor crimes, adultery charges and violence against women in Iran, Iraq, Italy, Nicaragua and Israel. The stories share two common factors: the crimes were considered violations of human rights and were justified by religious discourse, and they happen in religious communities of the west and the rest.

> "Today, women and girls around the world (including those living in "the West") are subject to appalling violence justified in the name of religion, culture, and tradition. They are told that such practices — imprisonment, maiming, torture, even death — are culturally authentic, required by religion, or sanctioned by time-honored tradition. When a woman objects, calling these practices unacceptable violence against women, she is often labeled a heretic, a traitor to her heritage, a Western pawn, a cultural imperialist, or worse" (Terman, 2010)

Violence is a global problem that crosses all religious, cultural, and societal lines, affecting the safety and security of women around the world. Rihla participant Bilal believes it is simplistic to assume that religiously justified cultural violence of women is a problem that exists only in Muslim communities. He refers to places like Africa where the Pentecostal Christians mix and confuse "fragments of their historical tradition" with religion that produces violence. Other participants had similar opinions:

> "Violence to women is something that happens in every community unfortunately and not necessarily Muslim…Domestic violence runs across all communities and women are oppressed in all sorts of cultures and religions" – Tala.

> "The difference between a western drinking and a Muslim with a very long beard both of whom have no control over their *nafs*, they both beat their wives, one would be honest enough to say he was drunk and hit his wife and the other would say that religion says we could" – Fairs.

> "Both Western cultures and cultures in Islamic countries have their share of problems…domestic violence, being chauvinistic, exist in all the cultures" – Emran.

> "In the US…it's a very religious culture in a way. In God We Trust is written on the money. I mean every culture has its underlying problems. If you go to South America women are as objectified as women in the Middle East. If you go to South Asia, women don't sit on the bus next to men. In Japan they have their own trams because of how prominent sexual harassment is. There's a huge fault for women around the world, I don't think a Muslim culture is any worse or any better" – Reem.

Conclusion

> "No religion is responsible for terrorism — people are responsible for violence and terrorism…We are not at war with Islam — We are at war with people who have perverted Islam."
>
> President Barak Obama, Summit on Countering Violent Extremism, 2015

Maha came to Rihla 2014 seeking answers for questions about gender, culture and religion that troubled her. She grew up in a household, in Israel, witnessing her father verbally abuse and physically assault her mother. “My father used to beat my mother and it was culturally and socially accepted,” she said. In his defense, he argued that he was “disciplining” her mother. When Maha tried to stop him, he would justify his violence by saying that Islam allowed it. He used to hit his wife if food was not ready on time, or if she defended herself when confronted with his verbal humiliation. “My cousin also got married five years ago and was beaten almost to death by her husband. It is very difficult.” Until recently, Maha believed that Islam allows violence against women. “In the Qur’an, verse 35 from Chapter 4 clearly indicates to men that beating is allowed,” she said. Yet it is not Maha alone who is confused about Islam, patriarchal cultural practices, violence and Muslim women’s rights. Islam is stigmatized as “the mother of bad ideas”, inherently oppressive and violent and it brings nothing but destruction and delusion to the people who firmly believe in it. Isla, culture and identity do not sit well with the modernist development discourse. Despite Western attempts to modernize and secularize Muslims, they are still trying to cling firmly to their religion – but this resistance allowed negative cultural practices to penetrate the religion, pervert and corrupt the authentic message of Islam including the ways in which women are viewed, evaluated, and treated. Patriarchal Islam has become

the anti-development politics of this century.

Does the Qur'an authorize abuse and violence? How do we balance faith in the divine message while clinging to the outward meanings of controversial verses? Does Islam allow men to 'beat' their wives, kill them in the name of honor, or subordinate them in their communites? Why is it that Muslim communities are not acheiving the desired goals of women's empowerment and gender equality? Canadian Muslim leader, professor of Islamic Studies and interfaith activist, Ingrid Mattson, says that Western efforts must be aware of the importance of religion to Muslim women's identities, cultures and empowerment.

> "Problems arise when Western activists insist that certain beliefs and practices that many Muslim women embrace are inherently oppressive. It is ironic that Western women who claim to be interested in supporting their Muslim sisters are unaware of how deeply paternalistic their attitude is. This lack of self awareness often arises because many women take what they perceive to be oppressive practices or attitudes towards other women personally." (Challenges of Change, Mattson, 2008, p. 28)

Research findings confirm that there is a persistent gap between religion, culture, identity, gender and development theory and pracitce. Mainly because "religion has long been seen as an obstacle to development rather a stone on which to build" (Haar, 2011 p.24). Just recently discourses in international development are realizing that it is important "for secularists not only to collaborate with religious communities…but also to enage in an intellectual debate with religious believers" (Haar, 2011 p.25). But these ideas are still lagging behind in the implementation of women's empowerment and gender equality projects. In her analyses of the intersection of Islam, gender, and development policy and practice in Yemen, Strzelecka argues that despite the gap between theory and practice, "Islam now appears as an interesting

means for gender and development advancement" (2013 p.1). She says that promoting women's rights through Islam "has been seen as a culturally sensitive approach that helps to connect with wider segments of Yemeni society" (2013 p.8).

To get to the bottom of violence against women in Muslim communities, religious and cultural factors need to be considered before formulating development interventions and taking action. Instead of urging people to discard their Islamic identities, cultures and worldviews, the legacy of Muslim men and women must be reinstituted to educate Muslims about the proper way to the fair and equitable treatment of women. Islamic history can not be forgotton or omitted; it is the fundamental basis of people's belief systems. Juergensmeyer asserts that religious violence cannot end until some accommodation can be forged between the two. "The cure for religious violence may ultimately lie in a renewed appreciation of religion itself" (2005 p.243). We also have to consider all underlying factors contributing to violence against women whether affecting men or women, locally or globally, historically or in contemporary times. Also, a huge responsibility lies on the shoulders of Muslim male scholars to change the attitudes of societies against women. In a phone interview, Tamara Gray said that imams and male religious leaders must address the spaces allocated to women in mosques. She believes that the often small, isolated and marginalized prayer rooms in mosques for women and children send all the wrong messages about how women are valued in Muslim communities and thus how they ought to be treated.

> "We provide a tiny room inaccessible not fun to be in or they're locked up in a place with no access to the center of the mosque…this message goes home and at home as a woman you're not important…If we start in the mosque and we change the prayer room…that's an important thing to start with and the messages are going to change" (Gray, 2014, Phone Interview).

After all, Muslims look up to Prophet Mohammed ﷺ as the best role model. Has he ever hit a woman? Has he ever oppressed a woman? Has he ever practiced harmful cultural practices against women? Has he ever used the authority invested in him by Allah to subordinate women or abuse them? Never. In the words of the "agonistic Jew" Lesley Hazelton, Prophet Mohammed ﷺ would be outraged at the state of affairs of women in Muslim communities.

> "Could Muhammad have so radically changed his world without such faith, without the refusal to cede to the arrogance of closed-minded certainty? I think not. After keeping company with him as a writer for the past five years, I can't see that he'd be anything but utterly outraged at the militant fundamentalists who claim to speak and act in his name in the Middle East and elsewhere today. He'd be appalled at the repression of half the population because of their gender. He'd be torn apart by the bitter divisiveness of sectarianism" (Hazleton, TEDGlobal, 2013).

Violence Against Muslim Women is not about religious "fundamentalism" rather it is a more complex and nuanced phenomenon that reveals multiple layers of women's oppression at different scales. Paradoxically, Western efforts to empower women and demand gender justice and equality may be exacerbating violence against women in Muslim countries, as external efforts to foster development based on a model of modernization and secularism are seen as threating and undesirable. Indeed, development, and its treatment of religion, is often discordant with women's values, experiences and aspirations for themselves. Perhaps it is time to think of religion as a double-edge sword where cultures of patriarchy use it to justify violence, yet Muslims can employ it to promote equality and empower women and end violence against them.

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