

https://dspace.org/

The emergence of Islamic feminisms in South Africa in the 1990s

Jeenah, Na'eem

2013-06-03
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/12758

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/



from the cover of the brochure of the MYM Gender Desk

“*A degree above*…”

The Emergence of Islamic Feminisms in South Africa in the 1990s

Naeem Jeenah

"*A degree above*..."

The Emergence of Islamic Feminisms in South Africa in the 1990s

Naeem Jeenah

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (Religious Studies), Faculty of Arts,
University of the Witwatersrand

Johannesburg
June 2001

Declaration

I declare that the contents of this Research Report are original except where duly referenced. This Report has not been submitted previously for any degree to any academic institution.



_____

Naeem Jeenah

for

soraya bosch

and

shamima shaikh

may the equality and justice that they desired be theirs always
and may they be surrounded by fragrance and light forever

Acknowledgements

To Paul Germond for being a teacher, a critical supervisor and a friend, for having confidence in me and for encouraging me to have as much confidence in myself.

To all in the Religious Studies post-graduate class of 2000 for making it a pleasant, stimulating and challenging year.

To all those who trusted me enough to financially assist me through my Masters degree and with this research.

To all family, friends, neighbours and comrades that tolerated my using this Research Report as an excuse for not doing other things and for doing things for me when they believed my excuse.

To Minhāj and Shir'a for helping me to do my homework even though they believed I was too old to be a student.

To Shamima for inspiring me for more than a decade, and then continuing to inspire me even after.

And thanks to The All-Knowing and The Provider for being at my side through a year (and a life) of uncertainty.

wallahu 'alam
And God knows best

Contents

Chapter One
Introduction 1

Chapter Two
Different Strokes for Different Folks
A Survey of Islamic Feminisms in South Africa in the 1990s 7

Chapter Three
Re-reading and Re-thinking
International Islamic Feminist Thought and the South African Link 60

Chapter Four
Re-Acting
The Impact of the National Liberation Struggle 84

Chapter Five
Phambili Makhosikazi
The Potential for the Future 102

Appendix A
Statement by the 23rd Street mosque Women's Jamaah 129

Appendix B
In Defence of a Positive Image of Islam: The Issue of Women's Voices 131

List of Interviews 133

Bibliography 134

Abstract

This Research Report is an investigation of the rise of Islamic Feminisms in South Africa. I argue that:

1. with its roots in developments within the Muslim community in the 1980s, Islamic Feminisms in South Africa flourished from 1990 to 1998.
2. the emergence of Islamic feminisms in South Africa was based on particular readings of Islamic scripture. The process of rereading these scriptures was assisted by a developing international trend towards the reinterpretation of Islamic scriptures from a contextual perspective and specifically the reinterpretation of the Qur'ān and Sunnāh from a feminist perspective.
3. the development of political Islam in South Africa in the 1980s and its interaction with the national liberation struggle was an important factor in the rise of Islamic feminisms.

I will narrate and analyse this history in terms of the development of several key organisations and moments: the Muslim Youth Movement of South Africa and its Gender Desk, the Call of Islam, women's attempts to claim space in the mosques, Muslim Personal Law, Muslim media, the matter of Radio Islam and the funeral of feminist Shamima Shaikh. It is within this history and its broader context of struggle in South Africa that I propose two types of Islamic feminist thought having emerged: activist feminist thought and academic feminist thought. I will analyse these two tendencies and show how the comparative rise of the latter affected the manifestations of Islamic feminisms in the late 1990s.

The high point of Islamic feminisms in South Africa, I show, was in 1997-1998. I argue that the lull in feminist activity from 1998 to 2000 was caused by several reasons, one of which was the increased academicisation of Islamic feminisms in South Africa.

Finally, I lay out and discuss some of the challenges facing Islamic feminists in South Africa for the future. These challenges, if met and addressed, I argue, could result in the re-emergence of Islamic feminisms in South Africa. I thus propose ways in which the Islamic feminist agenda in South Africa can be revived and strengthened.

Chapter One Introduction

> Verily, for all men and women who have surrendered themselves unto God, and all believing men and believing women, and all truly devout men and truly devout women, and all men and women who are true to their word, and all men and women who are patient in adversity, and all men and women who humble themselves [before God], and all men and women who give in charity, and all self-denying men and self-denying women, and all men and women who are mindful of their chastity, and all men and women who remember God unceasingly: for them has God readied forgiveness of sins and a mighty reward.
> (Qur'ān, 33:35)

Muslims have lived in South Africa for over 300 years. The Muslim community is diverse, a diversity which is manifested through differences in race, ethnicity, language, class, politics and jurisprudential schools. Such diversity has often created differences and conflict within the community. Women have been located within this diversity and have generally developed their identities around the above factors. Despite the important community roles women have played, it has been only in the past three decades that the gender roles and the gendered identities as defined by the Muslim community have been seriously questioned, particularly on the basis of Islamic scriptures. Such re-evaluation about the position and role of women within Islam came to a head in the 1990s with the emergence of feminist tendencies that premised themselves on Islam. This brief period then – the decade of the 1990s – is the focus of this Research Report.

As with most communities, the attitudes towards women and gender roles vary within South Africa's Muslim community. On the one extreme there is a significant misogynist tendency paralleling the most conservative Taliban-type[1] Muslim discourse on issues relating to women. On the other extreme there have been emerging feminist tendencies. The latter have become prominent and vocal particularly in the last two decades of the 20th century and have coincided with the increased involvement of Muslims in the struggle against apartheid. Indeed, apartheid and the anti-apartheid struggle, I will argue, provided the backdrop for the emergence of Islamic feminisms in South Africa. Generally, the human rights culture and the emphasis on justice and equality that

came to the fore during and through the anti-apartheid struggle had a logical consequence in the struggle for a non-sexist society. Islamic activists found themselves re-interpreting Islamic scriptures in the cause of an anti-apartheid and anti-capitalist struggle. Such re-interpretation later impacted on the discourse of women's rights as well. However, the development of Islamic feminisms in the 1990s did not occur in isolation of initiatives by Muslim women in the past few decades to assert themselves and gain a greater role for themselves in Muslim society. These women often found allies in men who also argued that Muslim women had greater roles to play in society than traditionally understood.

But what is Islamic feminism and who is an Islamic feminist? And what are the manifestations of this kind of feminism in South Africa? These are among the questions that this Research Report seeks to explore. In the process of exploring these questions, however, I will sometimes impose the label 'feminist' on people that would not – at least publicly – call themselves feminists. Despite Margot Badran's warning that '[i]t is important to be attentive to the identities individuals claim for themselves and not to impose unwanted feminist identity labels on persons,'[2] I will apply the label on people that I regard as feminist and who possibly avoid it for various reasons that I will discuss in Chapter Three. Such application will, however, be based on a definition – within the South African context – of 'Islamic feminism' and 'Islamic feminist' that I will propose.

I will argue in this Research Report that Islamic feminisms exist within South African Islamic discourses and I will show that the emergence of these feminisms in South Africa was based on the following factors:

1. particular types of readings of Islamic scripture. The process of rereading these scriptures was assisted by a developing international trend towards the reinterpretation of Islamic

scriptures from a contextual perspective and, specifically, the reinterpretation of the Qur'ān and Sunnāh from a feminist perspective.

2. the development of political Islam in South Africa in the 1980s and its interaction with the national liberation struggle.

In order to achieve these aims, I will propose a definition of Islamic feminism in terms of the praxis of Muslim women's rights activists throughout the world. I will argue that a liberatory reading of Islamic scripture – the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth – has been the main impetus for a feminist discourse within Islam and will discuss how South African Muslim activists have chosen to read these scriptures from a liberatory perspective in developing Islamic feminisms.

An important element of my hypothesis regarding the emergence of Islamic feminisms in South Africa is that these were developed within the crucible of the anti-apartheid struggle among Islamic activists who attempted to develop a broad Islamic understanding of justice and could not allow themselves to ignore gender justice as part of that understanding. The anti-apartheid jihād[3] with its emphasis on justice and a human rights discourse was, I will argue, an important factor contributing to the gender jihād.

While there has recently been increasing amounts of material written on progressive understandings of women in Islam, not much has been written on the development of Islamic feminisms in South Africa and how contextual forces have shaped them. Indeed, not much has been written on Muslim women's activism in South Africa in general over the past few decades. This study will contribute to an understanding of Islamic feminisms in South Africa, to the theoretical and ideological perspectives informing some of such feminisms, to the role of the new democratic order in influencing them and to an appreciation of the organisations and individuals involved in this movement.

Furthermore, gender studies have – over the past few decades – come to the forefront in the study of religion and the social sciences more generally. Among various religious traditions there is increasing amount of research being done in reviewing the role of women in the religions and attempting to reinterpret religious scripture from feminist perspectives. And, more broadly, gender has become a crucial benchmark in the framing of social dynamics. No reasonable examination of any society can afford to omit a gender perspective. As far as the South African Muslim community is concerned, there is very little scholarship that looks at it as the subject of an examination that uses gender as a basis. This Research Report will contribute to the understanding of the influence of Islam in South Africa in that arena.

I involve myself in this research not as an outsider but as a participant-observer. I have been involved in the Islamic Movement[4] in South Africa since 1980 and thus have first-hand experience with the national liberation struggle and the phenomena of Islamic feminisms as their seeds germinated through the 1980s and as they emerged in the 1990s. These kinds of involvement obviously assist in shaping my understanding of the topic and my passion for the issues discussed. Further, being a participant-observer, I cannot allow this Research Report to be simply descriptive-analytical. While the analysis is obviously based on my own perspectives of the issues at stake, I also provide suggestions for ways in which Islamic feminisms in South Africa may be helped to develop. Having stated my ideological position, I should also state, however, that I am male. I believe that however much a person might be committed to the struggles of oppressed peoples, if one is not of the oppressed group one can never completely identify with and appreciate those struggles. This is as relevant for anti-racist and anti-capitalist struggles as they are for the gender struggle.[5] Of course, with an anti-capitalist struggle, a working-class sympathiser has the option of 'class suicide'. There is, however, no such thing as gender or race suicide. My views in this Report, therefore, are obviously coloured by my gender.

I have divided this Research Report into five chapters. This 'Introduction' is the first chapter. Chapter Two is a lengthy Chapter wherein I will look at and analyse the different strands of Islamic feminism in South Africa, their development in the 1990s and their roots in the 1980s. I divide the decade of the 1990s in this Chapter as well as the rest of this Research Report into two phases: 1990 to 1998 when Islamic feminisms where on the rise and 1998 to 2000 when the phenomenon declined. In Chapters Three and Four I address the question: 'How did we get here?' by examining the two main factors contributing to the emergence of Islamic feminisms in South Africa in the 1990s: liberatory ways of interpreting Islamic scripture (Chapter Three), and the national liberation struggle (Chapter Four). Chapter Three also examines the term 'Islamic Feminism', proposes a definition for it and discusses its place within South African Muslim discourses. Chapter Five looks at the future of Islamic Feminisms in South Africa. This Chapter is based on the analysis in the earlier chapters. It concludes this Research Report by proposing ways in which the Islamic feminist project in South Africa might be strengthened.

[1] The Taliban is the ruling military power in Afghanistan. They have some of the most conservative and fundamentalist notions about various aspects of Islam. One of their excesses for which they have achieved notoriety is their treatment of women. They have been responsible for preventing girls from attaining an education, forcing extremely repressive dress codes on women and forcing women out of employment.
[2] Margot Badran, "Feminisms and Islamisms", *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 10 No.4 (Winter), 1999, 200.
[3] The Arabic word jihād means a struggle or a striving for a particular cause.
[4] The term 'Islamic Movement' carries very special meanings in South Africa. It developed out of the Islamic resurgence movements in the Middle East and the Indo-Pak subcontinent. It was a term that was imported into South Africa by the Muslim Youth Movement (MYM) in the 1970s (see *Islamic Training Programme Manual*, Durban: Muslim Youth Movement, 1981, 8-94 and *Halqa Manual*, Muslim Youth Movement, undated but from the early 1980s, 21H1-21H6). 'Islamic Movement in South Africa' was loosely interpreted as referring to those Muslims that believed in a 'comprehensive understanding of Islam'. In the 1980s it became a contested term as organisations apart from the MYM laid claim to it as well. The definition then changed to accommodate that contestation. It became 'those Muslim individuals and organisations that have a comprehensive understanding of Islam and are part of the anti-apartheid struggle' (Shuaib Manjra, *Islamic Movement in South Africa*, unpublished talk delivered at numerous MYM camps). Thus the definition of the Islamic Movement was broadened to include those organisations that formed the 'three strands' (Farid Esack, "Three Islamic Strands in the South African struggle for Justice", *Third World Quarterly*, 10(2), 473-498) of Muslim anti-apartheid activity in South Africa. I will use 'Islamic Movement' with this latter definition.
[5] I should, however, express my agreement with Maryam Rajavi when she asks, 'In a society where women are second-class citizens, deprived of their genuine rights how can any man claim to be free and not suspect his own humanity? [...] Are men not in bondage too?' Quoted in Farid Esack, "Islam and Gender Justice: Beyond Simplistic Apologia" in (eds.) John C. Raines and Daniel C. Maguire, *What Men Owe to Women: Men's Voices from World Religions*, New York: Suny Press, 2001, 189.

Chapter Two Different Strokes for Different Folks

A SURVEY OF ISLAMIC FEMINISMS IN SOUTH AFRICA IN THE 1990S

Introduction

The Islamic feminist agenda and activism around it in South Africa have been extremely weak between 1998 and 2001. This after most of the decade of the 1990s had seen many of the peaks of Islamic feminist activity and Islamic feminist discourses. Nevertheless, there exist a range of feminisms in the Muslim community in ways that might often not be clearly visible or identifiable. Many of these might not even want to consider themselves feminist.

The past decade has seen the rise of different strands of Islamic feminism in South Africa. I will look at some of these in this Chapter. For most of this Research Report I will use a working definition of feminism as used by Ziba Mir-Hosseini. She understands feminism as being 'a general concern with women's issues; an awareness that women suffer discrimination at work, in the home and in society because of their gender; and action aimed at improving their lives and changing the situation'.[1] Apart from the feminist activities and thought that fall within this definition, there are also other forms of self-assertion by women in the public domain that I will not be discussing in this Chapter. While I would not consider these expressions as necessarily feminist, they are important indicators of the kind of impact that the Islamic feminist discourse has had on the Muslim community. It must be noted here that there are also many Muslim women that are feminists but whose basis for their feminism is not premised on Islam. These I refer to as 'secular feminists'.[2] This is a group whose activities and contributions fall outside of the scope of this Research Report.

This Chapter will focus on the most overt expressions of the attempts at the emancipation of women within the Muslim community. My objective here is not to focus on individuals but rather on discourses, flash point events and organisations. I will particularly use as examples the Muslim

Youth Movement of South Africa (and its Gender Desk), the Call of Islam and Muslim academics – most of whom were, at some stage, associated with one or other of the above organisations. While using these organisations as examples, I will also examine certain events, institutions and debates as contributing to the general state of Islamic feminisms in South Africa in the 1990s. These include the Muslim Personal Law Board; the Claremont Main Road Mosque in Cape Town; a short-lived but unique Muslim prayer congregation in Mayfair, Johannesburg; the monthly community newspaper *Al-Qalam*, the Muslim community radio station in Johannesburg, *The Voice;* the matter of the conservative Radio Islam and the funeral of an Islamic feminist.

I will begin these discussions with a review of the way in which gender is perceived in certain sectors of the Muslim community. I do not here intend to cover all the Muslim positions around the issue of gender but only those positions espoused by people who argue for some kind of women's public assertion.

How equal is equal?

The question regarding the equality of women and men is one that will result in many different answers if asked to a group of Muslims. Muslims generally would not want to give the impression that they believe that women and men are not equal in status. However, an objective examination of Muslim discourses about women will reveal a range of positions. Without unduly simplifying the issue, one can say that there are three broad positions on this question – internationally as well in South Africa. On the one extreme there are those that argue that women are inherently inferior to men; secondly, there are those who argue that women and men are not equal but that they are 'complementary' to each other; and on the other extreme there are those who argue for complete gender equality. (I refer here to the theoretical positions held by people and groups. Whether their practice is consistent with the theory is another matter.)

As I pointed out, the division of the women discourse in Islam into these three categories is not unique to South Africa. Mir-Hosseini's analysis of the debate around gender in Iranian society shows the parallels of these categories in that society and those discourses. She describes the categories as: 'gender inequality' (of 'the traditionalists'), 'gender balance' (of the 'neo-traditionalists') and 'gender equality' (of 'the modernists').[3] I prefer not to use the labels (traditionalist, neo-traditionalist and modernist)[4] but accept her nomenclature for the three positions (gender inequality, gender balance and gender equality) as being representative of the South African Muslim scenario as well. Her methodology and criteria in dividing the discourse is also one that I find useful for the South African context.

The rest of this section will focus on the latter two of the above three positions – gender balance and gender equality. However, before proceeding, a few points need to be made regarding the first – gender inequality.

It is certain conservative sections of the South African Muslim community that hold the position that Islam clearly promotes a regime of gender inequality. These notions are argued on the basis of certain verses from the Qur'ān, some aḥādīth and statements by Muslim scholars. The following are some of (the interpretations of) such quotations:

> Women shall have rights similar to the rights against them, according to what is equitable; but men have a degree over them (Qur'ān 2:228).
> Men are in charge of women (Qur'ān 4:34).
> I have not seen anyone more deficient in intelligence and religion than you [women] (ḥadīth).[5]
> And stay quietly in your houses, and make not a dazzling display, like that of the former times of ignorance (Qur'ān 33:33).

This position also includes in its discourse its perspective of the inherent nature of women. According to this perspective, women have been created defective in intelligence and in religion; women are gossip-mongers; women are untrustworthy; women are concerned mainly with their own adornment.[6] These perspectives on women's nature obviously influence their positions in

terms of the roles that women should or may have within Muslim society. I will return to re-examine the kind of quotes above from the Qur'ān and ḥadīth from a feminist perspective in Chapter Three. For now, it is sufficient to note that such a position does exist in the South African discourse about women in Islam.

Having briefly discussed the first position I will now discuss the two other positions – beginning with the one that espouses gender equality as being most consistent with Islam.

Equal is Equal – Gender Equality

Despite what might be regarded as androcentric sacred texts and despite majority Islamic scholarly opinion suggesting that Islam's perspective is not one of gender equality, there is a strong position within Islamic discourses arguing that women and men are indeed equal. This is not an argument unique to South Africa; there are female and male scholars around the world who argue this perspective. In general, the exponents of this position are mainly Muslims in the West – though not necessarily born in the West. For many, their attempt has been to engage the West and to engage with modernity in developing a contextual understanding of Islam. To a large extent, those in the Muslim world who argued for gender equality generally did so from a secular rather than an Islamic perspective. Recently, however, there is increasing evidence of Islamic gender equality discourses having taken root in parts of the Muslim world as well. Iran is a good example of this kind of discourse.

The South African Muslim gender equality lobby only really engaged in a confident discourse on its position in the early 1990s. Although the Call of Islam said in 1984 that it believed in 'the equality of men and women and in the liberation of the Muslim woman from legacies pertaining to the period of Muslim decline',[7] it did not explain what its 'equality and freedom' meant. Nor did it provide any objective criteria for understanding equality and inequality. This is not surprising

considering that the organisation was not too concerned about careful – especially written – debates but more concerned about 'doing'.[8] The Call's position was, however, the most progressive position at the time. In the 1990s, however, the confidence of the Muslim gender equality activists increased to the extent that they were willing to openly argue for their positions and were willing to engage in scriptural debates around these positions. (The factors that assisted in the development of these strong and unambiguous positions will be dealt with in the next two chapters.)

Thus in 1993 the Muslim Youth Movement could establish a 'Gender Desk' and in 1994 the Gender Desk's National Coordinator, Shamima Shaikh, could propose to the organisation's National Executive a 'Gender Equality Campaign'.[9] Throughout the 1990s the term 'gender equality' was extensively and unapologetically used. Esack says that the objective for Islamic feminists today is an uncompromising gender equality.[10] While his earlier arguments have been that the seeds for gender equality do exist in Islamic scripture, of late he expounds a view that the Qur'ān itself is a patriarchal text – almost suggesting that gender equality within Islam must be attained despite rather than because of the Qur'ān.[11]

Another 1990s women's rights activist, Sa'diyya Shaikh, also alludes to the new 'equality' discourses when she writes about that period: 'Gender equality thus became an intrinsic part of the agenda for an Islamic struggle and earlier understandings of gender and women's rights were subjected to interrogation and critique.'[12]

Having discussed the two extreme positions in South African Muslim discourse regarding the position of women in Islam – that of gender inequality and that of gender equality – I will now turn to a discussion of the third and middle position – gender balance.

Equal is not really Equal – Gender balance

The middle position between gender inequality and gender equality is one of gender balance. This position is not misogynistic like the first one. Indeed, many of the women who strongly hold this position are active in the community, in the economy and in society generally. However, they argue that men and women have been created in complementarity rather than equality. Mir-Hosseini's summary of this middle position in Iranian society mirrors that in South Africa:

> They are intent on finding an Islamic solution to the pressing issues of gender but, although they seek new interpretations of the shari'a, they dismiss equality in rights and duties as a Western concept with no place in Islam.[13]

Those holding this position include a range of people. Many of them argue for the right of women to participate in Muslim public life, to work, to be educated, etc. However, for them, women and men have their respective places in society. Men are undoubtedly heads of households while women are the nurturers of children. These understandings are also based on the understanding of inherent differences between the genders.

This group includes many women and women's organisations involved with welfare and propagation work. Organisations like the Women's Cultural Group are very active in the Muslim community in a range of activities that see women engaging in the public domain. Yet, their position on the relation of the genders is that women and men and complementary to each other rather than being equal. The Group's Zuleikha Mayat[14] makes it clear that, for Muslim women, looking after the family is the priority. The same view is echoed by Fatema Hoosen,[15] an early MYM female member and currently involved with a few organisations involved with social welfare.

Before concluding this brief description of the position of 'gender balance' it is necessary to state that this position was also held until the late 1980s within the MYM. In this period, then, the Call of Islam was the only Muslim organisation using the equality rhetoric. Abdul Rashied Omar, then

president of the MYM, spoke as late as 1989 about 'the full humanity and equivalence of women'.[16] 'Equivalence' was the codeword for complementarity, as opposed to equality. Interestingly, he based his statement on his reading of the works of Mernissi, Riffat Hassan, Aziza al-Hibri and Nawal El Saadawi, all of whom argue strongly for gender equality. This was the period in the MYM when the women's rights discourse was taking front stage.

A Decade of Gender Jihād

In this section I will focus on some of the more overt expressions of Islamic feminism that have manifested themselves in South Africa in the 1990s. The focus here will not be on individual feminists but on organisations, significant moments and discourses. The organisations and moments I will discuss are: the Muslim Youth Movement of South Africa (and its Gender Desk), the Call of Islam, the Muslim Personal Law Board, the Claremont Main Road Mosque in Cape Town, the Mayfair prayer congregation, the newspaper *al-Qalam*, Muslim community radio station *The Voice*, the matter of Radio Islam's preventing women's voices on air and the funeral of Islamic feminist Shamima Shaikh.

Muslim Youth Movement of South Africa and MYM Gender Desk

The Muslim Youth Movement was established in 1970 in Durban, and since its inception had dealt with some elements of what could be part of a women's agenda. These elements included inviting foreign women guests for speaking tours; establishing a Women's Council; campaigning for women to be allowed spaces in mosques and attempting to form a 'Women's Islamic Movement'. The 'women in mosques' campaign attracted the most vitriolic response from the 'ulamā.[17] The MYM campaigned for mosques to provide some facilities where Muslim women could pray. Most mosques in South Africa's northern provinces have no such facilities. Abdulkader Tayob[18] shows that in that period – the 1970s – the MYM argued for a 'parallel development' of women within

society, implying that women and men should have separate spheres within which they operated. The 'Women's Islamic Movement' was an attempt to entrench this separation. Such separation was also evident at most major MYM programmes until the mid-1980s.

The MYM saw itself as part of an international Islamic resurgence movement and one of the tasks it set itself from the beginning was to bring to South Africa a range of international guest speakers to help develop its revivalist agenda. Many of these had some association with the Ikhwanul Muslimoon (Muslim Brotherhood) in Egypt. Tayob presents an excellent analysis of the movement from its formation until 1990 and covers the various different phases it went through. As with other international Islamic resurgence movements at the time, the involvement of women in Muslim life was important for the MYM. The movement's insistence on the public involvement of women was one of the main reasons for it earning the ire of the conservative 'ulamā. For the 'ulamā, the MYM's call for women to be accommodated in the mosques – especially in the provinces of Natal and Transvaal – and its 'mixed gatherings' – conventions, youth camps and other programmes where men and women participated together even though segregated – were a deviancy from the Islam that they had been promoting. The MYM's positions on these issues also served as a challenge to the hegemony that the 'ulamā held in terms of religious knowledge because the movement had to interpret Islam in different ways in order to justify its more women-friendly positions. Such reinterpretation flew in the face of the 'ulamā who argued that only they had the right to interpret and explain Islam.

Thus MYM members were labelled non-believers and hypocrites from the organisation's earliest attempts – in the 1970s – to provide more public space for women.[19] Indeed, its views on women was one of the pillars of its denunciation by the 'ulamā.[20] I must point out, however, that the MYM was not the first organisation to fight for women's public space nor was it the first organisation to be attacked by the 'ulamā for this. Another example is the Women's Cultural Group, formed in

1954. Although focussing mainly on cultural activities and activities that are stereotyped as being women's work and although not confronting the 'ulamā, the Group still managed to attract the anger of the conservative clergy.[21] However, the MYM was more dangerous because it was the first *national* organisation to raise these issues, it made the issue of Muslim women's public participation an Islamic issue and, being led by men, could not as easily be dismissed or controlled by the 'ulamā.

Having said this, however, it must be noted that the understanding of the reasons within the MYM of the involvement of women in public life was not uniform. On the one hand, Jadwat talks of women 'being there' in the MYM 'from the beginning' – mainly the wives of those who formed the organisation – and of their roles in various MYM activities. This includes their travelling around the country (only women) with female guest speakers in the 1970s. His account gives the impression of assertive women who confidently took their place in the organisation.[22] Also, the fifth guiding principle of the MYM in the 1970s stated that 'Muslim women [were] an integral part of the whole programme' of the movement and that unity of the Muslim community could not be achieved without the active participation of women.[23] On the other hand, we note that the articulation of the public role of women was a male articulation that was sometimes quite condescending. A good example is one of the motivations for wanting to get women to mosques: they were deprived of Islamic knowledge because their lives 'pivot around cinema, pop music, fashion-shopping, cheap love-story books, gossip'.[24] Thus, the 'discourse on the liberation of women in the first decade within the MYM had an ambiguous tenor'.[25]

It must be noted here that the issue of women's rights has been for many years the interface of the different discourses between conservatives and Islamists/modernists/progressives. Tayob explains how the MYM's campaign to get women into mosques and its 'mixed gatherings' of women and men drew the ire of the 'ulamā.[26] Women's participation was an issue that neither side was willing

to compromise on. Yet, as with most such battles, both sides *did* compromise. Jadwat[27] points out that in the circles of the ultra-conservative international Tabligh Jamaat, South Africa is unique because of its women's programmes. These are weekly programmes organised for only women where Tabligh Jamaat books are read by women to each other. Usually the passages to be read are selected by the male members in the locality. Of late there have also been parallel programmes to the all-male *ijtimas* that the Tabligh Jamaat organises. The *ijtimas* attract thousands of Muslim males. The new trend has women having a parallel programme – usually at homes. This means that women often travel between cities (with male family members).[28] According to Jadwat,[29] this trend has been a direct result of the pressure on Muslim society in South Africa from groups like the MYM to involve women in Islamic activities.

On the other hand, the MYM also responded to the pressure to cease their 'mixed gatherings'. In the 1970s and 1980s MYM national programmes sometimes resulted in tension between the more liberal (on the issue of female-male interaction) Cape contingent and the Transvaal and Natal contingents which were concerned about the conservative backlash. Such concern from the Transvaal and Natal members often resulted in an ambiguous response to the participation of women, a response which varied between regions and changed at different times. For example, the MYM's annual national Islamic Tarbiyyah Programme (ITP) in 1980 had women and men praying the same space, with women at the back. During the ITP in 1986, on the other hand, women and men were separated by an elaborate curtain which could be fully closed during prayers and partially opened during lectures. The MYM rallies (in the early 1980s) which attracted more than 1 000 youth living together over a five-day period were also characterised by elaborate arrangements of hundreds of metres of sacking that provided a complete separation between women and men – whether in lecture venues or in the open field which connected these venues with the eating or sleeping quarters. All of these very creative devices were to prevent the organisation being attacked

by the conservatives. However, the MYM had resigned itself to a life in a separate sphere from the ‘ulamā and this resignation protected it from greater capitulation.

While in the 1970s the main ‘women’s issues’ that the MYM focussed on were mosque access for women and participation of women in Islamic activities like lectures and its own programmes like conventions and camps, in the 1980s that focus changed somewhat. The decade of the 1980s saw women entering the organisation on their own rather than as wives of male activists. Most of these were university and high school students. Many of them, like their male counterparts, occupied a hazy organisational space between the MYM and – what had by now become its student wing – the Muslim Students Association (MSA).[30] The MSA was the more radical of the two organisations and the more politically active. Women’s participation in Islamic activities became less of an issue as the students were more relaxed on this issue and had a natural interaction between the genders at educational institutions. MSA programmes were also not segregated like the MYM’s. As the MYM and MSA got more involved in political activity, women also automatically formed part of marches, demonstrations and protests. Thus, while in the 1970s the MYM tried to convince the Muslim community of the need for women to be in the mosques and lecture halls, in the 1980s it was drawing women into the streets as well.

The latter part of the 1980s saw other issues around women making their appearance in the MYM’s discourse. The issues the organisation began grappling with included Muslim women’s leadership in the community (including within its own structures) and – most significantly – the notion that Islamic scriptures should be reread in a contextual manner that revealed more women-friendly interpretations. This latter process was spearheaded in the organisation’s Western Cape region by then Deputy President of the MYM – Maulana Ebrahim Moosa.[31] Indeed, both the women’s leadership and the contextualisation of scriptures issues became prominent with the accession to national leadership of Abdul Rashied Omar (as president) and Ebrahim Moosa (as National

Director).[32] With their ideas of the contextualisation of scripture, they began a new phase in the history of the organisation. Increased political activity, interfaith relations and women's rights became among the most important issues on the MYM's agenda.[33]

Moosa organised regular workshops with selected activists to reread the Qur'ān's verses on women. Suddenly, the organisation whose female activists had begun a new fashion trend in schools and universities early in the 80s with their insistence on wearing headscarves (at great personal cost) began asking whether headcoverings were even a requirement in Islam. This development was not an even one throughout the organisation. Most of this new thinking was happening in the Western Cape with only a handful of activists from other parts of the country attempting to keep abreast. Others were very uncertain about the new language of 'contextualisation' and 'hermeneutics'. I remember that at the movement's annual national Islamic Training Programme in December 1988 there was acrimony even between female activists from the Western Cape on the headscarf issue as – for the first time – women without regulation headcoverings were chairing sessions and speaking.

As much as innovative readings of the Qur'ān made many MYM activists uncomfortable, the issue of women's leadership also posed a dilemma for the MYM. While the MSA had elected two women to its National Executive in 1984,[34] the MYM elected a woman to its National Executive only six years later, in 1990. Fatima Noordien became the first woman to become a member of the MYM's National Executive when the 1990 General Assembly decided to include regional chairpersons on the National Executive.[35] Noordien had just been elected Western Cape regional chairperson. This followed about four years of debate about the level of leadership that women could occupy according to Islam. Noordien was very much part of this debate, arguing on the basis of the Qur'ān that women should be able to play leadership roles.[36] Women's oath of allegiance to the Prophet meant their full participation in the politics of the time, she argued. She based her argument on 60:12:

> O Prophet! When believing women come to thee to take the oath of fealty to you, that they will not associate in worship any other thing whatever with Allah, that they will not steal, that they will not commit adultery (or fornication), that they will not kill their children, that they will not utter slander, intentionally forging falsehood, and that they will not disobey you in any just matter – then do you receive their fealty, and pray to Allah for forgiveness (of their sins): for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

According to Firdouza Waggie, Noordien's election was part of a larger 'questioning of women's roles'.[37]

In 1990 the MYM launched its 'Women's Rights Campaign'. It was one of a package of changes that the organisation made at the 1990 General Assembly. Other changes included changing the membership structure of the organisation from its previously 'cadre-based' to a new 'open-membership' structure. New regions were added and a decision was taken to focus the recruitment drive of the organisation in African areas. Its activities were separated into three areas: organising, education and campaigns. The women's rights campaign was one of three campaigns the movement decided on.[38] This GA also saw the election of the first African president of the MYM – Shaikh Tahir Sitoto. Sitoto believes there's a definite link between his election, the entry of African members into the organisation and the rise of feminism in the movement:

> At that General Assembly Africans were a handful. I think women members threw their votes behind us. Menfolk in the MYM were dead against electing an African president. The women's voice in the MYM made a big difference in terms of people influencing the leadership structures in the organisation. During that particular time a discourse developed that to make the Islamic movement relevant you must have African leadership and to make it relevant it also had to focus on the women's agenda. Thus Africanising went hand in hand with gender issues.[39]

According to Sitoto, African members in the organisation were not necessarily more gender sensitive, but 'the cultural background was much more relaxed and liberal when it came to interaction.' For him the toyi-toyi culture embraced by the MYM was an example of such cultural influence. 'There was no way you could have a toyi-toyi for the men and a [separate] toyi-toyi for the women.'[40]

The two projects of 'Africanisation' and the women's rights campaign were to change the MYM forever. 'The problem of emancipating women,' noted a Women's Rights Campaign brochure, 'is to change the overall relationship between male and female.'[41] The brochure lists as one of its objectives: 'To examine the various verses in the Qur'an that contain "both the potential for oppression and liberation" of women and look at exploiting the latter.' It lists 14 issues 'in which women are unjustly treated', including 'women in mosques', 'Muslim personal law' and 'women's leadership'.

For the next three years, however, the campaign did not have a national character but was taken up in an ad-hoc manner and unevenly in the different regions. One of the strong manifestations of the campaign was in Transvaal where the focus became women's access to mosques. However, unlike in the past when the MYM contented itself with speaking and writing pamphlets about the issue, MYM women now decided on a more confrontational approach. Just before the Muslim month of Ramadan in 1993, MYM women activists anonymously printed and distributed pamphlets calling on women to attend the *Tarāwīh* prayer daily at the 23rd Street Mosque in Fietas, Johannesburg. Women's defiance of the mosque committee and the committee's almost violent responses to it drew much media attention – especially for the leader of the campaign, Shamima Shaikh, a rising star in the MYM. The action was the main impetus for the MYM's General Assembly deciding later that year to form the MYM Gender Desk with Shaikh as its national coordinator.

The mission statement of the Gender Desk said:

> Committed to the Islamic values of justice, freedom and equality, the MYM Gender Desk focuses on gender issues in order to transform society and affirm people's humanity through education, campaigns and the empowerment of women.[42]

The mission statement illustrated a shift in the thinking of the MYM. It did not speak of women or women's rights but rather of 'gender issues'. Further, its objectives were clear: 'to transform society and affirm people's humanity' (note, again, the deliberate omission of 'women' in favour of

'people's humanity'. However, key to the agenda of the Desk was also a transformation of the movement itself. Waggie says that following Moosa's classes and the women's leadership debates upto 1990, women realised that they had been marginalized in the MYM. The Gender Desk, she says, was one response to such marginalisation.[43]

The Gender Desk was represented on the National Executive of the organisation by its National Coordinator and became an effective structure promoting gender equality and the agenda of Islamic feminism within the organisation and the Muslim community as a whole. Yet the Desk never claimed for itself the title 'feminist'. The first time that Shaikh publicly applied the label 'feminist' to herself was at an MYM training programme in 1997, three weeks before her death.[44] Female and male members of the organisation from all over the country identified with the agenda of the Desk and its various campaigns. These included the attempt to get Muslim women 'equal access' to Muslim institutions and the campaign for a 'Just Muslim Personal Law'. The Gender Desk also supported the idea of a national federation of Muslim women in South Africa and the development of 'networks with local and international, Muslim and other, women's organisations' – even those without the same feminist agenda – and publicity and lobbying for Muslim women's rights.[45]

Crucial to these activities was an education programme and, particularly, the distribution to gender desk coordinators and MYM activists of publications explicating its Islamic feminist agenda. While Moosa had made some international Islamic feminist material available to MYM women previously, this was limited to a small group in the Western Cape. Now a broader range of members – even in remote rural areas – were receiving Gender Desk 'Education Packs' on a range of issues. The packs contained readings by scholars like Amina Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, Fazlur Rahman as well articles by local gender equality activists. Issues dealt with in these readings included abortion, modernist interpretations of women in Islam and Muslim Personal Law. The Desk also organised a number of workshops on issues related to women and Islam. These were targeted not only at MYM

members but also at women and women's organisations – an attempt by the Gender Desk to allow a broader range of women to take ownership of gender equality agenda.

Another important development was the Gender Desk Divorce Support Group in Cape Town. This was one of the initiatives that the Gender Desk pointed to as one of its practical community outreach activities as compared to its educational, propaganda and lobbying activities. Through the group, divorced Muslim women and women with marital problems received emotional as well ideological support. The group served upto 30 women at a time.[46] For Shamima Shaikh, the divorce support group – which began in 1996 and still exists – was an integration of the strategies of presenting the Qur'ān as a 'source of empowerment for women' and of providing immediate relief to those women who were victims of the lack of that empowerment.[47]

Lest the above paints too rosy a picture of the MYM's move towards feminism, it must be noted that the passage of these structures and campaigns in the organisation were not always smooth. Shaikh repeatedly complained about how marginalized she felt whenever she – as National Gender Desk coordinator – presented proposals to the organisation's national executive meetings. The proposals, she said, were never engaged with; they would simply be adopted. Waggie was even more critical. She also mentioned the 'silence from the men' as regards the Desk and its work. The Gender Desk, she said was 'too ambitious; the MYM wasn't ready for it'.[48] (I will deal with more of these criticisms in Chapter Five when I look at the role of men in the Islamic feminist project.)

I have shown that the Muslim Youth Movement has been active in attempting to provide more space for women within the Muslim community since its formation in 1970. These attempts have often had an ambiguous tenor with regional differences and vigorous criticism by the 'ulamā affecting how forcefully the organisation was willing to take up women's issues. The women's issues that the organisation dealt with also changed from the 1970s to the 1980s as women became

more active in the organisation and acquired leadership positions from the late 1980s. The 1990s saw a feminist discourse emerging within the MYM with its 'Women's Rights Campaign' and the formation of the MYM Gender Desk.

I now turn to the other organisation that played an important role in the emergence of Islamic feminisms in the 1990s – the Call of Islam.

Call of Islam

Despite holding some of the most progressive Muslim positions on women in the 1980s, the involvement of the Call of Islam in the Islamic feminist arena in the 1990s was extremely limited. Indeed, its ideological and strategic positions around the issue of women actually became less progressive. It is important, however, to review some of the positions and activities – related to issues of women – of the Call in the 1980s and examine how these affected the rise of Islamic feminisms in the 1990s.

In 1983, 'a small group of dissidents who refused to sever their links with the UDF'[49] broke away from the MYM-MSA to form a group called Muslims Against Oppression. Within a year, it changed its name to 'Call of Islam' and became an organisation rather than the loose grouping of people it had been. Esack, Ebrahim Rasool, Adli Jacobs and Shamiel Manie left the MYM when they did not succeed in convincing it and the MSA to affiliate to the ANC-aligned United Democratic Front (UDF). From 1984 until the late 1980s the Call captured the forefront in the articulation of women's rights among Muslim groups. One of its 'badges' in the Muslim and activist community in the Western Cape was its position on gender equality.[50] An early Call brochure had 'On Women' as the first point under the heading 'What is our line' and said:

> We believe in the equality of men and women and in the liberation of the Muslim woman from legacies pertaining to the period of Muslim decline. We believe that our country will never be free until its women are also free from oppressive social norms.[51]

The four male founders of the Call ensured that they maintained control over the organisation for much of its life – even when it moved beyond just the Western Cape where it was started.[52] Esack was national coordinator until his acrimonious departure from the organisation in 1989.[53] Thereafter, Rasool took over as coordinator. Especially in the early years, the organisation functioned like a typical vanguardist organisation with a tightly-controlled small membership core and secrecy but drawing in people from beyond its ranks to be involved in its campaigns. A person could not simply become a member of the organisation but was recruited. The recruitment included an interview which determined whether the person was acceptable membership material.[54] In many ways, this method of working was adopted from the MYM. The Call managed, however, to pull together hundreds of Muslim activists – beyond its membership – to support its activities.

One of the Call's strong positions was its insistence that Muslims needed to work with the oppressed from other religious communities in the struggle against apartheid. 'It … broke new ground in South Africa,' said Esack, 'with its unambiguous embracing of Christians and Jews as "brothers and sisters" and "believers".'[55] The Call affiliated to the South African chapter of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) soon after the WCRP was launched by Bishop Desmond Tutu in 1983. The Call was often attacked within the Muslim community for working with people of other faiths but it finally managed to make inter-faith relations more acceptable among Muslims. In 1987 it managed to also draw the MYM into this agenda.[56] The Call's inter-faith focus, together with the attention it gave in its publication – *Call of Islam* – to women and the environment made it a very different organisation to any other in the country.

However, its main focus was political activity and most of its work was subordinated to its political agenda. While initially the organisation held internal training programmes – especially *halaqāt* (study groups) similar to the MYM model, as the organisation grew it became consumed by the

political struggle – prosecuted from within the UDF. The effect of this will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter Four. Because of the manner in which it operated and its specific political focus, the Call was not forced to engage in the same internal struggles as the MYM did. It never really had an African membership and thus the internal balancing act of integrating people of different races into one organisation was not a challenge for it. Even when it expanded into the Transvaal province, the organisation operated as two organisations – one in the Western Cape and one in Transvaal[57] – and therefore did not face the trauma of regional integration.

Gender interaction within the organisation was very free and at a public level the Call attempted to force mixing between women and men. It deliberately appointed women marshals for marches and funerals and ensured that its activists mixed with members of the opposite gender in public meetings. Internally, men and women met together, prayed together and had mixed *halaqāt*. The issue of women's leadership was an issue of debate only at the very beginning of its organisational life,[58] about four years before it began to be debated in the MYM. Within a short period the issue was resolved – at least among the four founders – and there was then a move to put women into leadership positions within the organisation.

Women became leaders of the *halaqāt*, but many were reluctant to take on more involved leadership roles. Adli Jacobs mentions Masthura Sadan who was active in the Call from the beginning and was a key person in promoting the involvement of women. She, however, was 'reluctant' to take up a leadership position within the organisation despite her confident and active involvement in activities and structures outside the Muslim community. Many activist Call women had a general sense of confidence but 'as soon as they stepped into' the Call 'a shyness descended', said Jacobs.[59] The organisation even attempted to *force* women into leadership positions but, as Jacobs said, 'What was the point of eight men forcing three women to lead it'. An attempt was then made to recruit women with leadership potential. In 1987 Rosieda Shabodien was accepted as a

member and was quickly appointed an 'ameera'.[60] The rapidity of her appointment, however, was the cause of some unhappiness among other members.[61] Nevertheless, by 1989 the Call's 12-person executive consisted of seven women.[62] Despite this, however, Esack said that the organisation did not have any women leaders and that it was always controlled by the four founding members.[63] The implication seems to be that even though women were ameeras, they – together with the other ameers – actually functioned in a second-tier leadership capacity, the first tier being occupied by the (male) founder members.

Apart from a very successful 'Women's Week' of activities in 1989, the Call did not organise activities especially focussing on women. According to Jacobs, this was because the Call's strategy was to mainstream certain issues into other aspects of its work. Hence its policy of having women chair meetings, being marshals, etc was supposed to serve the purpose of conscientising the Muslim community about the role women should play. This strategy of not being too upfront with the debates around women's issues also, however, protected the Call from having to defend and protect its ideological positions on women in a practical day-to-day manner. Thus the feminist agenda slowly slipped from the Call's bigger agenda. And the heightened levels of anti-apartheid activity in the late 1980s meant that Call activists were drawn into national political issues with little time for internal (Muslim) issues.

There were two other reasons for women's issues becoming less important to the Call. Firstly, in its efforts to draw in the 'ulamā into the liberation struggle, the Call was willing to compromise on some of its positions that were unpalatable to Islamic conservatism. One of these was women's equality. I showed earlier how the Muslim conservatives responded to the gender mixing of the MYM and how the MYM responded to the attacks against it for its attempts at greater involvement of Muslim women in community activities. As with the MYM, the Call was not immune from such attacks and was also often forced to respond to maintain its legitimacy. When the Call was just a

Western Cape organisation, the need to be concerned about such criticism was not as great because of the more liberal attitude in the Cape to gender mixing. However, when the Call began recruiting members in Transvaal – around 1986 – and began to flirt with the 'ulamā – particularly the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC) – in the Cape, its practical expressions of its position on women began to be diluted. An example was a play staged by the Call of Islam, which raised many controversial issues in the Muslim community – including the role of women.[64] The play received very negative responses from the MJC and the Call decided to tone down some parts of it.

Unlike the MYM, the Call was keen to develop relationships with the 'ulamā fraternity to be able to draw them into the anti-apartheid struggle. Nationally, the 'ulamā controlled the main communication medium in the Muslim community – the Friday mosque pulpit. The Call recognised that this could become an effective tool for mobilising the Muslim community for the struggle. Furthermore, the symbolism of having 'ulamā supporting a cause could be extremely useful to an organisation. With the Call having clergy like Esack and Imam Hassan Solomons in its leadership, it was easier for it (than for the MYM) to develop relationships with the MJC and to pull the MJC into the UDF. This relationship then also allowed the Call greater access to the mosques. Furthermore, the Call always argued that as an activist organisation it needed to use a policy of *tadrij* (gradualism) and to 'take the community from where it is'.[65] This in itself meant being cautious about how it articulated women's issues. Also, the Call's position was that

> the 'ulamā was a reflection of our community; very much part of our community. They articulated the more conservative positions in the community. The relationship between us and the 'ulamā was mutual respect, disdain and awe.[66]

Such a relationship persisted even though, as Jacobs said, 'The 'ulamā is a mistress you don't want to tell anyone else about.'[67] And the relationship meant that the Call had to be cautious about what it said and did. In Jacobs' words:

> There was guardedness but not because they were the 'ulamā. If they were to oppose us it would defeat the purpose of being an organisation. This guardedness *did* influence how we

> interacted and put forward the issue of women. When we read ‘‘ulamā’ we read ‘the community’.[68]

But such relationships had their own compromises – for both sides. One of those compromises for the Call was a toning-down of its women’s agenda from the late-1980s.

The second issue that resulted in the Call being less vociferous about women’s issues was its political role. This was so in the 1980s, but more so in the 1990s. In the 1980s everything had to form part of a strategy for an anti-apartheid struggle. Even though Call members, especially Esack, were vociferous on public platforms about women’s involvement, most agendas had to be subservient to the political one.

From 1989 the Call went through an extremely turbulent period. Esack left the organisation;[69] the organisation was plagued by internal dissension on a range of issues; *halaqāt* disintegrated; ‘’89 was a period we couldn’t cope with’.[70] This was followed by a period during which the Call focussed on only two issues: the internal dissension and the dynamics of the UDF having to transform itself to become part of the ANC. Both of these were extremely trying for the Call. The Call’s very existence seemed to depend on the UDF, whose activists were leaving and whose funding had dried up.

Nevertheless, the 1990s saw exciting political activity in South Africa. Political organisations like the African National Congress were unbanned; Nelson Mandela was released from prison after 27 years; negotiations between the broad anti-apartheid movement and the apartheid government began and required the vigilance of all role-players. Esack details some of the turbulence within the Call and the role played by the organisation in such a scenario.[71] The negotiations were also to lead to South Africa’s first democratic elections. And the Call most definitely had a role to play in this process to ensure a clear and unambiguous election victory for the ANC – especially within the

Muslim community. From its heyday in the mid-1980s, the Call had, by now, become a weakened organisation. Its feminist agenda seemed to be a thing of the past – except in intention.

Soon after the formation of the MYM Gender Desk in 1993, the Call of Islam had one of its few national meetings. The meeting was called as an attempt by the extremely weakened Call to visualise a role for itself beyond the 1994 democratic election. The meeting took resolutions regarding areas that it would like to work in (apart from campaigning for the ANC). Two of these were on 'women's empowerment' and Muslim Personal Law. The women's empowerment resolution was because 'it is in line with everything we stand for', said Call spokesperson Naweed Hassan.[72] According to Hassan, the meeting had set up a task group to investigate how the Call should conduct the campaign. The task group never met and the campaign died at the meeting. 'We realised there was some unfinished business in the Muslim community, some that we had put on the agenda… It was a resolution but we didn't have the wherewithal to make it real. Nothing happened,' said Jacobs. The only real involvement of the Call in the Islamic feminist agenda in the 1990s related to the Muslim Personal Law Board.

It is clear from the above discussion that, in many ways, it was the Call of Islam in the 1980s that sowed the seeds for the emergence of Islamic feminisms in the 1990s. I have shown that the Call's emphasis on the issue of women in Islam began from the time it established itself. It also very quickly provided a range of spaces for women's activism within and without the organisation. By 1990, however, the Call's focus on women's issues decreased drastically as the organisation began fighting for its own survival. Also, its deference to the 'ulamā and its focus on political activity forced the issue of women's equality to the margins. The Call's involvement in the 1990s, then, was limited.

The MYM and the Call were the two main organisations with a feminist outlook and attempting to prosecute an Islamic feminist struggle in South Africa. I will now look at a few events and moments that played an important role in the Islamic feminist struggle in South Africa. The first of these that I examine is the issue of women and mosques.

Women and Mosques

I have reviewed above how the MYM took on a campaign to secure space within mosques for Muslim women soon after it began its activities. It was a campaign that the organisation never dropped. However, in the 1990s, the campaign took a new turn and it is this new angle to the women's access to mosque issue that I will cover in this section. I will discuss this with reference to three events: the 23rd Street Mosque *Tarāwih* incident in 1993, the Claremont Main Road Mosque woman's sermon incident in 1994 and a small gender-equal congregation in Johannesburg in 1995-1996.

While the MYM was confronted with a great deal of vilification for its attempts to secure space in mosques for women; for most Muslims in the Western Cape this was a campaign that they could not identify with. The reason was that the majority of mosques in the Western Cape had provided women with facilities in mosques for many decades – even centuries. Muslims in the Western Cape – who make up about 50 percent of South Africa's Muslim population – are mainly of Malay origin with a culture of more relaxed mixing of the sexes. The Muslims in the Northern provinces – what used to be Natal and Transvaal in apartheid South Africa – are mainly of Indian origin with a more restricted culture of gender interaction. Thus the battle for women to be able to pray in mosques was very much a Northern battle. The 23rd Street Mosque incident was the beginning of a new way for the MYM to view the issue, one which would have national implications.

The 23rd Street Mosque is situated in what used to be Fietas – just west of the Johannesburg city centre – from where a multi-racial community had been removed and relocated by the apartheid government in the 1960s. While houses and businesses had been demolished to make way for a White settlement, the two mosques in the area – which is now called Pageview – remained standing. These were the 15th and the 23rd Street mosques. The control of the 23rd Street Mosque changed hands many times as committees found difficulty in filling the mosque whose congregants had been moved to about 30 kilometres away and which had no Muslim community living around it. Early in the 1990s, the mosque committee came under the majority control of erstwhile members of the MYM. They attempted to make some changes to the mosque culture in line with past MYM policies. These included the (unsuccessful) attempts to have *khutbāh*s (sermons) delivered in English rather than in Arabic; the introduction of a range of different speakers rather than just clergy and the appointment of an African imam. The mosque became the closest thing to an 'alternative' mosque in Johannesburg. It was not surprising, therefore, that some MYM members wanted to exploit this space in other ways as well. The month of Ramadan in 1993 was witness to one of these attempts.

Ramadan is characterised by an additional daily prayer: the *Tarāwīh* prayer, which follows the late night *'Isha* prayer. While it is not necessary for *Tarāwīh* to be prayed in congregation, it is traditional to do so, especially since most mosques use the *Tarāwīh* to complete an entire recitation of the Qur'ān. In the Northern provinces, women had been largely excluded from the congregational *Tarāwīh* prayers because no facilities were provided for them. In Johannesburg, women that wanted to attend the prayer would go to one of the 'Malay' mosques in Bosmont, Newclare or Riverlea which did provide some facilities for women.

In the Ramadan of 1993 some MYM women – led by Shamima Shaikh – decided to claim their space in the mosque of their locality, Johannesburg's 'alternative' 23rd Street mosque. Just before

the beginning of Ramadan, they distributed pamphlets calling on women to attend the *Tarāwīh* at the Mosque. Although some members of the mosque committee initially reacted with anger, threatening to evict the women, the former MYM members on the committee tacitly supported the move. However, lines were sharply drawn on the 27th night – the night that attracts the largest *Tarāwīh* congregation. The mosque committee decided for that night to put up a marquee behind the mosque to accommodate the women who had, upto this point, prayed on the mezzanine level of the mosque. About 200 women came for *Tarāwīh* that night. When they arrived they were redirected to the marquee to allow the additional men to occupy the mezzanine level. The committee was unanimous about this decision. Shaikh and a small group of women nevertheless attempted to pray as they had done before but were forced out.[73]

The next night this group of defiant women issued a pamphlet[74] which raised more issues that just that of their ill-treatment the night before. The pamphlet claimed the mosque space for the women by the simple fact of their having prayed there. It also berated the 'preferential treatment' that men who had not prayed there for the rest of the month had received. And the pamphlet demanded:

> It is about time that our community, especially the men, begins educating itself about issues that are crucial to our lives and survival as a community. Women and children are not second-class citizens to be denied access to mosques, to be hushed up whenever we begin talking, and to be shunted around at the whims of men.[75]

The issue received a great deal of media attention beyond the Muslim community.

While this incident was one which Western Cape Muslims could not relate to – even members of the MYM – the pamphlet hints at further limits that needed to be transgressed, demands that women all over the country would be able to resonate with. And that's what the MYM Gender Desk decided to do when it was formed later that year. It altered its language to call not for 'space in mosques' for Muslim women but to demand 'equal access to mosques'. Shaikh claimed that this expression was introduced into Muslim discourse by the Gender Desk.[76] 'Equal access' implied that

women and men should share the main space in the mosque rather than women being relegated to a separate space. And another mosque, this time in Cape Town, was to show the way in this regard.

The 'equal access' demand became a reality at the Claremont Main Rd Mosque in Cape Town in 1994. Islamic scholar and author, Professor Amina Wadud, visited South Africa in August of that year, four months after South Africa's first democratic election. She had been invited to speak at a conference on 'Islam and Civil Society' organised by the Islamic Studies Department at Unisa. Besides her national speaking tour she also delivered a Friday pre-sermon lecture at the Claremont Main Rd Mosque. This was the first time in South Africa that a woman had delivered the Friday talk.[77]. The Friday ritual is divided into two important parts: the prayer and a *khutbāh* (sermon) preceding it. Many Muslims regard the *khutbāh* as a *dhikr* (remembrance of God) and hence argue that it must be in Arabic. Mosques which accept this position generally have a pre-*khutbāh* lecture in a local language. The Claremont Main Rd Mosque usually has its *khutbāh*s in English. On this day, however, the mosque – not willing to transgress too much – introduced the pre-*khutbāh* lecture to allow Wadud to speak without having her delivering the actual *khutbāh.*

The Claremont Main Rd Mosque had already made many efforts to increase women's involvement in the mosque: women had spoken at the mosque on occasions other than the Friday prayer (although this was usually from the upstairs women's section); there were women on the mosque committee and the mosque had a separate women's committee. Wadud's lecture sparked an international controversy and in Cape Town there were violent responses. Wadud was subsequently prevented from speaking at another engagement at the Masjidul Quds in Gatesville (another Cape Town suburb),[78] and six months later the Main Rd Mosque was picketed by members of the Muslim Judicial Council who physically prevented congregants from entering the mosque for its Annual General Meeting. Some congregants complained that they had been physically and verbally abused.[79] After Wadud returned to the US and news of her lecture had spread internationally, there

was a campaign to force the university where she taught – the Virginia Commonwealth University – to dismiss her.[80] And British newspaper, *Q-News*, lamented that:

> The South African Muslim community, which took on the Qadianis, and won; took on Rushdie and had both him and his lousy book banned;[81] and is generally regarded as being one of the wealthiest, strongest and most stable in the world,[82] has been rocked by – a woman![83]

What was surprising about the article was that *Q-News* is generally an enlightened, progressive-leaning paper. But this act of Wadud and the Claremont Main Rd Mosque was too much to tolerate. The article went on to link Wadud's lecture and the fact that she was invited to the Unisa conference as part of an international conspiracy:

> Predictions that South Africa's Muslims would be targeted by secularists, and the modernists in their pay, were made a couple of years ago following a meeting of Islamic scholars in Makkah. The West, they believed, simply could not afford to let a Muslim community thrive in Southern Africa, especially once the bastions of apartheid had been demolished.[84]

Allied to the fact that a woman delivered the lecture was an associated very important issue that did not escape the attention of the Claremont Main Rd Mosque's detractors. Previously, women had prayed at the mosque in an upstairs gallery section. On this day, the women 'came down, sat in space normally reserved for men, separated by a piece of rope, and never went back again'.[85] It was no surprise that the MYM put its full weight – physically and in terms of its newspaper and its writers and speakers – behind the mosque. Finally, here was a mosque that had 'equal access for women'! And it is no surprise that the imam of the mosque, Abdul Rashied Omar, was a former president of the MYM.

Despite the violent attacks – verbal and physical – against the supporters of the courageous Wadud lecture, the incident set the scene for more but quieter changes in the Muslim community. It is now commonplace for women to speak before the Friday prayer (and at other times) at the Claremont Main Road Mosque. And a mosque in Johannesburg's Brixton suburb – Masjidul Islam – followed the Claremont example, albeit in a more limited way. Masjidul Islam was started in 1996 by the co-

convenor of the Unisa conference that Wadud addressed – Iqbal Jhazbhay – and members of the 23rd Street Mosque committee that had broken away. The mosque has a gallery section for women and women often deliver the Friday pre-*khutbāh* talk and speak on other occasions from the gallery. The mosque has not yet taken the step (officially) of having women pray in the main section of the mosque except on one occasion which I discuss later in this Chapter. Women have prayed in the main section behind the men many times after MYM *halaqāt*, but these were always done without the approval of the mosque committee.

The Claremont Main Rd event was thus precedent-setting: it pushed the limits of Muslim women's participation in the Muslim public domain and it gave Muslim women a voice in the most important Muslim institution – the mosque. Many important Muslim scholars positively commented on the incident[86] and the progressive Muslim monthly *al-Qalam* – which belongs to the MYM – published Wadud's entire lecture[87] after a resolution of an MYM Gender Desk meeting instructed it to do so.[88]

The final example on the topic of women and mosques relates to a small congregation that started in Mayfair, Johannesburg in 1995. In this congregation there was no gender distinction in terms of who could fulfil any of the ritual roles; men and women delivered the sermon and led the prayer. For those who believed in the MYM Gender Desk's 'equal access', this seemed the ideal model. The initiative for congregation was taken by members of an MYM *halqā* (study group) in Mayfair. The congregation met weekly for the Friday prayer and daily in Ramadan for the *Tarāwīh* prayer. In Esack's words, it was 'a little-known move, and an unprecedented one in the Islamic world', where 'a number of comrades – male and female – started an "alternative" congregation where gender equality and all its implications for Islamic thought and practice were the norm'.[89] He explained his euphemism later:

> Since that occasion [the Amina Wadud lecture at the Claremont Main Rd Mosque] a rather small congregation has taken an even greater leap in the gender *jihad*. In the northern province of Gauteng up to twenty people meet on Fridays and have an entirely non-discriminatory congregational prayer. Although separated on two sides of the prayer area

> with the men on one side and, next to them, the women, who often preach and lead the prayers. During the month of Ramadan they have also been meeting, with women, more often than not, leading the prayers.[90]

Part of the uniqueness of the congregation is indicated in the descriptive ways its space allocation has been written about – by Esack above and by Faaiza Shaikh. Shaikh wrote:

> At times men would pray in front and women at the back – the size of the congregation was small and there would be only two rows. At other times a brother and a sister or a husband and wife would stand next to one another so that men and women were in one row… All decisions regarding this congregation were made by all the congregants present – men and women.[91]

Shaikh's last sentence in this quote highlights another element of the congregation: it was non-hierarchical with no concern for titles or job descriptions. The congregation, however, lasted for just two years before disbanding. The congregants then switched over to Masjidul Islam, by then seen as the only 'alternative' mosque in Johannesburg.

The question of women's space in mosques has been a contested one in South Africa for many years – especially from the early 1970s. Initially – particularly in Natal and Transvaal – the debate revolved around the question of women having any access to mosques. By the 1990s the debate shifted to the issue of equal access for women. This battle was fought by Islamic feminists in Johannesburg especially. By the mid-1990s the Claremont Main Rd Mosque had broken certain barriers with regard to women's involvement in the mosque, particularly with regard to redefining gendered space and having women address the Friday congregation. Masjidul Islam in Brixton followed by also having female speakers on Fridays. Also in Johannesburg, a short-lived congregation broke through even more barriers in the space women claimed for themselves.

This issue has been an enduring one for the past few decades in South Africa. Another issue that mobilised Islamic feminists, although for a shorter period of time, was that of Muslim Personal Law which I discuss in the next section.

Muslim Personal Law

A set of developments in the 1990s in which both the Call of Islam and the MYM got involved, and which brought Islamic feminisms into sharp contrast with Muslim conservatism was the discourse, actions and structures around Muslim Personal Law (MPL). Muslim Personal Law has been a term given to a package of provisions within Islamic law (or Shari'āh) that relate to family law. These include laws relating to marriage, divorce, succession and inheritance. MPL was developed during colonial rule in Muslim societies as these societies attempted to protect at least the basic private laws of Islam as the public expression of their cultures and religions were being repressed and fought against as being backward. MPL, then, was a compromise in colonial times rather than a body of law on its own. The idea was subsequently also taken up by Muslim minority communities as being relevant to their contexts.

South Africa's apartheid government had attempted on many occasions – particularly in 1985 – to woo the Muslim community with promises of the recognition of MPL. This was significant for a community whose marriages were not recognised as legal by the state and many of whose children were therefore illegitimate in terms of South African law. This illegitimate status created enormous hardships for Muslims – especially for women. Such attempts by the state, however, were continually opposed and thwarted by anti-apartheid Muslims, particularly those associated with the MYM. Any handout by the apartheid state was viewed as an attempt at co-option into state structures and thus acceptance of such handouts were acts of dubbed collaboration with apartheid. The 1980s were characterised by such attempts by the Nationalist Party government to attract Black support: the Tri-cameral parliament to co-opt so-called Indians and Coloureds; the 'homelands' (or bantustans) for African elites; the legal recognition of registered trade unions;[92] among others. MPL was regarded as one of these tools of co-option and was thus rejected by progressive Muslims.

In April 1994 – weeks before South Africa's first democratic election – the ANC began a process to establish a representative body of Muslims to look at MPL, how it could be integrated into the South African legal system and to possibly prepare draft legislation for that purpose.[93] Thus the MPL Board was launched in August 1994 with eight founding members: the Call of Islam, the MYM and six clergy organisations – the Muslim Judicial Council, Jamiatul Ulama Natal, Jamiatul Ulama Transvaal, Islamic Council of South Africa (ICSA), Sunni Ulama Council and Sunni Jamiyate Ulama.[94] By April 1995, less than a year later, the Board was unilaterally closed down by the five clergy organisations (excluding ICSA) that constituted the United Ulama Council of South Africa (UUCSA).[95] The closure followed a period of intense organisation and mobilisation by the MYM Gender Desk and the Call. The last Board meeting was characterised by sharp debate and even personal attacks between the Call and MYM on the one hand and the UUCSA contingent on the other. It was, as one observer said, 'a war zone'.[96] The Gender Desk mobilised women that were not members of the Board to attend the meeting as observers. These women walked out of the meeting in frustration at the refusal by the Board's president, Shaikh Nazeem Muhammad, to allow them to speak and at his 'presidential decree' that women had to wear headscarves to the meeting.[97]

But the Islamic feminist interventions at the Board level were not only procedural; they were also substantive. For MYM and Call delegates it became a Campaign for a Just Muslim Personal Law – as it was called by the MYM Gender Desk.[98] In particular, they argued that any new MPL regime must be based on the principle of gender equality and must be in line with the Interim South African Constitution. The UUCSA had been demanding that any MPL regime must be exempted from the Bill of Rights. As the representative of the Jamiatul Ulama Natal said at a constitutional assembly hearing:

> To avoid a conflict between Muslim Personal Law and other fundamental rights, it is recommended [that] the freedom of religion clause [in the Bill of Rights] be qualified to give it overriding effect.[99]

At the second MPLB meeting, Maulana Yunus Patel, president of the Jamiatul Ulama Natal, demanded that all members of the Board sign a declaration recognising MPL as supreme over any other law.[100] This after the Call's Rosieda Shabodien said Muslims could not be exempted from provisions of the Bill of Rights. She was echoing positions that her organisation and the MYM had taken much earlier, after discussions had started regarding the recognition of African Customary Law. Both groups had insisted that any system of customary law could not be exempted from the bill. The MYM's Shamima Shaikh, representing the position of many Islamic feminists throughout the country (as developed through various consultations and public statements), had argued that customary or religious law

> cannot be exempted from the Bill of Rights and be allowed to perpetuate inequalities. To even consider exempting any sector of society from being covered by the Bill of Rights is an injustice and makes a mockery of the Bill.[101]

The Call's Fatima Hujaij said that she recognised the absolute equality of men and women 'as sanctioned by the Qur'ān'.[102] Following on such an argument, Soraya Bosch and Ebrahim Moosa called for a review of MPL to make it consistent with legal transformation in South Africa.[103] The UUCSA obviously recognised the danger of such a gender equality position. Hence, after unilaterally closing down the MPLB, UUCSA accused the MYM and the Call of 'questioning the supremacy of Muslim Personal Law in relation to the Bill of Rights and accused them of "opposing any legitimate efforts to achieve the legal recognition and implementation of MPL"'.[104]

But the role and significance of Islamic feminisms in the MPLB process was also relevant insofar as it reflected new forms of working among Islamic feminists themselves. The MYM's involvement in the MPL Board was firmly taken charge of by its Gender Desk rather than by its National Executive. The MYM's representative on the MPLB executive was theologian-academic Maulana Ebrahim Moosa who was the Board's Assistant Secretary. Yet, because the MYM had decided that MPL was a campaign to be driven by its Gender Desk, he – a former deputy president of the MYM – reported to the Gender Desk rather than to the National Executive. Other MYM MPL Board

members – including the organisation's president and general secretary – were also accountable to the Gender Desk through its National Coordinator. The Gender Desk's main legal mind on MPL – Soraya Bosch – was also an advisor on legal aspects of MPL to Moosa and she thus influenced his academic writings on the subject. The Call's Hujaij was elected as a vice-president of the Board at a time when the clergy were refusing, on other occasions, to sit in the same meetings as women. The clergy members were also forced to accept that women would be represented on the Board 'as women' rather than only through organisations they might belong to. These developments show how within the Islamic feminist camp itself there were shifts in the way the women got involved in various processes and asserted themselves. After the collapse of the MPL Board, the Gender Desk continued with its 'Campaign for a Just Muslim Personal Law'.

That continuation saw the Desk shift its focus to attempting to influence Muslim experience of family law through the courts. One view within the MYM was that MPL should not receive more than minimal acknowledgement by the state and that only Muslim marriages should be recognised. This, it was argued, would afford better protection to women because the civil courts were seen as more trustworthy than clergy organisations in safeguarding women's rights. Bosch, as a lawyer with the legal aid clinic at the University of Cape Town, represented Thoerayah Rylands in the Rylands vs. Edross case in the Cape Town provincial court in 1996. Rylands sued her ex-husband for a range of maintenance and other benefits after he had divorced her. The decision of the court[105] was a limited victory for Islamic feminists because although she was not awarded all that Bosch had hoped for (such as an 'equitable' share of the estate), she was awarded benefits that went beyond what the clergy would normally agree to award: arrear maintenance and a conciliatory gift. Furthermore, although the marriage in question was illegitimate in that it was only performed according to Muslim rites, the court nevertheless recognised it as a legal contract, thus allowing other aggrieved Muslim women the option of using the courts to obtain justice in the case of divorces.

Shaikh, Bosch and Moosa, particularly, also persisted in their attempts at educating Muslims about the issues surrounding the implementation of MPL in South Africa and in raising the issues in broader fora as well. This often resulted in clashes between the MYM and the ‘ulamā. This is well illustrated in one case when Shaikh participated on a radio talk show on MPL.[106] The show resulted in a brief three-letter dialogue between her and the UUCSA. The ‘ulamā coalition initially demanded she retract her statements or face a ‘public rebuttal’.[107] After her detailed refutation of their objections,[108] they abruptly ended the conversation with a prayer that she receive guidance.[109] That ‘dialogue’ was a reflection of the new confidence that Islamic feminists had developed through the 1990s. In her letter, Shaikh accused the ‘ulamā body of being discourteous, and invited it to make good on its threat of a ‘public rebuttal’, expressing the hope that any such rebuttal would include her responses.

The issue of MPL also afforded Islamic feminists another voice, a voice in the national rights discourse. This is discussed further in Chapter Four. It is important to note here, however, that the fact that Islamic feminists were willing to confront the positions of the ‘ulamā in public fora outside of the Muslim community was another reflection of their confidence and their sense that they were capable to unapologetically argue for their positions.

MPL faded into the background of the agenda of Islamic feminists from around 1997 but has just been give new impetus when, in the middle of 2000, the South Africa Law Commission’s Project Team on MPL released an Issue Paper on MPL.[110] The release of this document jolted many of those who had followed the MPL discourse closely in the past. It also saw the entry of new actors of the Islamic feminist project.

The struggle around Muslim Personal Law, I have shown, while being at one level a struggle waged by the Muslim community, was, at another level, a struggle waged for a feminist agenda. Debate around MPL had begin in the 1980s but became more vigorous around the establishment of a Muslim Personal Board. Developments prior to the Board's establishment in August 1994, during its brief life and after its dissolution in April 1995 resulted in strenuous involvement of Muslim feminists attempting to ensure the best possible deal within any future MPL regime for Muslim women. the dissolution of the Board was followed by Islamic feminists turning their MPL focus in other directions, notably the South African courts.

The issues of women and mosques and MPL have been two important campaigns that saw the involvement of women. Another area of involvement for Islamic feminists that allowed them a voice was the Muslim media.

Islamic feminism in Muslim media

The South African Muslim community has a range of media that it uses. The earliest medium was the *minbar* (the mosque pulpit) which allowed communication in the community (at least) on a weekly basis.[111] Of course, such a medium had limited usage. Also, by the middle of the 20th century it was dominated throughout the country by conservative clergy who used the *minbar* less to focus on contemporary issues of concern to the community and more on issues of ritual and tradition. In the 20th century a range of print media were issued by different groups in the Muslim community as additional media services to the community. These included a range of pamphlets, newsletters, and two newspapers. From the 1970s, audio cassettes and, in the 1980s, video cassettes also became prominent information tools in the community. After South Africa's first democratic election, with the establishment of the Independent Broadcasting Authority and the opening up of the airwaves, the community also established Muslim community radio stations.

The most important of the above are two newspapers: *Muslim Views* and *Al-Qalam* and the radio stations. Four radio stations operate throughout the year: *Radio 786* and *Voice of the Cape* share a frequency in Cape Town; *Radio 1584* in Pretoria; *Radio Islam* and *The Voice* in Johannesburg. In Durban, *Radio Azaania* and *Radio Al-Ansaar* have, at different times, obtained one-month 'special events' licences and in Port Elizabeth *Voice of Guidance* has done the same.

Muslim Views is a newspaper that started in 1997 following the closure of its predecessor *Muslim News* which had been established in 1960. In the 1980s it had taken strong anti-apartheid positions and was often under threat by the state. Today, *Muslim Views* is very much a community newspaper, not linked ideologically to any particular organisation or tendency within the Muslim community. *Al-Qalam* was started in 1974 by the Muslim Youth Movement and has always been regarded as a mouthpiece of that organisation, even though its editors have generally maintained a sense of independence from the organisation. In the 1980s it faced bannings, closures, and warnings from the Nationalist Party government. Unlike *Muslim Views, Al-Qalam* remains an ideological mouthpiece (of the MYM). Of the five fulltime radio stations, three are firmly linked to particular organisations and follow their ideological leanings. *Radio 786* belongs to the Islamic Unity Convention; *Radio Islam* belongs to the Jamiatul Ulama Transvaal and *Voice of the Cape* belongs to the Muslim Broadcasting Commission which is a project of the Muslim Judicial Council. *The Voice* belongs to an independent trust – the Muslim Community Broadcasting Trust – whose trustees are appointed by the MYM. The trust owns and manages the station and the MYM does not influence its operations on a day-to-day basis. *Radio 1584* is owned by the Islamic Information Services in Pretoria and functions without strong ideological influence from any particular organisation. Of all of the above media, *Al-Qalam* and *The Voice* have been used extensively in the 1990s to further the Islamic feminist agenda.

Al-Qalam has served for the past 26 years as the mouthpiece of the MYM in terms of its broad vision. Although going through difficulties in terms of financial and human resources and vacillation in terms of the quality of the paper, it has managed to survive and has a circulation of 25 000 – mainly within South Africa. From 1991, with the MYM having decided to focus much more on African Muslim communities, the paper also began reflecting this trend by covering more African community issues that went beyond the praising of proselytising efforts. Its team of regular writers also began to include Africans – particularly MYM members. Together with this new focus the paper also began developing a focus on women. This could be seen in its regular coverage of issues related to women in various parts of the world and in South Africa.

As the MYM began getting bolder in its articulation of women's issues, so did *Al-Qalam.* Its coverage of three issues in particular are a good indication of the prominence that the paper gave to women's issues: the Muslim Personal Law Board, the Claremont Main Rd Mosque women's lecture controversy and the activities of the MYM Gender Desk. An examination of literature on the first two of these issues is a clear indication of the role that *Al-Qalam* played in popularising debates around them and constantly raising the women question within them. The writings of Esack,[112] Sa'diyya Shaikh[113] and Faaiza Shaikh[114] are examples that show how *Al-Qalam*'s coverage of these issues and debates influenced later analysis about them.

An analysis of the articles in *Al-Qalam* from 1991 to 1997 shows a deliberate and definite attempt at promoting the ideas of Islamic feminism. The articles on the Muslim Personal Law Board and other articles on MPL, for example, repeatedly raise the issue of women's participation in the process of determining an MPL code for South Africa and focus on the insistence by Islamic feminists that women's voices must be heard regarding all issues concerning their lives. The brief coverage – over just three issues – given to the Amina Wadud lecture at Claremont Main Rd Mosque was blatant and it became quite clear what the paper's position – and that of the publishers,

the MYM – was on the issue. The first issue to cover the lecture screamed out its front page headline 'Another first for South Africa (and the world?!)'[115] with two colour pictures of Wadud delivering her lecture.

Apart from the feminist content of *Al-Qalam* in the 1990s, another aspect that placed it within the Islamic feminist arena was its appointment in 1995 of Shamima Shaikh as managing editor. Shaikh was, at the time, still National Coordinator of the MYM's Gender Desk. Also, she was the first woman to be the editor of a major South African Muslim periodical in South Africa – apart from periodicals for women.[116] In that position she oversaw not only the content of the paper but managed its finances, administration and production. When she resigned in 1997 the feminist content of the paper immediately decreased and then faded into virtual non-existence.

The other medium that played an important role in promoting Islamic feminisms in South Africa was *The Voice*, the Muslim community station in Johannesburg set up by the MYM. The station and its licence belong to an independent trust – the Muslim Community Broadcasting Trust (MCBT). However, the trustees are appointed every three years by the National Executive of the MYM. From its inception its positions on women were important for the station. Even the formation of the MCBT in 1994 indicates the importance given to the women agenda. The founder and first chairperson of the MCBT was the MYM's National Gender Desk Coordinator, Shamima Shaikh. She served as chairperson till her death in January 1998.

The Voice began broadcasting in August 1997. While the other Johannesburg Muslim radio station, *Radio Islam*, had already been on air and had made it clear that it would not allow women broadcasters, *The Voice*'s launch broadcast had a woman anchor, Najma Khota. Its programming schedule also reflected its concern with women's issues. '*Saut al-Nisa*' (Women's Voice) was a two-hour slot, five days a week. Different programmes were included in the slot for each day.[117]

These included ‘Lifting the Veil’ – hosted by Shaikh – which presented feminist interpretations of Islam and its scriptures. It also sought to reconstruct the histories of prominent Muslim women and confronted controversial issues in the Muslim community relating to women. ‘Breaking the Silence’ – hosted by author and feminist Julie Adam – focussed on women abuse and particularly domestic violence. Zaheera Bham hosted ‘Women Today’ which interviewed and profiled prominent women in South Africa with a view to presenting them as role models. Apart from these shows in the *Saut al-Nisa slot,* there were other programmes which should be mentioned. ‘Our Voices’, hosted by Shaikh and Abdul Basit Bulbulia (who was also the station’s major donor) quickly became known as the most controversial show on *The Voice* mainly of its focus on women’s issues. The acknowledgement of the need to give women a voice is also reflected in a statement in station brochure: *‘The Voice* is your voice, the voice of women and men, youth, children, the voice of the whole community, not just a small section of it.’[118]

Importantly, however, women at *The Voice* were not ghettoised into women’s shows or shows about women. One of the most popular programmes was the weekly ‘In the Shade of the Qur’ān’ which discussed different topics in the light of Qur’ānic perspectives. The programme was hosted by Farhana Ismail who had a good grasp of Arabic and the Qur’ān. Although she usually brought in guests, one of the attractions of the show was that it was not an interview but a dialogue where the host obviously was as educated as the expert guest. Programmes like this, as well as others like ‘Qur’ān Quiz’ hosted by Nazlie Jada, daily current affairs programme ‘DriveTime Live’ hosted by Moefidah Jaffer, Shoneez Bulbulia and Julie Ally, daily children’s programme ‘Our Treasure Chest’ hosted by Rehana Moosajee and Julie Ally’s magazine programme ‘Straight Talk’ meant that women were very much part of the mainstream of the programming at the station. Women were also involved in the health, legal and sports programmes.

The first Muslim Community Broadcasting Trust had only three trustees – Shaikh, poet and author Don Mattera and community activist Bilal Motsau. For the first few months of the life of the station Shaikh played a hands-on role in directing its activities. The second trust, appointed in January 1998, consisted of eleven trustees. Five of these were women. And women soon headed two of the four committees of the trust, the programming committee and the complaints committee. Also, since its inception, the volunteer base of the station has always been more female than male. Currently, more than half of the 110 volunteers are women. And both its staff members are women.[119]

I have shown that these two media – *Al-Qalam* and *The Voice* – have played extremely important roles as propaganda tools for Islamic feminisms in South Africa, as much in terms of how they operated as in terms of what they said. They gave women an authentic voice in the Muslim community. But one cannot complete a discussion about media and women's voices within them without discussing the matter of the conservative Radio Islam.

The Matter of Radio Islam and women's voices

Why would I discuss Radio Islam in a chapter dealing with manifestations of Islamic feminism? How could Islamic feminisms have been boosted by a radio station that had refused to allow women on air because they regarded women's voices as *'awrāh* (private parts of their bodies that should be concealed)? I include this section not because the station promoted Islamic feminisms but because of the impetus given to the ideas of Islamic feminism during the furore that erupted over *Radio Islam*'s decision to exclude women's voices.

Owned by the Jamiatul Ulama Transvaal, *Radio Islam* began broadcasting early in 1997. The station had a clear policy of not allowing women's voices on air because of their belief that the voice was part of a woman's *'awrah* (private parts of their bodies that should be concealed).

Initially there were no objections to this position from any quarter in the Muslim community – or even from the regulatory authority, the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) – until a small organisation in Lenasia, Youth for Islamic Enlightenment and Development (YIELD) approached the station complaining that the exclusion of women constituted gender discrimination. YIELD also submitted a complaint to the IBA, alleging that *Radio Islam* was in violation of its licence conditions.[120]

Radio Islam defended its position to YIELD and the IBA, arguing that it was within its licence conditions in serving the interests of the Muslim community of Johannesburg. It claimed to represent the views of that community in not allowing women's voices to be heard. It 'does not discriminate against females, nor does it "condone the subjugation" of women,' submitted *Radio Islam*'s station manager, Haider Ali Dhorat.[121] The station went further to say that 'Throughout the Quran and the Hadith woman (sic) have been given equal status to men in every respect.'[122] Having women hosting programmes on air, *Radio Islam* argued, would be 'offensive to the overwhelming majority of Muslims'.[123]

The matter raised vigorous debate in the media with *Radio Islam* on one side, YIELD and the Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) on the other and various members of the public participating in one way or the other. The IBA heard the complaint and withdrew *Radio Islam*'s licence. The station continued broadcasting illegally for a period, then went off air and applied for a new licence. This time, however, it agreed that it would put women on air because, after a long and intense process of consultation internationally, it had obtained an Islamic opinion that women's voices may be heard. The IBA was not convinced that the physical female voice on *Radio Islam* would constitute giving voice to women and was concerned that women would end up 'reading recipes'. Further, the IBA was concerned about the manner in which *Radio Islam* had redefined its

target community and felt this was too narrow a definition. It denied the station a licence. *Radio Islam* went to court and won; the IBA was instructed to issue the licence.

Our main concern here is the role of Islamic feminists in this affair and what impact this case had – if any – on Islamic feminisms in South Africa. While Islamic feminists followed the case closely and watched and prayed for particular outcomes, their public interventions were minimal. It must be noted that the organisation that took up the issue – YIELD – has no history in women's right struggles. Throughout the battle around the station, the MYM and Call – the two organisations at the forefront of Islamic feminism in South Africa – remained silent (publicly, at least). A few ex-MYM members in Johannesburg, led by businessperson Abu Bakr Karolia, attempted to mediate between *Radio Islam* and YIELD. But much of this, in the words of Shamima Shaikh, was 'another case of men fighting about women'.[124]

At a public level, those identifiable from the Islamic feminist camp that took some positions on the issue were Esack, then a commissioner of the CGE and a few people from *The Voice*, notably Shaikh and her co-host on 'Our Voices', Abdul Basit Bulbulia. While continually insisting that *Radio Islam* was 'our sister station', the latter two vigorously took on the Islamic arguments presented by *Radio Islam* and presented the progressive positions on these – particularly the question of the permissibility of women's voices being heard in public. It was an attempt at pushing forward the agenda of women's voices and a means to increase listenership and credibility for *The Voice*. Esack's was mainly a media campaign and an attempt to draw together an alliance of Islamic feminists and others to support the CGE and YIELD's position. The question that begs an answer is: Why did Islamic feminists not get involved in an issue that obviously was within their domain of activity?

A few reasons might be advanced for this. Firstly, YIELD was not one of the organisations that had a good relationship with either the MYM or the Call. Indeed, because of previous experiences, people like Shaikh and Bulbulia were suspicious of its motives.[125] Secondly, as a flagship for progressive Muslims in Gauteng, *The Voice* did not want to present itself as wanting to benefit from the misery of its 'sister station'. Hence, it never called for *Radio Islam* to be denied a licence by the IBA. Thirdly, I believe that within the progressive Muslim camp there was not real clarity about the limits of freedoms that should be allowed within an open society. Did an organisation with a sexist perspective, like *Radio Islam*, have the right to express that perspective in a free society? Could they use a public resource – a radio frequency – to express such an perspective – which is unconstitutional? What does an imposition of a particular religious understanding – even if it is a gender equality position – on another religious group mean for freedom of religion and the right of minorities? Fourthly, the personality of Esack and the confrontational vigour with which he addressed the issue became an issue of dispute in the progressive Muslim camp. Fifthly, there was no agreement about whether it would be better for the cause of women for *Radio Islam* to be closed down by the IBA or not. Finally, Islamic feminists were too confident at this point in their own relative strength in the Muslim community and were willing to just ride the issue with others – YIELD and the CGE – doing the dirty work while they believed they did not need to prove themselves. The forces of Islamic conservatism were relatively weaker and this fact made the progressives complacent.

However, Islamic feminists did not isolate themselves from the issue. A closed email list was set up to brainstorm ideas and develop strategy. And a memorandum entitled 'In defence of a Positive Image of Islam – the Issue of Women's Voices'[126] was submitted to the IBA days before the hearing where *Radio Islam* agreed to allow women on air. The memorandum affirmed that 'Islam is a religion of justice and promotes the equality of men and women' and expressed the authors' belief that 'discrimination on the basis of gender goes against the very spirit of Islam'. The document did

not once mention *Radio Islam* by name and did not call on the IBA to take any particular course of action.

The importance of the matter of Radio Islam for this Research Report is, I have argued, in the manner in which Islamic feminists used the issue to mobilise public opinion and themselves around a critical issue – the necessity of women having a voice. Debates and action around the Radio Islam issue also formed the last phase of concerted Islamic feminist activity in the decade of the 1990s. I will now discuss a moment which came in the midst of the Radio Islam furore and which resulted in much confidence within Islamic feminist circles – the funeral of Shamima Shaikh.

The Funeral of Shamima Shaikh

On 8 January 1998, Shamima Shaikh, former national coordinator of the MYM Gender Desk, former editor of *Al-Qalam* and founder of *The Voice*, died of cancer.[127] Her death came in the middle of the *Radio Islam* controversy. It was a period when Muslim progressives were feeling particularly confident and Muslim conservatism was particularly vulnerable. While not intervening directly in the *Radio Islam* issue, progressives regarded this as a time to push the limits and make as many gains as possible.[128] It was inescapable then that Shaikh's funeral would play a part in enhancing this buoyant feeling. 'The day of her death and burial was a day of the relentless pushing of the religio-cultural limits,'[129] especially in how it thrust women's participation into the forefront. Shuaib Manjra refers to Shaikh's death and funeral as a continuation of her legacy of 'challeng[ing] everything'.[130] I look at some of these 'challenges' to 'everything'.

As per her request, Shaikh's (first)[131] funeral prayer was led by a woman friend, Farhana Ismail. Having a woman lead the funeral prayer was a highly unusual act and, according to Esack, 'it came to pass that for the first time in the last few centuries, a Muslim's funeral service, albeit at her home, was led by a woman and followed by women and men'.[132] Ismail herself was a fellow gender

equality activist of Shaikh's. She often led the *Tarāwīh* prayer at the short-lived Mayfair congregation and was the host of the popular 'In the Shade of the Qur'ān' on *The Voice*.

Shaikh's funeral prayer at Masjidul Islam in Brixton witnessed women participating in prayer in the main space with the men. This was the first time that this had happened with official sanction at the mosque. The mosque officials took it upon themselves to offer this as a tribute to the woman who fought for 'equal access to mosques' for Muslim women. At Shaikh's burial in Pietersburg women again would not be denied their place. They attended the funeral prayer at the cemetery and participated at the burial with the men.

These events were remarkable in their own right. But their propaganda potential was not to be ignored by Islamic feminists. Esack's obituary, which recounted these unusual events, was published in the *Mail & Guardian*,[133] in a Philippines' feminist magazine, *Women in Action*[134] and included in his next book, *On Being a Muslim*.[135] In addition, his and Manjra's[136] obituaries were circulated on more than a dozen Internet mailing lists internationally. It was a deliberate attempt at pushing the gender equality envelope within and without South Africa and, perhaps, chalking up 'another first for South Africa'.[137]

Much criticism poured in after the funeral, much of it directed against Shaikh's family. However, the Islamic feminist euphoria at the time meant that the criticism was faced squarely, counter-arguments quickly presented for each criticism and the event claimed as a victory.[138] It was the last major victory for Islamic feminists in the 1990s; the only one subsequent to it that might be regarded as a 'victory' was *Radio Islam*'s agreeing to allow women on air.

Conclusion

The decade of the 1990s saw the emergence of Islamic feminisms in South Africa. It was an expected phenomenon after the women's rights campaigns and the involvement of women in Muslim communal life that was promoted in the 1980s – particularly by the Call of Islam and the Muslim Youth Movement. These two organisations had had women's rights as part of their agendas since their inception – the MYM in 1971 and the Call in 1983. However, the manner in which they addressed the issue and the extents to which they were willing to go differed.

The Call began using the rhetoric of gender equality from its beginnings in 1983. For the MYM, moving from a standpoint of gender balance to one of gender equality took longer and it only adopted such a position by the end of the 1980s after thorough debate and study. In the 1990s, Islamic feminism came into its own through various events, structures and discourses. The MYM's Women's Rights Campaign led to the formation of its Gender Desk, which became an aggressive role-player in the arena of women's rights within the Muslim community. The Call, however, had become a weak organisation by the 1990s and this was reflected in its involvement in the Islamic feminist terrain.

Various processes, campaigns and debates around the Muslim Personal Law Board also provided avenues for Islamic feminisms to be expressed. These expressions were through the involvement of women in attempting to control the progressive responses to the MPL Board and the attempts of Islamic feminists to ensure that ordinary Muslim women were involved in discussions around MPL and how it would affect their lives. The 'Campaign for a Just MPL' was a strong mobilising centre which helped to get both the Call and the MYM working together and with other organisations – particularly women's organisations.

That women should have access to mosques had been a firm position for the MYM since its inception. It was an issue that the MYM kept pursuing – especially in the northern provinces. In the 1990s, however, the issue began to be addressed differently. No more was the demand for women to have 'facilities' in mosques, but the call became one for women's 'equal access to mosque space'. While there were many practical campaigns and battles around this, to date only one mosque in the country has 'equal access' for women – the Claremont Main Rd Mosque in Cape Town. However, the Claremont example opened up spaces for certain other mosques to at least believe that were other options. These campaigns have received substantial support in the Muslim community from particularly two community media.

The monthly newspaper *Al-Qalam* and the Johannesburg-based radio station *The Voice* are both linked to the MYM. Both have, in the 1990s, played an important role in furthering the objectives of Islamic feminism – both at a propaganda as well as at a substantive level. Both have served as tools for women's empowerment. And both have promoted the agendas of Islamic feminisms by the angles taken in their coverage of various issues within the Muslim community. A survey of various editions of *Al-Qalam* in the 1990s – particularly upto 1997 – reflect the deliberate attention given to women's issues by the paper. Also, *The Voice* has been successful in allowing airtime for members of the Muslim community to debate issues that are otherwise not debated publicly. The issues of women's voices, domestic violence against women, women's access to mosques, domestic workers and MPL are just some of these issues.

The last major issues addressed by Islamic feminism in the 1990s have been the funeral of gender equality activist Shamima Shaikh and the controversy surrounding *Radio Islam*'s decision to disallow women from being on air. This was arguably a period when Muslim conservatism was at one of its weakest periods in the past two decades in South Africa. And this situation resulted in an extra-confident attitude within progressive Muslim circles. However, the *Radio Islam* controversy

also saw the end of aggressive Islamic feminisms in the decade of the 1990s. An important reason for this was the internal dissension among progressive Muslims resulting from the positions taken on the issue – particularly the opposition to the approach taken by CGE commissioner Farid Esack. Islamic feminisms, since then, have been largely dormant – though not dead. These issues will be addressed further in Chapter Five. In the next two Chapters I will look at two of the main impetuses that resulted in the development of Islamic feminisms as outlined in this Chapter. Chapter Three will examine the development of Islamic feminist thought in South Africa, following on similar developments in other parts of the world; Chapter Four will look at the impact of the national liberation struggle on the rise of Islamic feminisms in South Africa.

[1] Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999, 6.
[2] My use of the term 'secular feminist' and counterposing that to Muslim or Islamic feminist is not unique. See, for example, Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender* and Maria Holt, "Palestinian women and the Intifada: An exploration of images and realities", in (ed.) Haleh Afshar, *Women and Politics in the Third World*, London: Routledge, 1996.
[3] Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender*, 18-19.
[4] It is perhaps ironic for me to write this, but I do not think that using the labels are necessarily helpful in dissecting the discourse. Sometimes parts of a person's discourse might be situated in one category and other parts in another category. Sometimes a person or organisation might be in one category at a particular point in time and then moves to another. I say my discomfort with using these labels is ironic because, in fact, this entire Research Report is based on an argument about a label: 'Islamic feminist'.
[5] Bukhari 1:7:304. I will use this manner of referencing aḥādīth throughout this Research Report. The notation should be read as volume:chapter:ḥadīth number.
[6] See Shamima Shaikh, "Women's Role in Contemporary Society", <<http://shams.za.org/role.htm>>, 1994, where she lists some of these conservative views about the nature of women.
[7] Call of Islam, *The Call of Islam*, brochure, Cape Town: Call of Islam, undated but probably 1994, 3
[8] Interview with Adli Jacobs, 4 February 2001.
[9] Shamima Shaikh, "Gender Desk and Gender Equality Campaign", Proposal to the MYM National Executive Meeting, January 1994.
[10] Interview with Esack, 12 December 2000.
[11] See Farid Esack, "What Men Owe to Women? Islam & Gender Justice – Beyond Simplistic Apologia", in (eds.) D Maguire and J Raines, *What Men Owe to Women*, New York: Suny Press, 2000.
[12] Sa'diyya Shaikh, "Battered Women in Muslim Communities in the Western Cape: Religious Constructions of Gender, Marriage, Sexuality and Violence", Unpublished MA Dissertation, Religious Studies, Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 1996, 27.
[13] Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender*, 83.
[14] Interview with Zuleikha M. Mayat, 26 September 2000.
[15] Interview with Fatema Hoosen, 26 September 2000.
[16] Abdul Rashied Omar, "Women in Islam", unpublished talk delivered to the Cape Town Business and Professional Women's Club, 25 January 1989, 2.
[17] While there were numerous attacks against the MYM for its position on women's presence in mosques, the most detailed was contained in *Women in Musajid and Islam* (undated) by the Majlisul-Ulema and published by the Young Men's Muslim Association of Benoni.
[18] Abdulkader Tayob, *Islamic Resurgence in South Africa: The Muslim Youth Movement*, Cape Town: UCT Press, 1995, 117.
[19] See Majlisul Ulama, *Women in Mosques and Islamic Law*, where the MYM and its leaders are attacked for their calls for women to be accommodated in the mosques.
[20] Interview with Ebrahim Jadwat, second president of the MYM, 26 September 2000 and Tayob, *Islamic Resurgence*, 127.
[21] Interview with Zuleikha Mayat.
[22] Interview with Jadwat, 26 September 2000.
[23] MYM, *Handbook of the MYM of SA*¸ undated.
[24] MYM, *4th Annual Convention at University of Durban-Westville 14-16 December 1974*, brochure, 1974, quoted in Tayob, *Islamic Resurgence.*
[25] Sa'diyya Shaikh, "Battered Women", 25.
[26] Tayob, *Islamic Resurgence*, 126-128.
[27] Interview with Jadwat, 26 September 2000.
[28] The issue of women travelling great distances is significant because conservatives attach importance to women's travelling. According to conservative Islamic positions, a woman is not allowed to travel beyond her town without a male escort – a male that is either her husband or related to her in such a way that they cannot be married.
[29] Interview with Jadwat.
[30] The MSA was started in 1969, one year before the MYM. Initially there was no significant relationship between the two organisations and the MSA was an ideological umbrella organisation for Muslim students.

By the early 198s, however, students trained by the MYM got involved in the MSA and began leading it in the same ideological direction as the MYM.
[31] For the role of Moosa in this process, see Sa'diyya Shaikh, "Battered Women", 28. Moosa's role is also reflected in the interviews I conducted with Fatima Noordien, 20 November 2000 and Firdouza Waggie, 21 November 2000. While his workshops seemed to have been most effective in the late 1980s, according to Noordien he had started a study group on women's issues as early as 1984.
[32] Tayob, *Islamic Resurgence*, 162.
[33] Tayob, *Islamic Resurgence*, 167-76.
[34] Minutes of the annual MSA National Executive meeting, 1984.
[35] Minutes of the MYM General Assembly, 1990.
[36] Tayob, *Islamic Resurgence*, 173-174.
[37] Interview with Firdouza Waggie, 21 November 2000.
[38] Minutes of General Assembly, 1990.
[39] Interview with Tahir Sitoto, 27 September 2000.
[40] Interview with Sitoto.
[41] *Introducing the MYM's Women's Rights Campaign*, MYM, 1990.
[42] *Muslim Youth Movement Gender Desk*, an undated (but most likely from 1994) brochure of the MYM Gender Desk, reproduced also on <<http://shams.za.org/gdesk.htm>>.
[43] Interview with Firdouza Waggie, 21 November 2000.
[44] Shamima Shaikh, "Women and Islam – The Gender Struggle in South Africa: The Ideological Struggle", paper presented to the MYM Islamic Tarbiyyah Programme, December 1997, <<http://shams.za.org/itppaper.htm>>.
[45] See *Muslim Youth Movement Gender Desk*, brochure.
[46] Interview with Waggie.
[47] Shaikh, Women and Islam".
[48] Interview with Waggie.
[49] Farid Esack, *Qur'ān Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression*, Oxford: Oneworld, 1997, 35.
[50] Interview with Adli Jacobs, 4 February 2001.
[51] *Call of Islam*, undated – probably 1984, 2.
[52] Interview with Farid Esack, 12 December 2000.
[53] Farid Esack, *On Being a Muslim: finding a religious path in the world today*, Oxford: Oneworld, 1999, 6.
[54] Interview with Sadia Fakier, 3 February 2001.
[55] Esack, *On Being a Muslim*, 38.
[56] Esack, *On Being a Muslim*, 42.
[57] Interview with Jacobs.
[58] Interview with Jacobs.
[59] Interview with Jacobs.
[60] The leadership core of the Call was made up of 'ameers' and 'ameeras' – the masculine and feminine forms respectively of the English equivalent 'leader'. They were not elected by the membership but appointed by the existing leadership core.
[61] Interview with Fakier.
[62] Interview with Jacobs.
[63] Interview with Esack.
[64] Interview with Jacobs.
[65] Interview with Jacobs.
[66] Interview with Jacobs.
[67] Interview with Jacobs.
[68] Interview with Jacobs.
[69] Clarity on whether he left voluntarily or was forced to leave depends on whose version of the issue one believes.
[70] Interview with Jacobs.
[71] Esack, *On Being a Muslim*, 207-239.
[72] "Women move up organisations' agenda", *al-Qalam*, January 1994, 16.
[73] "Johannesburg women take initiative", *al-Qalam*, March 1993, 3.
[74] "Statement by the 23rd Street Mosque Women's Jamaah", pamphlet, Ramadan 1993.

[75] "Statement by the 23rd Street Mosque Women's Jamaah", pamphlet, Ramadan 1993.
[76] Shamima Shaikh, Gender Desk Report to the General Assembly 96, 29 June 1996, 2.
[77] "Another first for South Africa (and the world?)!" and "A small Cape Town mosque makes world Muslim history", *al-Qalam,* August 1994, 1-2.
[78] "Anti-Wadud protestors desecrated Mosque", *al-Qalam,* August 1994, 2.
[79] *al-Qalam,* March 1995, 1.
[80] Personal email correspondence with Amina Wadud.
[81] The Muslim Judicial Council led a successful campaign to get Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* banned in South Africa. Rushdie himself, was, however, never 'banned'.
[82] All three of these descriptions are mythical. Many South African Muslims like to think these are true and their egos are often boosted by visiting Muslim scholars who make such claims. The truth is that, as a minority, the South African Muslim community is far from being the wealthiest in the world. Also, while there are sections of the community that are wealthy, there are sections that live in abject poverty. As for being the strongest and most stable, it is a community that is often rocked by internal dissension which has led on more than one occasion to Muslims killing each other for the sake of religion.
[83] "American Rubbishes Salaf", *Q-News,* 2-9 September 1994.
[84] "American Rubbishes Salaf", *Q-News,* 2-9 September 1994.
[85] Esack, *Qur'ān Liberation and Pluralism,* 246.
[86] Some examples of this are: Abdulkader Tayob, "The pre-khutbah, khutbah and Islamic change", *al-Qalam,* August 1994, 15; Farid Esack, "Hang in there, Brother Rashid", *al-Qalam*, August 1994, 13; Sa'diyya Shaikh, "Sexual Men and Spiritual Women", *al-Qalam*, September 1994, 6; Khadija Magardie, "Wadud is a brave woman", *al-Qalam*, September 1994, 13; Summer Hathout, "We applaud your courage", *al-Qalam,* November 1994, 13.
[87] Amina Wadud, "But what did she *really* say?", *al-Qalam,* September 1994, 4.
[88] Minutes of MYM Gender Desk Meeting, Cape Town, September 1994.
[89] Farid Esack, "Death of a Muslim Joan of Arc", *Electronic Mail & Guardian,* 20 January 1998, <<http://shams.za.org/20jan-shamima.htm>>.
[90] Esack, *Qur'ān Liberation and Pluralism,* 252-253.
[91] See Faaiza B. Shaikh, "Muslim Women's Rights to Mosque Space", unpublished MA dissertation, University of Natal Durban, 1998, 31.
[92] While the broad liberation movement generally rejected such attempts, trade unions decided – as a strategic manoeuvre – to register and thus get legal recognition. The state's plan at co-opting trade unions went terribly wrong as legalisation allowed unions the space to organise legally and to grow at phenomenal rates.
[93] See letter from A. M. Kathrada, ANC convenor of the process, 15 April 1994.
[94] See Constitution of the Muslim Personal Law Board, adopted at the launch of the Board, August 1994.
[95] See letter from M. S. Omar, secretary general of the Board to all Board member organisations, 12 April 1995.
[96] "Women angered by MPLB meeting", *al-Qalam,* March 1995, 2.
[97] "Women angered by MPLB meeting", *al-Qalam,* March 1995, 2.
[98] MYM Gender Desk Brochure, undated (probably 1994). Also available on <<http://shams.za.org/gdesk.htm>>.
[99] "Religious people talk rights", *al-Qalam,* June 1995, 1.
[100] "Rising tensions at MPL Board", *al-Qalam,* March 1995, 1.
[101] *al-Qalam,* October 1993, 1.
[102] *al-Qalam,* October 1993, 1.
[103] *al-Qalam,* October 1993, 4.
[104] "The MPLB is dead! (Or is it?), *al-Qalam,* April 1995, 1.
[105] *Rylands vs. Edross,* 4ALL SA557 (C), 1996.
[106] "Religion on the Line", *Safm,* July 1995.
[107] UUCSA letter to Shamima Shaikh, 24 July 1995, "Dialogue with the 'Ulama", <<http://shams.za.org/Dialogueulama.htm>>.
[108] Shamima Shaikh letter to UUCSA, 9 August 1995, "Dialogue with the 'Ulama", <<http://shams.za.org/Dialogueulama.htm>>.
[109] UUCSA letter to Shamima Shaikh, 24 October 1995, "Dialogue with the 'Ulama", <<http://shams.za.org/Dialogueulama.htm>>.

[110] South African Law Commission, Issue Paper 15, Project 59, "Islamic Marriages and Related Matters", May 2000.
[111] Although issues of leadership and authority are very important when dealing with issues of gender, this Research Report does not intend delving into such issues or their relationship to gender issues except incidentally. However, a very interesting piece on the role of the *minbar* in establishing authority and leadership within the Muslim community is Abdulkader Tayob, *Islam: A Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oneworld, 1999, 113-137.
[112] Esack, *Qur'ān Liberation and Pluralism* and *On Being a Muslim.*
[113] Sa'diyya Shaikh, "Battered Women".
[114] Faaiza Shaikh, "Muslim Women's Rights".
[115] *al-Qalam*, August 1994, 1.
[116] Mohammed Haron lamented in August 1994 at the "Islam and Civil Society" conference at Unisa that no major Muslim media had up to then appointed a woman as editor.
[117] See programme schedule for *The Voice* from 1997-1998.
[118] Brochure, *The Voice*, 1998.
[119] Interview with Basit Bulbulia, CEO of *The Voice*, 8 February 2001.
[120] Zayn Marimuthu, letters to *Radio Islam* and the IBA, 23 April 1997 and 15 May 1997.
[121] Haider Ali Dhorat, station manager of *Radio Islam*, in a letter to YIELD and the IBA, 26 May 1997, 5.
[122] Dhorat, letter to YIELD and IBA, 26 May 1997, 10.
[123] Dhorat, letter to YIELD and IBA, 26 May 1997, 11.
[124] Shamima Shaikh, at a meeting of the Muslim Community Broadcasting Trust, September 1997.
[125] Private conversations with Shaikh and Bulbulia.
[126] "In defence of a Positive Image of Islam – the Issue of Women's Voices", email memorandum submitted to the IBA, February 1998.
[127] See Esack, *On Being a Muslim*, 133-136.
[128] Posts to the "lobby" mailing list set up to discuss progressive responses to the *Radio Islam* controversy are a good indication of this feeling.
[129] Esack, *On Being a Muslim*, 135.
[130] Shuaib Manjra, "Obituary to a Courageous Campaigner", <<http://shams.za.org/shuaib.htm>>, January 1998.
[131] Four funeral prayers were performed for Shaikh: at her home led by Farhana Ismail, at Masjidul Islam – the mosque she used to attend, at the Pietersburg Cemetery where she was buried and at the Claremont Main Rd Mosque in Cape Town (in absentia).
[132] Esack, *On Being a Muslim*, 135.
[133] Esack, "Death of a Muslim Joan of Arc".
[134] Farid Esack, "If this be madness", *Women in Action*, 1:1998, 50-51.
[135] Esack, *On Being a Muslim*, 133-136.
[136] Manjra, *Obituary to a Courageous Campaigner.*
[137] This was the phrase used in the headline of the front page *Al-Qalam* article about the Friday lecture delivered by Amina Wadud at the Claremont Main Rd Mosque in 1994. See "Another first for South Africa! (and the world?)", *Al-Qalam*, August 1994, 1
[138] The euphoria is also reflected in the speeches at Shaikh's commemoration on the 17 January 1998. See "Warrior of the gender jihad returns to her maker after a life well lived", *Sunday Independent*, 18 January 1998, <<http://shams.za.org/sundayind.htm>>.

Chapter Three Re-Reading and Re-Thinking

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC FEMINIST THOUGHT AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN LINK

Introduction

Despite their isolation from most of the Muslim world, Muslims in apartheid South Africa had been able to maintain contact with their co-religionists in other parts of the world in a variety of ways. Such contact had been at various socio-religious levels and in many instances resulted in international ideological influences being imbibed by South African Muslims. Some of these ideological influences have included the Deobandi and Brelvi schools of thought from the Indo-Pak subcontinent and the Murabitun Sufi order from Europe. Significant influences on Islamic resurgent movements since the 1970s through the 1990s have been the Egyptian Ikhwanul Muslimoon, the Pakistani Jamaat-e-Islami and the 1979 Iranian revolution.[1] In the cases of the resurgent movements the influences have been via personal contact through visits to South Africa by members of these movements and meetings in international fora, and books and cassettes from these movements being imported and distributed in South Africa. In the late 1980s and in the 1990s these outside influences have included Islamic feminist literature.

This last influence will be one of the issues of discussion in this Chapter. I will examine the thought and activity of some Islamic feminist scholars and activists who have influenced their counterparts in South Africa. In doing so, I will also examine some expressions of Islamic feminism in the Muslim world. South African Islamic feminists, however, have not simply distributed the ideas of these foreign scholars in South Africa; they have also developed their own thought and activism around women's issues. In this Chapter I will also look at some ideological perspectives articulated by South African Islamic feminists as they sought to understand their struggles, draw inspiration from Islamic scriptures and to contextualise this inspiration. I will show that there are differences in

the articulation and meanings of the discourses and examine the influences on them from the rest of the world.

But before dealing with issues of feminist thought it is important to arrive at some understanding of what the term 'Islamic feminism' means. Thus far I have used the term, a term that is not without its problems, without having defined it. However, to proceed with the discussion on Islamic feminisms in South Africa – especially as regards Islamic feminist thought – it is crucial to define 'Islamic feminsm'. In this Chapter, then, I will briefly discuss the notion of feminism, look at how Islamic feminists in other parts of the world understand the relationship between Islam and feminism and propose a definition for 'Islamic feminism'.

Not everyone's feminism

For many Muslim women (and men) – whether in minority contexts like in most of the Western world or in Muslim majority communities – the label 'feminist' is not worn comfortably. For these Muslims, 'feminism' generally carries a specifically Western meaning with particular historical and ideological baggage. Most Muslim activists prefer not having to be accountable for such baggage. Thus such activists often avoid the label 'feminist' for strategic purposes, as American Muslim women's rights activist Laila al-Marayati explains:

> [F]eminism… is a bad word among some Muslims… It's often been associated with other movements – imperialism, colonialism, Zionism even. Among Muslims here it is a kind of buzzword that we try to avoid because of the perception that feminism is somehow about depravity, particularly sexual depravity, birth control, individualism, no family concerns, no morals.[2]

The kind of apprehension expressed by Marayati is not exclusive to Muslims, however. Many Third World[3] feminists have similar concerns. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, for example, while emphasising that 'I always call myself a "feminist"', nevertheless warns that 'we must be willing to give it [the term "feminism"] up if there is reasonable resistance to it from groups we respect.'[4]

Many women in Muslim societies do, however, regard themselves as part of some kind of project for the upliftment or emancipation of women – even if they don't use the 'F' word. This has seen the development in parts of the Muslim world, as well as in the West, of 'Islamic feminisms' where Muslim women (and men) articulate a discourse about and struggle for the establishment of women's self-worth, for gender equality and for the subversion of patriarchy.

But what is Islamic feminism and who is an Islamic feminist? This is a fundamental question that needs to be answered. The place to begin answering the question is to look at the term 'feminism', its genesis and its meanings. The term feminism has been increasingly used since 1895 to refer to the theory of sexual equality and the movement for women's rights.[5] Contemporarily, however, it has gone beyond being simply about equal rights between women and men; it is also 'an ideology of social transformation aiming to create a world for women beyond simple equality'.[6] While the hegemonic feminist discourse – particularly within Western feminism – is still just about equality between women and men, gender equality and social justice are increasingly becoming persistent themes in current articulations of feminism.

However, what has been the dominant expression of feminism – Western feminism[7] – has come under much criticism from gender equality activists in the South, particularly the manner in which much of Western feminist theory has homogenised the oppression and the struggles of women throughout the world or, at least, homogenised women throughout the Third World.[8] Joanna Hicks writes about this when she critiques the approach of Western feminists from the perspective of women of the South:

> The enunciation of the foundations of the women's movement and feminist ideology within the industrialized world has been dominated by white, middle-class women. These women often unreflexively set forth their concerns within their societal context as most important, uncritically use their culture's norms to judge others, and finally, leave unexamined their positions of privilege as citizens of formerly colonialist and, in many cases, neo-colonialist countries. Although these feminists, who try to help women in the 'Third World' liberate themselves, might be well-intentioned, they still bring their own ethnocentric and racist

> assumptions along with their trenchant critiques of patriarchy in the deployment of context-insensitive feminism.[9]

Hicks' critique of Western feminism is not unique. Her thoughts on this matter are common to many expressions of what are often called 'Third World feminisms'. This criticism is also articulated eloquently by women in the South like Chandra Talpade Mohanty[10] and Desiree Lewis.[11] In the main, Western feminists are seen as being from the industrialised world, White and middle class. Many Third World women have criticised feminist movements (in the West)

> on the grounds of cultural imperialism, and of short-sightedness in defining the meaning of gender in terms of middle class, White experiences, and in terms of internal racism, classism and homophobia.[12]

Talking about the Caribbean region, for example, Patricia Mohammed says that for many people feminism 'represents an imported set of ideas about women's rights and struggles, the latter which is felt to be unnecessary in these societies where the colonized black woman is deemed to have emerged as independent and aggressive in her own right.'[13] Despite such criticism, many Third World feminists prefer to redefine the term 'feminist' and use it for themselves[14] rather than to change the terminology.[15] This has resulted in the development of ideologies such as womanism and mujerista. Other Third World women 'have always engaged with feminism, even if the label is rejected in many instances'.[16] Such criticism is also present in Muslim discourses about gender equality and many Muslim women take the option of engaging with feminism but rejecting the label.

Deniz Kandiyoti traces the opposition that Muslims display towards Western feminism to the legacy of colonialism.

> Both colonial administrators and Christian missionaries attempted to reform the sexual mores and family traditions of Muslims as part of their 'civilising' mission. The interest in liberating oppressed Muslim women produced in the minds of many Muslims a close association between feminism and cultural imperialism.[17]

Muslim women activists also critiqued Western feminism for a range of other reasons. For Azizah al-Hibri,[18] the homogenisation that some Western feminists apply to women is a problem. Amina Wadud refuses to call herself a feminist, as Badran points out. [19] Wadud's writings have been very inspirational to Islamic feminists all over the world, including in South Africa. Yet, talking about those who approach the issues of women's equality in Islam from 'feminist ideals and rationales', Wadud says that although they are often concerned with 'valid issues', they would sometimes 'vindicate the position of women on grounds entirely incongruous with the Qur'anic position on women.'[20] She 'gets tired', she says, of 'the ideas that come to us in so-called global dialogue. Most of that discourse suggests that we should put religion aside so we can get real women's problems on the table. As Muslims we can't do that, religion is the base… I can't separate religion from my identity. It's just not possible.'[21]

Similar concerns exist among South African Muslim women. Sa'diyya Shaikh interviewed a range of women in Cape Town 'from those who called themselves religiously "conservative" to those that considered themselves "progressive and modernist" Muslims'. In these interviews, 'Some progressive women indicated that while there were problems which all women had in common, Western women had their own yardstick for measuring freedom which was not necessarily the same for Muslim women.'[22]

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

Islamic Feminism: An Oxymoron?

Can there be such a thing as 'Islamic Feminism'? Is it not a contradiction in terms? For many non-Muslims and Muslims alike the term would be seen as an oxymoron. Some non-Muslims view the

treatment of women under Taliban rule in Afghanistan, media images in movies like *Not without my Daughter* and the controversy over Muslim schoolgirls wearing headscarves in France as examples that assist in creating a perception of Islam as inherently oppressive to women. Thus the notion of a movement for the liberation of women having the qualifier 'Islamic' might seem strange. For many Muslims on the other hand, the term seems to be an attempt to use Islamic texts and symbols in the cause of Westernism and it would be rejected on that basis. Expressing this kind of concern, Al-Hibri, referring to the feminist organisation Sisterhood is Global Institute, says that it 'adopt[s] religious discourse – including Qur'anic verses – as a *tool* to achieve *secular* goals.'[23]

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

> women's coming into an awareness that being born female meant that they would lead their lives very differently from those of similar classes and circumstances who were born male. I refer to women's questioning *why* this was so, under what authority and *what* they started to do about it. The *why* was the beginning of an analysis of patriarchy – that is, the power that men had accorded themselves, irrespective of class, to make rules and to impose their rules on women to keep them subordinate. The *what* was feminism – ideas and actions expressed individually and collectively about personal life, family life, societal life;… in short, about being a woman in its totality and plurality of meanings – about gender and power.[24]

Taking this, then, as an adequate understanding of feminism, the question that remains to be answered is what makes an 'Islamic feminism' different. Lamya' al-Faruqi[25] attempts to define an Islamic feminism by discussing the elements within Islam that make it different from Western feminisms and which feminist movements must understand in order for there to be cooperation between feminisms and Islam. The first of three points she makes in arguing that there can exist an Islamic feminism is that it would be an ideology where the Qur'ān and the life example of the Prophet Muhammad (the Sunnāh) would represent the ideal for women. Asifa Quraishi is more

forthright about using the term Islamic feminism; she does not regard it as an oxymoron or as illusionary. 'Islam holds the potential for a really vibrant kind of feminism. The basis of egalitarianism is there in the Qur'an,' she insists.[26]

For Shamima Shaikh, '[t]he Muslim feminist looks to the Qur'an and the Prophet as a force for liberation.'[27] And while the Call of Islam called on Muslims in the 1980s to 'unleash a debate on the question of women so that equality and freedom become achievable,' it quickly added that '[t]his debate need not depart from the pages of the Qur'an.'[28] For Islamic feminists, are Islamic scripture used in the service of their feminism or does it flow from them? Shaikh answers that question from a personal perspective:

> I am often asked by people who are not Muslim why I do what I do; why struggle for the rights of women – and particularly Muslim women. What happened in my past that drove me to this? The answer is simple: we respond to the injunction of the Qur'ān to 'enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong', as we did when faced with the terrible injustices of apartheid and oppression on the basis of race and class.[29]

Following from the above perspectives of al-Faruqi, Quraishi and Shaikh, I propose a definition of Islamic feminism for the purposes of this Research Report. Islamic feminism is, firstly, an ideology which uses the Qur'ān and Sunnāh to provide the ideals for gender relationships as well as the weapons in the struggle to transform society in a way that gender equality is accepted as a principle around which society is structured. Secondly, it is the struggle of Muslim women and men for the emancipation of women based on this ideology. Islamic feminists 'insist that they are inspired by Islam and the women heroes of Islam who stood up for justice and human rights. And that Islam is a force of empowerment rather than of disempowerment.'[30]

Such an approach does two important things. Firstly, it applies a qualifier to the understanding of feminism in that the principles of the feminism that it refers to and the inspiration for it are rooted in Islamic scripture. Secondly, while Shaikh says that 'Islam is a force of empowerment rather than of disempowerment', Islam *has* been used for the disempowerment of women as well. This approach

then brings into sharp focus the issue of hermeneutics and interpretation of Islamic scriptures. Islamic feminists seek to read scriptures on the basis of a liberatory theology of justice. Discussing the ways in which Islamic feminists have sought to read Islamic scriptures 'as a force of [women's] empowerment' is the purpose of the next section.

International Islamic Feminist Thought

While Islamic resurgence in South Africa was greatly influenced by resurgent movements from outside of South Africa, as I had mentioned earlier, the influence of foreign Islamic feminists, in contrast, was different although still significant. There were no strong links that were developed with Islamic feminist organisations or Muslim organisations with feminist tendencies. Further, the person-to-person contact was very minimal. Despite this, it is interesting that there are many parallels in the development of Islamic feminisms in South Africa and other Muslim communities. For South Africans, however, the influence was mainly through Islamic feminist literature that found its way into South Africa. I will, in this section, briefly look at some of these outside influences: what they were and what they were saying. In the next section I will discuss some of the important elements of Islamic feminist thought in South Africa.

For the Call of Islam, the earliest international feminist influence (around 1986) was Kaukab Siddique.[31] According to Adli Jacobs, one of the early debates within the Call was that of women's leadership. Resorting to Siddique's book[32] quickly solved the problem. Siddique, a former Pakistani who relocated to Canada, makes a strong case in his book, *The Struggle of Muslim Women* for the absolute equality between women and men. He includes within his sphere of women's rights the right to lead a state and the right to lead the congregational prayer – of men and women. The Call accepted his arguments about women's leadership. However, the Call never really promoted Siddique's books in South Africa. It seems the organisation's supposed obsession with homegrown

solutions for South African Muslim activists[33] meant that even foreigners that influenced its own ideas were not promoted.

The 1990s saw the publication and/or distribution of a number of progressive books on women and Islam. Two books from early in the decade that did not get much attention in South Africa were by Siddique[34] and Asghar Ali Engineer.[35] This was unfortunate because both books were for popular rather than academic audiences. Because of their popular format and style, the wide distribution of the books of these two scholars by Islamic feminists might have assisted in the wider dissemination of Islamic feminist ideas.

Feminist literature that started gaining popularity in the mid-1990s among Islamic feminists in South Africa was, by contrast, more academic. Further, this literature also dealt with the more complicated issues of textual interpretation and hermeneutics in greater detail. The need to consider hermeneutics as important was introduced to South Africa by Parvez Mansoor when he introduced readings of Fazlur Rahman to participants at the MYM's ITP in 1987. Rahman was 'critical of contemporary critical Islamic resurgence, particularly its anti-intellectual emphasis. Rahman insisted on a creative reading of the sources of Islam for modern application.'[36] While Rahman's thought laid a basis for new readings of Islamic scripture – Qur'ān and ḥadīth – the feminist readings of scripture was provided by other scholars.

Three of the most influential of these scholars have been Fatima Mernissi, Leila Ahmed and Amina Wadud. The latter two have visited South Africa. Ahmed's visit in 1997 lasted for about 24 hours while Wadud travelled the country on a lecture tour. In each of the three cases one book was the most significant for South African Islamic feminists. Mernissi's *Women and Islam,*[37] Wadud's *Qur'an and Woman*[38] and Ahmed's *Women and Gender in Islam*[39] were avidly read, quoted and debated. All three concentrate on Islamic scripture and feminist interpretations of these. Wadud's

focus is the Qur'ān, Mernissi's is the ḥadīth, and Ahmed – while discussing both of these – is more focussed on Muslim history and the subversion of the position of women as history progressed from the era of the Prophet Muhammad.

Generally, these three scholars argue that the denial of women's rights is not inherent in Islam or part of Islamic scripture – especially the Qur'ān – but is a later development. That later development might be the accretions to ḥadīth literature[40] or the new political structures that developed with the expansion of the Muslim empire.[41]

'It was not the text which restricted women,' says Wadud, 'but the interpretations of that text which have come to be held in greater importance than the text itself.'[42] Her work seeks to review the Qur'ān 'with its principles of social justice and human equality, and its objective of guidance.'[43] She insists that

> Femininity and masculinity are not created characteristics imprinted into the very primordial nature of female and male persons, neither are they concepts the Qur'an discusses or alludes to. They are defined characteristics applied to female and male persons respectively on the basis of culturally determined factors.[44]

According to Mernissi,

> If women's rights are a problem for some Muslim men, it is neither because of the Koran nor the Prophet, nor the Islamic tradition, but simply because those rights conflict with the interests of a male elite.[45]

In her *Women and Islam*, Mernissi attempts to scrape away the additions to Qur'ānic interpretations, particularly aḥādīth that she argues are based on the 'interests of the male elite' in order to reveal an Islamic tradition which does not regard women's rights as 'a problem'.

For Ahmed, the Qur'ān displays a tension between 'pragmatic' and 'ethical' perspectives as far as the position of women is concerned.[46] She argues that the pragmatic perspective was context-bound and the ethical perspective is the one that should persist and determine gender relations. Engineer[47]

argues similarly that the Qur'ān contains provisions that are 'contextual' and those that are 'normative'. In Muslim history, argues Ahmed, the pragmatic [and legal] perspectives overwhelmed the ethical, thus resulting in an understanding of Islam which was misogynistic.

These scholars tackled issues of Muslim women's oppression as they related to the inherent nature of women as well how such oppression, disadvantage or discrimination manifested itself in the public and private domains, showing that the objective of Islamic scripture was the empowerment and emancipation of women rather than their subjugation. At the level of women's nature this included issues such as the notion that women were inherently weaker or less intellectual than men. On the public level, questions of women's leadership and other roles within the community were addressed. And on the private level, the relative roles of women and men in the family were dealt with. Such an approach – which looked at the Qur'ān and Sunnāh for inspiration for the emancipation of women – was one which appealed to South African Islamic feminists. These were people who were committed to their faith and were grappling with seeming contradictions they saw in their religion and how those contradictions related to their lives. That the scriptures on which their faith and religious practice were based held the potential for the emancipation of women meant these contradictions could be resolved in favour of a gender equitable understanding of Islam. These women-liberatory elements of Islamic thought internationally then manifested themselves in Islamic thought within South Africa.

South African Islamic Feminist Thought – the 1990s

Within South Africa, a more sophisticated understanding of the position and role of women took root in the 1990s. As pointed out earlier, however, these issues had already started to be debated in the late 1980s. Esack says that there is not 'sufficient of a discourse' within Islamic feminism to talk of trends. One should rather talk of attitudes towards gender justice, he suggests.[48] The 'attitudes' he refers to he labels as 'traditionalist', 'modernist/apologist/loopholist' and 'radical'. I prefer not to

use these descriptions because I regard them as being too judgemental and I do not believe the attempt to understand Islamic feminisms in South Africa is served by these categories.

I do, however, assert in this section that in praxis, the rethinking about women in Islam manifested itself as a range of ideas and positions. This range included positions with nuanced differences in praxis from each other. I will discuss here mainly two categories within the range – realising that there were positions in between: the gender activist and the academic categories.[49] The first position includes those people who were primarily activists, working in the community and whose primary task is the practical alleviation of the plight of Muslim women and the struggle for women's rights. The second category includes those Islamic feminists who have focussed their energies on the development of thought around gender issues and whose primary contribution has been academic. This is a difficult categorisation to make because none of the Islamic feminists can be said to be *only* activists or *only* academics. All have contributed both at the level of thought and activism, but my distinction is in relation to their primary activities (in the 1990s). The effects of my categorisation will become clearer as I proceed. While there are a large number of people that could fall into each of these categories, I will discuss the first category with reference to Shamima Shaikh, and the second with reference to Farid Esack.[50] I will also, however, refer to interviews and writings of other Islamic feminists as well.

'I'm just a housewife,' was a favourite refrain of Shamima Shaikh.[51] While her Islamic feminist comrades might not agree that she was *just* a housewife, Shaikh's statement makes a point about how she viewed her role in the world of feminist activism. For her, feminist activism was primarily about action in support of the rights that women were denied. Her ideas, positions and approach to Islamic scripture – like that of others in this 'activist' category – are informed by their activism and the experiences of women they interacted with. Shaikh and Firdouza Waggie, for example, both

worked with divorced Muslim women; Shaikh in an informal manner and Waggie through the Divorce Support Group which she was instrumental in initiating.

Both of them were also centrally involved in drawing up and distributing a questionnaire to Muslim women nationally. The questionnaire was a project of the MYM Gender Desk and the objective was to collect information from Muslim women about their experiences as women. It focussed particularly on issues related to marital life and women's expectations of marriage. Part of the purpose of developing the questionnaire was for the Gender Desk to understand the challenges Muslim women face and to develop programmes around those challenges – particularly as regards the issue of Muslim Personal Law. Such projects meant that the activist Islamic feminist attempted to allow her feminism to be influenced by the needs of Muslim women on the ground.

While Shaikh has been hailed by many for the radical positions that she articulated and the radical and courageous actions that she undertook in support of those positions,[52] she was less concerned about developing radical positions than about the practical alleviation of women's difficulties. In the last paper she presented before her death, 'Women and Islam – the Gender Struggle in South Africa: The Ideological Struggle', she speaks out against an anti-intellectualist position that she believes was characterising progressive Muslim discourse. At the same time, however, that paper in itself does not pretend to be an academic paper and the arguments that she makes there substantiate my assertion about her. One example that will suffice is the manner in which she interprets the contentious *qawwamūn* verse of the Qur'ān (4:34). This verse has been one that Islamic feminists internationally grapple with and attempt to reconcile with their notions of gender equality. The verse states:

> Men are *qawwamūn* (maintainers/protectors) of women, for Allah has preferred (*faddalā*) some over others, and (on the basis) of what they spend of their property. So the righteous women (*salihāt*) are *qanitāt* (obedient), guarding in secret that which Allah has guarded. As from those whom you fear *nushūz* (rebellion), admonish them, banish them to beds apart, and scourge/beat them. Then, if they obey you, seek not a way against them.

Shaikh's approach to the verse is a simplistic, practical one that might be useful for activists relating to abused women but not satisfactory in terms of the ideals of gender equality that she promotes. Regarding the most contentious part of this verse – 'As from those whom you fear *nushūz* (rebellion), admonish them, banish them to beds apart, and scourge/beat them' – she suggests that

> there are three stages of correcting: admonish them, banish them to beds apart, and then beat them lightly. The one that causes most grief in the community is that men are allowed to 'beat' women or one individual is allowed to beat another, especially in a marriage… But if I look at the stages through which one goes, through the process, first it's 'admonish them'. (If it says 'beat them *lightly*' then admonishing would be, for example, just saying 'stop it' or something like that. Not yelling or shouting, but something light.) And then 'banish them to beds apart'. I don't believe anybody, any rapist or abuser – according to the profiles for such people – will get to this second stage. Rapists and abusers (that are spouses), generally they'd sleep with her first. Generally they sleep with the victim then beat them, then sleep with them again. A normal, good Muslim will never reach that stage, the stage of banishing them. An abusive husband will do things the other way around.[53]

This is clearly a defensive and apologetic position that does not seriously grapple with the text and does not attempt to either deconstruct or contextualise the verse (even though she argues that the Qur'ān and ḥadīth must be contextualised). Despite her recommendation to read Ahmed, Wadud and Mernissi who agonise about interpretation, Shaikh avoids getting into an interpretive debate about the verse. It seems that for her such a debate seemed unnecessary; the more important issue was subverting the oppressive interpretations of the verse in any way – even an apologetic one – in order to ease the plight of abused women.

While activists like Shaikh do not shy away from dealing with difficult verses like 4:34 and difficult aḥādīth, they prefer to focus on other verses and traditions that clearly *promote* gender equality. Hence Shaikh could say that, 'The Qur'an declares the absolute moral and spiritual equality of men and women,'[54] and support her assertion by quoting Qur'ān 33:35:

> For Muslim men and Muslim women, for believing men and believing women, for devout men and devout women, for true men and true women, for men and women who are patient and constant, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who fast (and deny themselves), for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in Allah's praise, for them has Allah prepared forgiveness and great reward.

Shaikh concludes that, 'This passage makes a clear statement about the *absolute equality* of the human moral condition and identical spiritual and moral obligations placed on all individuals *regardless of sex,*' (emphasis mine). She also quotes other verses (3:195, 49:13, 19:17-19, 28:7, 27:22-23) to argue for the equality of women and men, to argue that women received revelation from God and to show that the Qur'ān praises and therefore supports the leadership roles of women – even as rulers of nations.[55]

Shaikh is characteristic of those in the activist category who, while very critical of contemporary Muslim society and its practices towards women, are defensive of the scripture and the early Muslim community:

> Despite the overwhelming and strong position of Muslims that Islam liberated women 1400 years ago, you still find there's a problem. Some thought and practice within Muslim society does not reflect this conviction, giving rise to the accusation that Islam oppresses women, to which the Muslim community reacts emotionally with denial and animosity, without reflecting inwardly and addressing the existing problems.[56]

This manner of interpreting scripture (interpretation which will be easily acceptable to other Muslim women) of the 'activist' Islamic feminists is also reflected in their attitude to the 'feminist' label. Waggie makes a statement typical of this group when she says: 'I would feel that I am an Islamic feminist, but I wont say so publicly,' because 'Muslims are opposed to the notion of women being superior.'[57]

Such caution is also reflected in the way 'activist feminists' prefer to deal with conflictual issues. While the obituaries about Shaikh reflect her courage in the face of opposition and people like Waggie, Fatima Nordien and Sa'diyya Shaikh were unflinching in their support of Islamic feminist causes – such as the Wadud lecture at Claremont Main Rd Mosque in 1994 – they are sensitive to the effects that their positions and actions have on the broader community. Sa'diyya Shaikh's[58] insistence that issues of conflict must be dealt with 'with compassion'[59] is a reflection of that

attitude, as is Shamima Shaikh's insistence for dialogue with the United Ulama Council of South Africa.[60]

It is important to note that despite the relatively less sophisticated discourse of the 'activist feminist' of the 1990s, she was not unconfident in her positions in relation to the 'academic feminist'. Chapter Two highlighted some of that confidence of the 1990s. Earlier, in the 1980s for example, activist women generally took direction – even in terms of issues of women and Islam – from the 'more knowledgeable' men. Mahdi Samodien, an MYM activist from the early 1980s and husband of Waggie – reflects on the new confidence of the 1990s: 'Women are wanting to give expression to reinterpreting Islam from a woman's perspective and assert themselves according to Islam. Only a female can appreciate the depth of the oppression of women… The trump is the woman's view.'[61]

Having briefly examined the views and attitudes of the 'activist Islamic feminist' I now turn to the 'academic feminist'. In this category I will examine mainly the views of Farid Esack. Others in the academic category include Ebrahim Moosa and Abdulkader Tayob.[62] I have decided to focus on Esack because I believe he represents the extreme position –furthest from the 'activist' – in the academic category. He refers to himself as being on the 'radical edge' of Islamic feminism.[63] I want to briefly unpack here what that 'radical edge' is.

Esack was one of the four founder members of the Call of Islam. He left the organisation in 1989 and devoted himself to academia, getting a PhD and pursuing post-doctoral studies in Germany. In 1997 he was appointed to South Africa's Commission on Gender Equality. According to Esack, his recent article 'Islam and Gender Justice: Beyond Simplistic Apologia'[64] is 'the furthest that people have gone in looking at the Qur'ānic text and its patriarchal nature and the patriarchal nature of God.'[65] An analysis of this article will therefore form the main part of my explication of Esack as someone belonging to the 'academic' position.[66]

Esack sees the Islamic feminist struggle leading to 'the absolute equality of men and women; unqualified equality as far as imams, inheritance, etc are concerned'.[67] However, he does not seem keen to uncover the liberatory aspects of scripture that actually assist in moving society in that direction. The activist approach of focussing on the verses and traditions that promote 'the absolute equality of men and women'[68] is not one that Esack favours; and this is a significant difference between the two approaches. While the activist's imperative is the women she has to deal with on a regular basis, the academic's imperative seems to be more one of taking further the process of textual deconstruction and developing hermeneutics than the application of such deconstruction and hermeneutics in the lives of ordinary women. Esack's 'Islam and Gender Justice' is an example of this.

While the activist grapples with the scripture in order to use it to uplift the condition of Muslim women, the academic project has the danger of being more selfish. In Esack's words:

> So, whom am I writing for? I write for myself. I want greater clarity about how and why it is possible for me to be a Muslim with a passionate commitment to both the Qur'an and to gender justice.[69]

And, 'Our view of what we owe to women, is really a view of what we owe to ourselves.'[70] Pointing out that gender injustice results in men also being in 'bondage', he says: 'Although I, as a male, may therefore owe women many debts, the debt is essentially to myself. I owe it to my own humanity to be free and for this reason work for gender justice.'[71] Such an approach liberates the reader-academic from the need to be sensitive to, firstly, the women for whose sake the reinterpretation of scripture is undertaken and, secondly, to those who oppose gender equality and who impose their gender unjust views on Muslim society. The activist, who is not liberated in the same kind of way, would not be able to openly state that 'if a choice has to be made between violence towards the text and textual legitimization of violence against real people, then I would be comfortable to plead guilty to the former.'[72]

This approach manifests itself in the methodology Esack uses in interpreting various contentious verses of the Qur'ān (which, as I pointed out, are the ones he prefers to focus on). He often provides the most patriarchal and misogynist translation of a verse simply in order to then be able to critique it as being patriarchal. In doing so, he does 'violence towards the text', imposing words and meanings that might not exist. I will examine Esacks' interpretation of Qur'ān 4:34 to illustrate the above assertion.

Esack's reading of the contentious verse 4:34 is the clearest example of his imposition onto the text. He translates the verse in the following way:

> Men are qawwamun (the Protectors and maintainers) of/over ('ala) women,
> Because God has faddala (preferred) some of them over others,
> and because they support them from their means.
> Therefore the salihat (righteous) women are qanitat (devoutly obedient),
> and guard in their husbands' absence what God would have them guard.
> As to those women on whose part you fear nushuz (ill-conduct \ disobedience)
> Admonish them, refuse to share their beds and beat them
> But if they return again to obedience seek not means against them
> for God is the most high, Great above you.[73]

I will not engage in a full critique of Esack's interpretation of this verse. It will suffice to raise a few points. While he gives some of the key words of the verse in the Arabic before translating them, Esack does not attempt to problematise these key words but prefers to accept traditional translations. This does an injustice to the excellent work done by feminist scholars like Amina Wadud[74] and Riffat Hassan[75] who deal with this verse in detail, problematising these key words and attempting to present all possible readings of the words and of the verse as a whole. Barbara Stowasser analyses some of these views – of Rahman, Amina Wadud-Muhsin, Abdullahi al-Na'im and Nasr Abu Zayd – relating to this verse, showing how their interpretations differ from the traditional ones.[76]

'The Qur'an actually has a word for female disobedience, *nushuz*,' claims Esack in reference to this verse.[77] A quick response would be to quote the first part of 4:128: 'If a wife fears *nushūz* on her husband's part, there is no blame on them if they arrange an amicable settlement between themselves.' Clearly, the Qur'ān uses the word *nushūz* in the context of the verse that it is located within. In 4:34 it is about women's *nushūz*; in 4:128 it is about husbands' *nushūz*. It is not, as Esack alleges, a word created by the Qur'ān especially for 'female disobedience'.

Referring to the word *qanitāt*, Esack says: 'While liberal readers insist that… *qanitat* (the obedient) refers to obedience to God, most of the traditional interpreters have viewed this as obedience to the wishes of the husband and suggest that this, in fact, is an extension – even a condition, of righteousness.'[78] Esack continues, in his attempt to give the most patriarchal view of the verse, by then concluding that all the feminist scholars are actually wrong and 'the traditional exegetes are nearer to the truth in their fusion of duty to God and to husband'.[79] His next sentence is perhaps the most obvious attempt at imposing meaning on the verse. He repeats his translation of the fragment of the verse: 'The righteous wives are those who "guard in their husbands' absence what God would have them guard".' The problem with his translation is that the word 'husband' does not occur here. Indeed, the word 'husband' does not occur even *once* in the verse. Yet he imposes it onto the verse to prove a 'fusion of duty to God and to husband'.

Since the objective of Islamic feminisms is the emancipation of Muslim women, it does not help for Islamic feminists to suggest to Muslim women that they cannot 'be content with a Transcendent who speaks about you and rarely to you'.[80] Such an approach could actually serve to disempower women who look to Islamic feminists for their empowerment and emancipation. The difference in the manner that Qur'ānic verses about women are problematised by activist feminists and by academic feminists like Esack are an indication of the location of each. The activist locates her/himself among disadvantaged Muslim women; the academic is liberated from them.

In this section I have discussed some elements of Islamic feminist thought in South Africa. There is a range of such thought and not all positions could be covered. My purpose was to analyse two extremes[81] within the spectrum. I thus looked at what I called an activist Islamic feminist articulation and an academic articulation; the former being represented (in this Report) by Shamima Shaikh and Firdouza Waggie and the latter by Farid Esack. Some implications of these different articulations will be dealt with in Chapter Five.

Conclusion

The term 'feminism' is a contested term among many people who struggle for the emancipation of women. Many Third World women activists apply it to themselves with circumspection and often after redefining it. Many Muslim women's rights activists face a similar dilemma. I have examined this issue in this Chapter. Further, taking into consideration the views of Muslim feminist activists, I have proposed a definition of Islamic feminism as an ideology that promotes and struggles for gender equality using the Qur'an and Sunnāh as the motivating factors and the tools. Thus, I have argued that Islamic feminisms are different in certain important respects from Western feminisms and such differences shape the form and substance of Islamic feminisms differently.

I have looked at the thought of certain prominent international Islamic feminist scholars who have had a profound impact on the South African scene. Such scholars as Amina Wadud, Fatima Mernissi and Leila Ahmed have proposed feminist readings of Islamic scripture – the Qur'ān and ḥadīth – and of Muslim history. These readings and the hermeneutical theories that informed them were appropriated by Islamic feminists in South Africa and developed into local Islamic thought that would also influence feminist action.

Feminist thought and action in South Africa, however, fall within a spectrum of positions. Attempting to analyse all these positions or tendencies is a task that cannot be accomplished in this Research Report. I therefore critically analysed two positions within this spectrum: what I called the 'feminist-activist' and the 'feminist-academic' positions. Having argued that Islamic feminists in South Africa have been influenced by international Islamic feminist thought, I will look – in the next chapter – at another significant influence on the emergence of Islamic feminisms in South Africa: the impact of the national liberation struggle.

[1] See Abdulkader Tayob, *Islamic Resurgence in South Africa: The Muslim Youth Movement*, Cape Town: UCT Press, 1995.
[2] Quoted in Elizabeth Warnock Fernea, *In Search of Islamic Feminism: One Woman's Global journey*, New York: Doubleday, 1998, 388.
[3] My use of the term 'Third World' by no means implies my acceptance of the term as unproblematic. I use the term with the full knowledge of the implications of hegemony inherent in it and how it is counterposed with 'First World'. 'Third World' is used here as a convenient descriptive category but always used under protest.
[4] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Feminism 2000: One Step Beyond", *Feminist Review*, Number 64 Spring 2000, 115.
[5] Lisa Tuttle, *Encyclopedia of Feminism*, Essex: Longman, 1986, 107.
[6] Maggie Humm, *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory*, Harvester: Wheatsheaf, 1989, 74.
[7] See Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Introduction: Cartographies of Struggle" in (ed.) Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres, *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991, 3-4 where she expresses the difficulty of using the term 'Western feminism' but argues that the term can be used in this context in terms of the kind of scholarship produced by feminists in the West especially regarding Third World women.
[8] See Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" in (ed.) Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres, *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991, 51-80.
[9] Joanna Hicks, "Leila Ahmed's *Women and Gender in Islam*", <<http://www2.soc.hawaii.edu/css/dept/owr/Joanna.html>>, downloaded 30 June 2000.
[10] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes".
[11] Desiree Lewis, "Feminisms in South Africa", *Women's Studies International Forum 16*, 1993, 535-542
[12] Mohanty, "Introduction", 7.
[13] Patricia Mohammed, "The Future of Feminism in the Caribbean", *Feminist Review*, Number 64, Spring 2000, 116.
[14] There are exceptions to this rule. One such exception is Indian activist Madhu Kishwar, editor of the women's magazine *Manushi*, which is regarded as a beacon of Indian feminism. She explicitly states that she is not a feminist. See "Women, Sex and Marriage: Restraint as a Feminine Strategy", *Manushi*, Issue No. 98.
[15] Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1992, 8.
[16] Mohanty, "Introduction", 7.
[17] Deniz Kandiyoti, "Introduction" in ed. Deniz Kandiyoti, *Women, Islam and the State*, London: Macmillan, 1991, 7.
[18] Quoted in Warnock Fernea, *In Search of Islamic Feminism*, 388.
[19] Margot Badran, "Feminisms and Islamisms", Review Essay in *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 10 No.4 (Winter), 1999, 200.
[20] Amina Wadud-Muhsin, *Qur'an and Woman*, Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Fajar Bakti Sdn. Bhd., 1992, 2.
[21] Quoted in Warnock Fernea, *In Search of Islamic Feminism*, 403.
[22] Sa'diyya Shaikh, "Battered Women in Muslim Communities in the Western Cape: Religious Constructions of Gender, Marriage, Sexuality and Violence", Unpublished MA Dissertation, Religious Studies, Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 1996, 34.
[23] Quoted in Warnock Fernea, *In Search of Islamic Feminism*, 396.
[24] Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt*, Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1996, 3.
[25] Lamya' al-Faruqi, *Women, Muslim Society and Islam*, Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1988, 23-31.
[26] Quoted in Warnock Fernea, *In Search of Islamic Feminism*, 378.
[27] Shamima Shaikh, "Women and Islam – the Gender Struggle in South Africa: The Ideological Struggle", <<http://shams.za.org/itppaper.htm>>, 1997.
[28] Quoted in Farid Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression*, Oxford: Oneworld, 1997, 223.
[29] Shamima Shaikh, "Women's Role in Contemporary Society", <<http://shams.za.org/role.htm>>, 1994.
[30] Shamima Shaikh, "Women and Islam".

[31] Interview with Adli Jacobs.
[32] Kaukab Siddique, *The Struggle of Muslim Women*, Maryland: American Society for Education and Religion, 1986.
[33] See Esack's criticism of the MYM and MSA for their attachment to ideas originating outside of South Africa in "Three Strands in the South African Struggle for Justice", *Third World Quarterly*, 10(2), 1988.
[34] Kaukab Siddique, *Liberation of Women thru Islam*, Maryland: American Society for Education and Religion, 1990.
[35] Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Rights of Women in Islam*, New York: St. Martins Press, 1992.
[36] Tayob, *Islamic Resurgence*, 170.
[37] Fatima Mernissi, *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry*, Translated by Mary Jo Lakeland, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991. Mernissi has published many books but her *Women and Islam* was the most popular for Islamic feminists in South Africa in terms of providing scriptural arguments for their feminism.
[38] Wadud-Muhsin, *Qur'an and Woman.*
[39] Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.
[40] See Mernissi, *Women and Islam.*
[41] See Ahmed, *Women and Gender.*
[42] Wadud-Muhsin, *Qur'an and Woman*, vi.
[43] Wadud-Muhsin, *Qur'an and Woman*, vi.
[44] Wadud-Muhsin, *Qur'an and Woman*, 22.
[45] Mernissi, *Women and Islam*, ix.
[46] Ahmed, *Women and Gender*, 63.
[47] Engineer, *The Rights of Women*, 42.
[48] Interview with Farid Esack, 12 December 2000.
[49] I am only using these 'categories' for the sake of descriptive convenience in this Research Report. I do not suggest that these are categories that should be used as analytical categories beyond this Report.
[50] Again, I caution that neither of these two people is to be regarded as 'typical' of any 'category' of feminist.
[51] Khadija Magardie, "Faith on the Move", *Mail & Guardian Friday Books*, January 12 to 18 2001, 5.
[52] See the articles about Shaikh and the obituaries to her, <<http://shams.za.org/orbit.htm>>.
[53] Shamima Shaikh, "Women and Islam".
[54] Shamima Shaikh, "The Role of Women".
[55] Shamima Shaikh, "The Role of Women".
[56] Shamima Shaikh, "Women and Islam".
[57] Interview with Firdouza Waggie, 21 November 2000.
[58] In terms of the kind of categorisation I am using, I would call Sa'diyya Shaikh an 'activist-academic'
[59] Interview with Sa'diyya Shaikh, 8 January 2000.
[60] Shamima Shaikh letter to the United Ulama Council of South Africa, 9 August 1995, "Brief Dialogue with the ''Ulama", <<http://shams.za.org/dialogueulama.htm>>.
[61] Interview with Mahdi Samodien. 21 November 2000.
[62] I have noted earlier that although Sa'diyya Shaikh is an academic I would not include her in the 'academic' category but rather refer to her as an 'activist-academic'.
[63] Interview with Esack.
[64] Farid Esack, "Islam and Gender Justice: Beyond Simplistic Apologia" in (eds.) John C. Raines and Daniel C. Maguire, *What Men Owe to Women: Men's Voices from World Religions*, New York: Suny Press, 2001, 187-210.
[65] Interview with Esack.
[66] The impression should not be derived from this that all of those that fall within the 'academic' category have the same views or strategies as Esack. My objective is not to present all possible views within a category – or, indeed, to present all categories – but to illustrate positions on the ends of the activist – academic spectrum.
[67] Interview with Esack.
[68] See, for example, Shamima Shaikh, "Role of Women".
[69] Esack, "Islam and Gender Justice", 188.
[70] Esack, "Islam and Gender Justice", 207.
[71] Esack, "Islam and Gender Justice", 189.

[72] Esack, "Islam and Gender Justice", 192.
[73] Esack, "Islam and Gender Justice", 194.
[74] Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman.*
[75] Riffat Hassan, "An Islamic Perspective", in (ed.) Jeanne Becher, *Women, Religion and Sexuality*, Geneva: WCC, 1990, 93-128.
[76] Barbara Stowasser, "Gender Issues and Contemporary Quran Interpretation", in (eds.) Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito, *Islam, Gender and Social Change*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, 32-42.
[77] Esack, "Islam and Gender Justice", 201.
[78] Esack, "Islam and Gender Justice", 200.
[79] Esack, "Islam and Gender Justice", 200.
[80] Esack, "Islam and Gender Justice", 196.
[81] I do not use the word 'extremes' here in a negative way to indicate 'extremists'. Rather I use it to indicate the ends of the spectrum of Islamic feminist thought.

THE IMPACT OF THE NATIONAL LIBERATION STRUGGLE ON THE EMERGENCE OF ISLAMIC FEMINISMS

Introduction

Apartheid was an all-pervasive ideology that affected the all aspects of the lives of South Africans: where we lived, where and how we were educated, whom we could marry, whom we could have sex with, what we said, who we said it to… in short, apartheid defined who we *were*. It is not surprising then, that the struggle against apartheid (and capitalism, depending on where on the opposition political spectrum one located oneself) also became pervasive for those engaged in the struggle'[1]. For anti-apartheid activists, the national liberation struggle in South Africa deeply affected how people thought, how they behaved, who they befriended, how they prayed, how they worked…

This Chapter will briefly examine how feminisms in South Africa emerged out of the national liberation struggle. The political involvement of sections of the Muslim community in the struggle against apartheid had a definite impact on how they viewed a range of issues. How the national liberation struggle shaped Islamic understandings and struggles around women and, more broadly, gender, will be explored in this Chapter. I will argue that there was a similar development within Islamic discourse as the anti-apartheid Islamism that swept South Africa in the 1980s – and located itself within the broad national liberation struggle – provided the impetus for the emergence of Islamic feminisms. Thus, an important focus of this Chapter will be the interaction between the Islamic Movement and the national liberation struggle and how such an interaction influenced Islamic feminisms. In order to accomplish this I will again look at the manifestations of Islamic feminisms in the Call of Islam and the Muslim Youth Movement. Finally, I will argue that there was a difference in the articulation of gender issues between men and women who entered the

Islamic feminist terrain depending on whether they entered through the Islamic Movement or through the national liberation struggle.

Feminism in South Africa in the 1990s

In this section I will briefly examine the development of feminism in the South African context in the 1990s and how such a development was related to the national liberation struggle. This section will provide a parallel with the next section which will examine the impact of the national liberation struggle on *Islamic* feminisms in South Africa.

Many South African scholars have argued that there was no real feminist movement in South Africa until the beginning of the 1990s.[2] Others suggest that a feminist movement did exist – although not self-conscious. The Malibongwe Conference held in January 1990 in the Netherlands – two weeks prior to the unbanning of the liberation movement – and which brought together women from within and without South Africa for the first time, is heralded by many as the beginning of the emergence of feminism or of a feminist movement in South Africa.[3]

The 1980s saw the development of strong women's organisations like the United Women's Organisation, the Natal Organisation of Women and the Federation of Transvaal women. This was also the period of increased anti-apartheid resistance in the townships and women emerged a powerful force fighting around 'bread and butter issues'. However, the relationships between class, race and gender were only seriously explored in the trade union movement.[4] The increased role of women as political actors generated new political debates about the possible transformation of political organisations so that they might take account of women's interests and facilitate women's participation.[5] Thus, the Malibongwe conference came at an opportune time. It 'legitimated feminism as a political discourse'[6] and 'the position and status of women were legitimated as political issues to be addressed within the process of national liberation'.[7] An important aspect of

the conference was the networking between South African women and women from other countries: Palestine, Mozambique, Angola, etc.[8]

Hassim's prediction that the political transitionary period to follow Malibongwe would provide the space for a feminist movement to emerge[9] was proven to be true soon after the unbanning of the liberation movements. Four months after the Malibongwe conference the ANC issued a landmark policy statement on women's emancipation.[10] For the first time in the liberation struggle, an official position from a major section of the liberation movement acknowledged the centrality of gender equality to national liberation and its role in a future constitution. The document also called on the ANC Women's League to initiate a debate that will result in a Charter of Women's Rights. This call led to the establishment of the multi-party and multi-organisational Women's National Coalition (WNC). The WNC was a broad front of women from across the racial, political, cultural and religious divides for the singular purpose of ensuring equality for women in the new constitution. It 'helped to bring [gender equality] directly into the mainstream of public discourse at a critical political moment – that of negotiating the new democracy.'[11] But it also served as a platform on which to mobilise women and women's organisations for gender equality. By 1994 when it presented its 'Women's Charter for Effective Equality' to a Women's Convention, the WNC had 90 national organisations and 14 regional coalitions as its members.[12]

Besides women being organised in the WNC, the various negotiations processes leading up to democratic elections in April 1994 also saw increased women involvement. CODESA I virtually excluded women completely; CODESA II saw a symbolic feminist victory with the formation of the multiparty Gender Advisory Committee (GAC) as a result of pressure by the ANC Women's League (ANCWL). The ANCWL's policy section also made input into the terms of reference of the CODESA working groups and into ANC positions in the negotiations. And the GAC also allowed civil society gender activists and academics to get intimately involved with the process. Women had

even more impact in the second round of negotiations as they were included in all negotiating teams in the Multiparty Negotiating Process (MNP). The WNC was also involved in the MNP. The end of the negotiating processes saw the adoption of the interim constitution which was widely recognised as having tremendously advanced the cause of gender equality. The rest of the decade was witness to even more political gains being made as women were included in large numbers (albeit still not in terms of their demographic proportion) on party lists for election and the strengthening of the 'triple alliance' of women politicians, activists and academics.[13]

The Emergence of Islamic Feminisms in the 1990s

While the Muslim scenario did not *mirror* the above national process in the emergence of feminisms – especially in terms of party politics,[14] I will argue in this section that there were similar developments, at around the same time, in the emergence of Islamic feminisms. Diagram 1 illustrates some of these similarities.

Islamic feminisms of the 1990s developed out of organisations and through individuals that had played a role in the struggle against Apartheid – notably in the 1980s. From the previous section it is clear that the development of general feminisms in South Africa followed a similar path. The nationalist struggle (converging with a class struggle) in South Africa led to the development of a strong human rights discourse among left activists and intellectuals. This then led to feminist discourses. From a Muslim perspective the process began with an Islamist discourse influenced mainly by international Muslim politics. Islamic anti-Apartheid activists were also part of the nationalist struggle (and class struggle) and attempted to develop Islamic discourses of this struggle. These discourses, overlapping with the general human rights discourses, led to attempted Islamic discourses of human rights. These 'Islamic human rights' discourses then interfaced with the South African women's rights / feminist discourses, and was heavily influenced by international Islamic

modernist discourses and international Islamic discourses on gender equality to result in the emergence of indigenous South African feminist discourses.

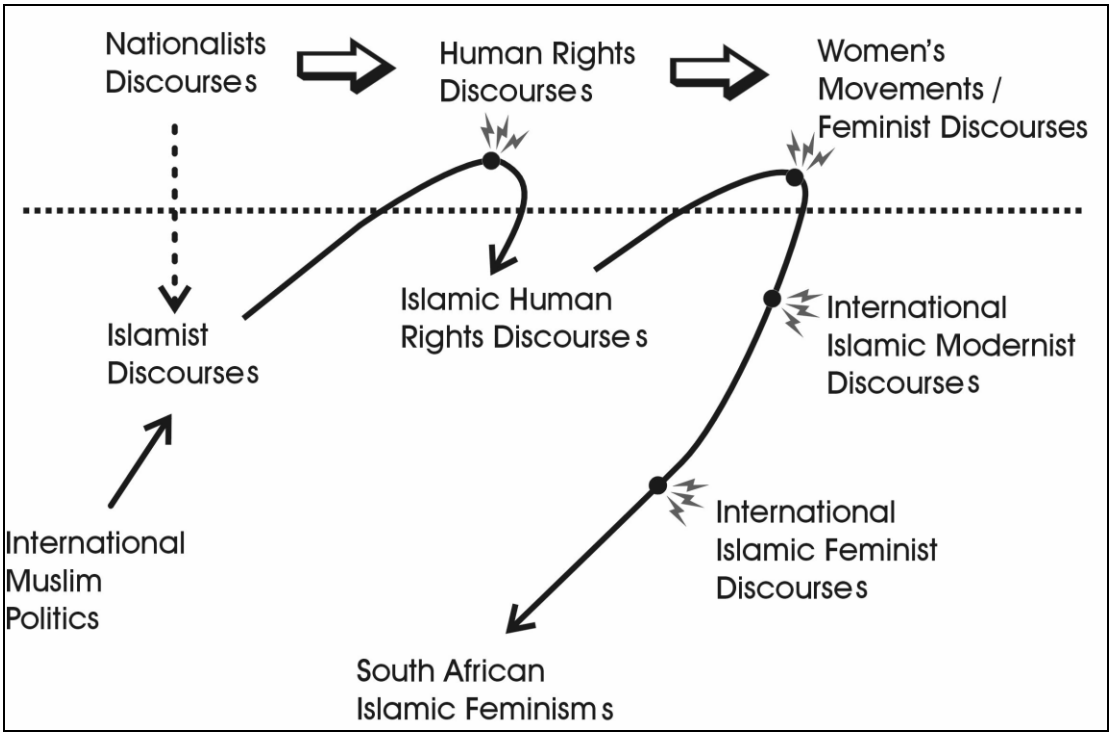


Diagram 1

From Chapter Two it becomes clear that in terms of two organisations – the MYM and the Call – the beginning of the 1990s saw some differences in their approach to feminist issues. By 1990, increased political activity, interfaith relations and women's rights became among the most important issues on the MYM's agenda.[15] On the other hand, by 1989 the Call had begun to somewhat downplay its message of gender equality. This development was, to some extent, also attributable to the Call's involvement in the struggle. In its efforts to draw in the 'ulamā into the liberation struggle, the Call was willing to compromise on some of its positions that were unpalatable to Islamic conservatism. Chapter Two has explored in more detail the attitude of the Call towards the 'ulamā. One of these issues that was compromised was that of women's equality. Secondly, while the Call began as an Islamic organisation attempted to develop a comprehensive Islamic programme, its focus soon became political activity and for the sake of mobilising support

for the national liberation struggle, compromises had to be made. The women agenda was one of those. Tahir Sitoto says that the Call was

> reacting to things that were happening in the broader South African socio-political milieu. There were perceived to be priority items [for the Call]. If it meant that if you took up the gender issue you are going to be marginalized within the Muslim community (and they wanted to politically see themselves as having some hegemony)… and their political following would be at stake, they would rather sacrifice principle for political expediency.[16]

In this respect the Call mirrored the strategy of its political mentor, the ANC. Hassim points to the August 1990 re-launch of the ANCWL as a 'depressing affair for feminists' and argued that 'the priority for the Women's League remains organising women for national liberation'.[17] She also talks about the 'macho nature of politics' in which the UDF was involved in the 1980s.[18] And Patricia Horn laments that women's

> fear of creating divisions in the national liberation struggle has led to the development of a women's movement which is afraid of seriously challenging patriarchal domination. This timidity comes through in the general avoidance within the mass women's movement of strategic gender interests.[19]

Farid Esack criticised these attitudes in 1991 when he was a spokesperson for the UDF. He called for a feminist appreciation by the liberation movement and slated it as being male-dominated and of wanting to postpone women's issues to after the non-racial struggle has been won.[20]

The influence of the national liberation struggle was also seen in the fact that by the late-1980s the MYM and the Call often linked political questions with women's issues. An example was at a 1988 conference organised by these organisations – under the name of the 'Campaign for Muslim Awareness' – ostensibly to discuss Islamic Law but in reality to encourage a boycott of the municipal elections. Calling for a boycott of the elections or organising meetings that called for such boycotts were illegal and the organisations planned a mass meeting in Lenasia, Johannesburg, under the seemingly-innocent theme of 'Shari'ah and South African Law'. At the meeting, a 'women's caucus' – led by veteran anti-apartheid activist Fatima Meer – resolved to 'disarm' the

'ulamā organisations and called for a number of actions to support the struggles of Muslim women.[21]

In 1990 the MYM adopted three national campaigns. One of these was the Women's Rights Campaign; another was the Living Wage Campaign. These two, particularly the latter, was a clear indication of the influence of the MYM's interactions within the national liberation struggle.[22] 'The problem of emancipating women,' noted a women's rights campaign brochure, 'is to change the overall relationship between male and female.'[23] One of the objectives listed in the brochure – 'To examine the various verses in the Qur'an that contain "both the potential for oppression and liberation" of women and look at exploiting the latter' – was another instance of the language of the liberation struggle permeating the work of the MYM and influencing, particularly, its women's rights agenda.

Soon after the launch of that campaign, the MYM in Transvaal focussed on the women in mosques issue. However, unlike in the past when the MYM contented itself with speaking and writing pamphlets about the issue, MYM women now decided on a more confrontational approach. There were two reasons for this new approach. Firstly, women themselves now ran the campaign. While in earlier years the MYM could speak and write about the need for women to have space in mosques, they – as men – never had to flagrantly defy mosque's policies by actually going to mosques. This is exactly what the women had to do. Secondly, the decade of the 1980s, with its political activism, seemed to have given the younger activists a greater sense of bravado. This confrontational approach was also one that required more mobilisation, and mobilising was a skill MYM activists had learnt well through political activity in the 1980s. Just before the Muslim month of Ramadan in 1993, MYM women activists anonymously printed pamphlets calling on women to attend the *Tarawīh* prayer daily at the 23rd Street Mosque in Fietas, Johannesburg. The pamphlets

were distributed at shopping centres and, reflecting 1980s-type political activity, through door-to-door visits.

The manner in which Islamic feminists got involved in the Muslim Personal Law Board (MPLB) also reflected some of the influences of the national liberation struggle. Various pieces of correspondence between particularly the MYM and the either the executive of the MPLB or the United Ulama Council of South Africa (UUCSA) are indications of the 'struggle language' that was in vogue among these activists. And the last Board meeting – which was what caused the UUCSA to decide to disband the Board – showed how 1980s-type political organising had become normal methodology for progressive Muslims. The disbandment followed a period of intense organisation and mobilisation by the MYM Gender Desk and the Call. The last Board meeting was characterised by organising and debating techniques that these two organisations brought from their legacy in the national liberation struggle. The Gender Desk also mobilised women that were not members of the Board to attend the meeting as observers in its effort to promote 'transparency' and 'accountability'.

The issue of MPL also afforded Islamic feminists another voice, a voice in the national rights discourse. Members of the MYM Gender Desk represented the organisation at various Constitutional Assembly hearings to put forward the idea of a 'Just MPL'. The stark contrast between the feminist and conservative positions is well illustrated by the debates around the clause on religious systems of family law in the Interim Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. Members of the UUCSA argued that this clause and the clause on freedom of religion should be allowed to trump other clauses in the Bill of Rights. Their main concern seemed to be that the Equality Clause might be used to interfere in their interpretation of MPL. Islamic feminists, on the other hand, argued that MPL was consistent with gender equality and there was no need for any such exemption. It must be noted that their passionate defence of the constitution and its equality clause was not only motivated by their Islamic ideology. These anti-apartheid activists were

defending a document which they believed they had struggled for for decades and which encapsulated the achievements of that struggle. Shaikh, echoing the views of progressive Muslims throughout the country, argued that customary and religious family law 'cannot be exempted from the Bill of Rights and be allowed to perpetuate inequalities. To even consider excluding any sector of society from being covered by the Bill of Rights is an injustice and makes a mockery of the Bill.'[24] Hujaij said that she recognised the 'absolute equality of men and women as sanctioned by the Qur'an.'[25] Bosch pleaded for a review of Islamic law to bring it into line with the transformation taking place in the country and with constitutional provisions.[26] For Islamic feminists the positive outcome of the anti-apartheid jihad had become a terrain for the gender jihad.

I have already pointed out that by the early 1990s Islamic feminists in South Africa were being influenced by the likes of Amina Wadud, Fatima Mernissi and Leila Ahmed, whose methods and ideas were being effectively employed to argue for discourses of gender equality. But one of the local developments that also assisted in developing these discourses was the establishment of the Women's National Coalition which both the MYM Gender Desk and the Call became members of.[27] While both organisations had small representations in the WNC, the demands developed there were enthusiastically taken up and both organisations promoted the Women's Charter idea within the Muslim community through their various structures.[28]

In conclusion, it might be noted that no interaction results only in a one-way transfer of knowledge. Indeed, some Islamic feminists would argue that the Islamic feminist discourse was much more active in the national scene and was not just a passive recipient. Esack – then a member of the Commission on Gender Equality – wrote that

> the Call of Islam's pioneering, regular and consistent use of the term 'non-sexist' [in the slogan 'non-racial, non-sexist and democratic South Africa'] at a time when it was not cliché loaded means that was our own vision long before it became a cliché in the liberation movement.[29]

While some of his claims like this one might seem far-fetched, it is important to note that Islamic feminists believes their feminists efforts did impact on the national discourses. Perhaps he goes too far, however, when he says that the national liberation struggle had no impact on the Call. Indeed, according to him,

> the Call of Islam was the only non-women's organisation [in the UDF] that consistently put women on the agenda of the national liberation struggle. We didn't pick up the vibes from them, we enriched the vibes… At Women's Day meetings we would lay down the line; [UDF leader] Cheryl Carolus would follow suit.[30]

He goes even further: 'I was the first user of the phrase "non-sexist South Africa". It is quite conceivable that I coined the term.'[31] He suggests that his efforts were probably responsible for the insertion of – or, at least, for the 'widest coverage' of – the 'non-sexist' in the ANC's call for a 'non-racist, non-sexist democratic South Africa' in the 1980s.[32]

Same Struggles, Different Struggles?

The foregoing discussions suggest that the intersection with the national struggle did not have uniform results on the progressive Islamic Movement. Other factors were also significant. These include race, political allegiances, socio-economic background, gender, etc. It will not be possible for me to cover all of these distinctions here. However, I will use a brief discussion of certain membership trends in and interactions between members of the MYM and the Call to argue that activists' political and Islamic backgrounds and their gender influenced their responses to the feminist challenges presented to them. I will refer to four groups of people and their entry onto the terrain of Islamic feminism: women who enter from a background in the liberation movement; men who enter from a background in the liberation movement; women who enter from a background in the Islamic Movement; men who enter from a background in the Islamic Movement (see Diagram 2).

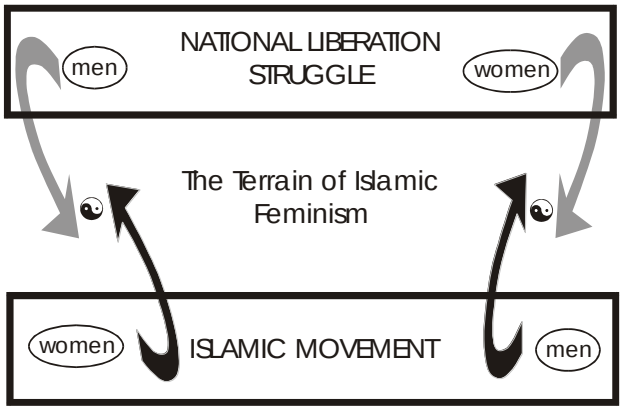


Diagram 2

Bosch and Shaikh were among the most vociferous in the MYM's articulation of feminism. Interestingly, although both were committed Muslims, their entry into the Islamic Movement was through nationalist liberation organisations. Bosch was a member of the Gender Desk of the National Association of Democratic Lawyers before she was recruited to the MYM and its Gender Desk. She was recruited to the MYM when the MYM identified her as an ideal candidate to work on Muslim Personal Law. She entered the MYM with the experience obtained from a professional association that was anti-apartheid and in the Congress tradition. This experience included ways of working, strategising and even understandings of concepts like negotiation, compromise, the relationship between strategy and principles, etc. Shaikh had been an activist with the Black Consciousness organisation, the Azanian Peoples Organisation (Azapo). About five years after having already been involved in the heat of struggle through Azapo, and having also gotten involved with Muslim student organisations, she joined the MYM. She, then, also came to the Islamic Movement with her own political baggage.

In contrast to these two activists, most of the earlier female MYM activists had been schooled in politics, organisation and struggle within the Islamic Movement. In the 1980s, many of these women often followed the feminist tendencies of the influential men in the organisation – like Ebrahim Moosa and Abdul Rashied Omar – and looked to these men for leadership and for their understandings of women's rights in Islam. Men like Moosa and Omar were inspired in their

feminist inclinations by a new tendency internationally to re-examine Islamic scripture. For some of this re-examination, women's issues were convenient pegs, for others Muslim women's oppression was the impetus. Since men had been the leaders of the MYM for 20 years and provided the major ideological and other direction, it was not surprising that the women took their cue – as in the past – from the men in leadership. This time, however, the direction was regarding issues that affected them directly. By contrast, Bosch and Shaikh insisted – as seen in the MPL Board case – that as women it was their right to take the lead as far as women's issues were concerned.

The membership of the Call was somewhat different in their backgrounds. The Call, as was mentioned earlier, was formed by MYM members who broke away from that organisation. The original four – Esack, Rasool, Jacobs and Manie – were based in Cape Town where the Call started and where its initial ideology was shaped. They – all male – were schooled in the Islamic Movement in the form of the MYM and then entered the national liberation struggle with their particular understandings of principles, strategies and negotiations shaped by the Islamic Movement dynamic. 'Our initial ideological hinterland was the "Islamic Movement",' wrote Esack. 'The South African endeavour to rethink Islam for us is, in fact, the result of a marriage between the Islamic Movement idea of a comprehensive Islam and "the Struggle", the battle against apartheid.'[33] The Call's initial forthright positions on women's rights were drafted by this group led by Esack. This was the period in which – as I have argued in Chapter Two – the Call took the women's rights initiative away from the MYM.

By the late 1980s, as the Call grew, it began developing a group of members in Johannesburg. Most of these (male) members entered the Islamic Movement (the Call) with a background of involvement in the national struggle. They were mostly members of the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC) and thus the UDF. They, then, also entered their new ideological homes with their peculiar political and organisational baggage. In their case that baggage was the Congress tradition of

struggle. While many of these men were politically fairly radical in their anti-apartheid stances, they were theologically conservative. They did not have the benefit of the radical Islamic schooling that their Cape colleagues – who came from the MYM – had.

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

The day before the launch of the Muslim Personal Law Board in Durban, the leadership of the Call and the MYM met to discuss the possibility of a merger between the organisations. Such an initiative was important for progressive Muslims especially since, at about the same time, the six clergy founding members of the MPL Board had united to form the United Ulama Council of South Africa in order to have a bloc against the two progressive organisations. Thus the imperative of the merging of the Call and MYM became more critical. The meeting was not very fruitful. As Esack said, the Call 'played the difficult suitor'.[34] One of the criticisms of the Call was that the MYM did not respect the community because of its anti-'ulamā stance.

Within two weeks of that merger exploratory meeting, the National Chairperson of the Call, Johannesburg-based Yusuf Saloojee, informed me that the proposed merger would 'never take place'. The Call had made this decision, he said, following the Claremont Main Road Mosque incident with Wadud where the MYM gave its full organisational and media backing to the mosque in the face of violent ideological and physical opposition from the 'ulamā. This had proved to the

Call (or rather, to the Johannesburg Call) that the MYM was – in Saloojee's words – 'ultra-radical and ultra-leftist'. Saloojee's message signalled the end of the merger talks. It was interesting that this was the issue on the basis of which the Call decided to end negotiations. Interesting because Call members in Cape Town (particularly Ebrahim Rasool, Rosieda Shabodien and by now ex-member Esack) had supported the mosque and the MYM. This highlighted again their different backgrounds: Saloojee being of the group that entered the Islamic Movement from the liberation movement and the latter three representing the group whose background was the Islamic Movement.

Another example occurred in Ramadan of 1997 in Johannesburg at the Masjidul Islam, a mosque whose ex-coordinator, Iqbal Jhazbhay, is generally regarded as being progressive. Jhazbhay, a Call member, was the coordinator of the mosque for the first four years of its existence. On the fourth Sunday in Ramadan, during a lecture at the Mosque after the *Zuhr* (noon) prayer, the sound system in the (upstairs) women's section broke down. Two MYM female members, Shamima Shaikh and Jennifer A'isha Roberts, entered the men's section of the mosque to listen to the rest of the lecture. Roberts was another of the women whose entry into the Islamic Movement came through the national liberation struggle: she had been an activist in the National Union of South African Students. Their action resulted in a confrontation outside the mosque the following Friday between, on the one hand, Shaikh and Roberts, and on the other, the mosque chairperson Akhtar Thokan, Jhazbhay and Muhammad Dangor, a Call member who was also an ANC member of the Gauteng provincial legislature.[35]

According to Roberts, Dangor was the 'least progressive' of the three men. He had angered Shaikh with his reference to the 23rd Street Mosque incident four years earlier and his accusation that she had 'taken the women's struggle 20 years back,' implying that her confrontational manner was detrimental to the cause of women's rights. 'As if he knows anything about the women's struggle,'

she later retorted angrily. During the altercation Jhazbhay kept insisting that the altering of gendered space in the mosque must be a slow process so as not to upset 'the community'. This was two years after members of the Cape Call had exposed themselves to violent retaliation by supporting Claremont Main Road Mosque. A year after this altercation at Masjidul Islam, on the 8 January 1998 – the day of Shaikh's death –women were *officially* allowed to pray in the main section of Masjidul Islam for the first time. Before the funeral prayer, Thokan approached this writer and informed me that he had instructed Jhazbhay to direct the women to pray in the main section because 'we must set a precedent'. For the rest of that month two women that decided to follow through on the 'precedent' and pray in the main section of the mosque were begged not to and harassed by Jhazbhay.[36] It is curious that Thokan, who had no political agenda, capitulated to the women while ANC and Call member Jhazbhay did not.

This incident illustrates, again, that women asserting their agency – even their right to be part of Muslim public life – is seen as transgressive and destabilising to the entire community. So much so that it is regarded as undermining even a progressive agenda. The question that is raised, then, is how progressive was the Call agenda and, by implication, the TIC's and the UDF's.

This Masjidul Islam confrontation pitted two of the four groups that I referred to at the beginning of this section, against each other. These two groups were 1) men who entered the Islamic feminist terrain with a national liberation struggle background, and 2) women who entered the Islamic feminist terrain with a national liberation struggle background. The difference in the understanding of Islamic feminism between these two groups can be symbolised by the world (representing the national domain) and the mosque (representing the Muslim domain). It was as if the women had the world and were trying to find their space in the mosque. The men, however, had the world *and* the mosque; they were willing to share the world but were afraid that if they shared the mosque they would *lose* the world. Those men's main concern was not the feminist struggle that the women were

prosecuting but the result of that prosecution on *their* national agendas. It was the same timidity that Horn wrote about (see above).

Conclusion

While in Chapter Three I looked at Islamic ideological influences that assisted in the rise of Islamic feminisms in South Africa, in this Chapter I traced another important factor that led to the emergence of Islamic feminisms in South Africa in the 1990s – the national liberation struggle. I have argued that the manifestations of Islamic feminisms arose out of the involvement of Islamic activists in the anti-apartheid struggle and that their articulation of Islam and the role of women was shaped by the discourse of national struggle just as their articulation of feminism was shaped by their perspectives on Islam. I have further argued that women and men in the project of Islamic feminism respond differently to the stimulus provided them by the national liberation struggle and that while women are more committed to their feminist agendas, men are often more concerned about how those agendas affect national agendas.

However, the types of Islamic feminisms that have developed in South Africa and the various stimuli to which they responded need much more study. Having noted that many Islamic feminists had been involved in or came from different liberation political tendencies, we need to ask how the ideologies of these different tendencies affect their feminist outlook. Beyond the national struggle, did the pushing of the limits of women's participation in the public domain by women and men from the 1960s to the 1980s influence the emergence of Islamic feminism in the 1990s? Did the movement into the public domain by Muslim female cultural or social activists who might have had little understanding of feminism or of a liberatory reading of Islamic scripture serve as an impetus for the confidence of the feminists in the last decade? And finally, what is the substance of the 'liberatory potential' of Islamic scriptures. The answers to these questions will assist in taking forward the project of Islamic feminism in South Africa.

[1] 'The struggle' was a well-known and well-used term particularly in the 1980s to refer to the struggle against apartheid.
[2] Sheila Meintjies, "The Women's Struggle for Equality during South Africa's Transition to Democracy", *Transformation*, 30, 1996, 49.
[3] Cathi Albertyn, Beth Goldblatt, Shireen Hassim, Likhapha Mbatha and Sheila Meintjies, *Engendering the Political Agenda: A South African Case Study*, Johannesburg: Centre for Applied Legal Studies, 1999, 9-10; Andrew Charman, Cobus de Swardt and Mary Simons, "The Politics of Gender: Negotiating Liberation", *Transformation*, 15, 1991, 40; Shireen Hassim, "Gender, Social Location and Feminist Politics in South Africa", *Transformation*, 15, 1991, 66; Sheila Meintjies, 1996, 48.
[4] Albertyn, et al, *Engendering the Political Agenda*, 7.
[5] Albertyn, et al, *Engendering the Political Agenda*, 9.
[6] Albertyn, et al, *Engendering the Political Agenda*, 10.
[7] Charman, et al, "The Politics of Gender", 40.
[8] Cathi Albertyn, personal conversation, 15 June 2000.
[9] Hassim, "Gender, Social Location and Feminist Politics", 65.
[10] African National Congress, *Statement of the National Executive Committee of the African National Congress on the Emancipation of Women in South Africa*, 2 May 1990.
[11] Albertyn, et al, *Engendering the Political Agenda*, 12.
[12] Meintjies, "The Women's Struggle", 59.
[13] All the information for this paragraph was derived from Albertyn, et al, *Engendering the Political Agenda*, 13-16.
[14] While two Islamic parties were formed in 1994, Muslims largely ignored these parties and neither of them won any seats in national or provincial parliaments. Muslims were rather involved in and supported the established political parties.
[15] Abdulkader Tayob, 1995, 167-76.
[16] Interview with Tahir Sitoto, 27 September 2000.
[17] Hassim, "Gender, Social Location and Feminist Politics", 67.
[18] Hassim, "Gender, Social Location and Feminist Politics", 68.
[19] Patricia Horn, "Post-Apartheid South Africa: What about Women's Emancipation?" *Transformation*, 15, 1991, 37.
[20] Farid Esack, "Our Struggle Has Had To Cope With Many Slogans", 1991.
[21] "Resolutions of the Women's Caucus at the Conference", *Shariah and South African Law: An Islamic Conference organised by the Campaign for Muslim Awareness*, 4.
[22] See MYM General Assembly Resolutions, 1990. The other two campaigns were its "Living Wage Campaign" and the "Campaign against Alcohol and Drug Abuse".
[23] *Introducing the MYM's Women's Rights Campaign*, MYM, 1990.
[24] *al-Qalam*, Vol. 19 No. 10, October 1993, 1.
[25] *al-Qalam*, Vol. 19 No. 10, October 1993, 1.
[26] *al-Qalam*, Vol. 19 No. 10, October 1993, 4.
[27] Shamima Shaikh, undated letter from the Gender Desk to MYM Regional Chairpersons.
[28] Letter from Shamima Shaikh to MYM Regional Chairpersons, undated but seems to be from early 1994.
[29] Farid Esack, *On Being a Muslim: Finding a Religious Path in the World Today*, Oxford: Oneworld, 1999, 198.
[30] Interview with Farid Esack, 12 December 2000.
[31] Interview with Esack.
[32] Email from Farid Esack, 3 June 2000.
[33] Esack, *On Being A Muslim*, 119.
[34] Farid Esack, *Qur'ān Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective f Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression*, Oxford: Oneworld, 1997, 252.
[35] Information about this confrontation was obtained from a personal conversation with Shaikh (January 1997) and an interview with Roberts (3 June 2000).
[36] Interview with Moefidah Jaffer, 5 June 2000. Jaffer was one of the women that prayed in the main section for a few nights before Jhazbhay forced her with repeated phone calls (even asking her husband to convince her) to abandon that mosque for the rest of the month of Ramadan.

THE POTENTIAL FOR THE FUTURE

Looking Back on a Decade

Islamic feminism in South Africa requires a revival. The factors that gave rise to this phenomenon in the 1990s still exist: the disadvantages faced by Muslim women, the patriarchy that oppressed women and the exclusion of most Muslim women from the Muslim public domain. But is there potential for such a revival of Islamic feminism? I will argue that there is. However, before examining the potential for the renewal of Islamic feminisms in South Africa, I will briefly review their existence in the past decade as I have discussed in the previous chapters of this Research Report.

I have shown that the existence of Islamic feminisms in South Africa should be examined as two periods in the 1990s: from 1990 to 1998 when this phenomenon emerged and developed, and 1998 to 2000 when it weakened and declined. Any attempt at Islamic feminist renewal needs to consider both these periods and the factors that resulted in each. In order to discuss these periods and the feminist activity therein, it was necessary for me to propose a definition of Islamic feminism so that the use of the term might be clearly understood and might not be trapped in misunderstanding.

As far as Islamic feminisms are concerned, the developments of the 1990s, of course, followed the debates and activities of the 1980s. In particular, the involvement of Islamists in the anti-apartheid struggle in the 1980s and the development of Islamic feminist thought in South Africa – following on similar developments in other parts of the world – had a significant influence on the rise of Islamic feminisms. I have shown how both these factors were important in assisting the emergence of Islamic feminisms in South Africa.

The first of these factors was the anti-apartheid struggle of the 1980s which saw the increasing involvement of Islamists, especially those involved with Qibla, the Call of Islam and the Muslim Youth Movement. One of the results of such involvement was the increasing politicisation of these organisations and – in the case of the latter two – the assimilation of ideas, methodologies and struggles that they encountered in the struggle into their own programmes. Thus, for example, one witnessed in the 1980s a new discourse around Muslims struggling together with non-Muslims and around inter-faith cooperation in the struggle for justice. The Islamic discourse around human rights and the manner in which such a discourse intersected with the broader national discourse on human rights led, I have argued, to an Islamic discourse on women's rights.

Further, I argued that as feminist agendas developed in the broader South African society as part of the anti-apartheid movement, so did one find somewhat parallel agendas in the Muslim community – promoted especially by the Call and the MYM. Thus, for example, as the Women's National Coalition assisted in developing the confidence of women in putting forward a feminist agenda and feminist demands, a similar confidence was also reflected among Islamic feminists who began more forcefully struggling for their own parochial agendas within their community.

By the late 1980s and into the early 1990s, there was an additional important influence that led to the rise of Islamic feminisms in South Africa: the development of Islamic feminist thought within this country following similar developments in other parts of the world. Islamic feminist literature by scholars such as Amina Wadud and Fatima Mernissi became standard reading for the women and men who were to become Islamic feminists. The influence of such literature saw the development of South African Islamic feminist thought along similar lines.

The above influences gave rise to a range of Islamic feminist activity in South Africa until 1998. Most of this centred on the activities of two Muslim organisations: the Muslim Youth Movement

(and its Gender Desk) and the Call of Islam. Activities or moments that characterised this phase of feminist activity included the campaign for women's 'equal access' to mosques, the Campaign for a Just Muslim Personal Law, the publication of the newspaper *Al-Qalam*, the broadcasts of the community radio station *The Voice*, the matter of *Radio Islam* which had refused to allow women's voices to be heard on air and the funeral of feminist activist Shamima Shaikh.

Beyond the glorious past

While the decade of the 1990s witnessed the highpoints of Islamic feminisms in South Africa, I will show in the rest of this Chapter that the phenomenon is currently on the wane. What are the critical issues that characterise the current weakness of Islamic feminisms in South Africa? Are there any possibilities for the revival of an effective Islamic feminist movement? If so, what are the issues that will need to be addressed for such potentialities to be realised? These are the questions that demand urgent answers if there is to be a revival of Islamic feminisms. I will attempt answers to these questions in the hope that this concluding chapter might be the beginning of new and positive developments in Islamic feminisms in South Africa.

To answer the above questions I will divide the rest of this Chapter into three sections. In the first of these sections I will show why I assert that Islamic feminisms are on the wane in South Africa. The next section will present my assessment of some of the critical issues affecting Islamic feminisms in South Africa today and the reasons for their extreme weakness. I do not intend to focus on issues external to Islamic feminists and their organisations – a task which would yield much useful information and which could be explored in another study. I will argue that the most important of these issues are internal to the arena of Islamic feminisms and these are the ones that Islamic feminists need to urgently focus on. In the third of these three sections I will explore the possibilities for Islamic feminisms in the immediate future. I will also, in this Chapter, suggest areas within my broad research interest that need further research.

And Now? Floundering Feminisms

'We thus find that not only is the country in the wilderness, but so is progressive Islam[1],' wrote Farid Esack in 1997.[2] Since Islamic feminism is an expression of progressive Muslims living their Islam, Esack's statement equally applies to Islamic feminisms. And now, at the beginning of the next decade (after the 1990s), Islamic feminisms in South Africa are dying in the wilderness! In this section I will briefly revisit some of the manifestations of Islamic feminisms as discussed in Chapter Two and show that however glorious they might have been in the 1990s, they are now – at best – shadows of their former selves, either substantively or symbolically.

At an organisational level, those that were in the forefront of issues Islamic and feminist have not taken forward an Islamic feminist project. In the middle of 1996 the Muslim Youth Movement decided that its Gender Desk Coordinator would not be a member of its National Executive but would be appointed by that executive committee. That was effectively the end of the Gender Desk as a national structure. It existed thereafter in stops and starts in the Western Cape. There are no records of the new coordinator, Khadija Magardie, having carried out any tasks in that position. Nor is there any record of the National Executive attempting to make the Desk accountable for its inaction or in any other way until the end of 1999. In November 1999 a national meeting was held in Durban with women representatives from the five MYM regions: KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, Western Cape, Free State and Gauteng. The meeting was presided over by the organisation's president and deputy president – both men. The purpose of the meeting was to 'relaunch' the Desk. The relaunch did not take place as the meeting ended up debating the need for such a structure. A committee was tasked with examining the possibilities for a Gender Desk and proposing ways to move forward. The committee has not met and no report has come from it. While the Desk exists in name in the Western Cape, at a national level it is dead.

The MYM itself is in a weak position with a lack of human resources and most of the current membership being new people who have not been through the old method of education and training. Esack wrote in 1997 that 'while the MYM is still very much alive, even if not always well, in the Cape one can safely write out a death certificate for the Call, without the corpse protesting.'[3] In Gauteng, I venture to add, 'one can safely write out a death certificate for the Call, even if the corpse protests'. The activity of the Call since 1994 has been to publish a pamphlet just before each election, calling on Muslims to vote for the African National Congress. The Gauteng Call has plans for a low-cost housing project, plans that have existed since 1995.[4]

The 'Campaign for a Just Muslim Personal Law' was a flagship campaign for Islamic feminists of the 1990s. However, when the South African Law Commission (SALC) Project Team released an Issue Paper on MPL in May 2000,[5] the interventions of the former Islamic feminist activists was minimal. The consultation workshops throughout the country that the MYM had promised did not materialise. The organisation subsequently decided that the Issue Paper was a step too early in the process for it to conduct community workshops on it.

However, many MYM and Call members and other feminists participated in workshops convened by the Commission on Gender Equality. And the MYM made a submission to the SALC critiquing the Issue Paper. The MYM's submission reflects its previous positions that any MPL regime must have as an objective the granting of substantive rights to women within marriage situations and divorces.[6]

Despite the weak response to this new MPL development by these organisations, new Islamic feminist initiatives are on the horizon to address MPL. Particularly significant is the formation in Cape Town of an organisation called *Shurah Yabafazi*. The name is a curious mix of the Arabic word *Shūrāh* (consultation) and the Xhosa *Yabafazi* (with women). The group consists of only

women, mostly lawyers. Its objective is to impact on the law reform process regarding MPL. Significantly, *Shurah* hopes to help the debate 'expand beyond 'ulama and professionals' so that 'women's voices are heard' and 'the debate is not limited to experts', according to one of its members.[7] While currently operating only in the Western Cape, the organisation hopes to expand into the Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal provinces as well. One of the key people in this initiative is Fatima Seedat, parliamentary officer for the Commission on Gender Equality (CGE). She coordinated the CGE's response to the Issue Paper and organised workshops and meetings around it in Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg. She also encouraged the formation of a women's group in Durban to look at MPL.

One way in which Islamic feminists in the 1990s were able to raise consciousness around MPL and other women's issues was through the MYM's newspaper *Al-Qalam*. From 1997, *Al-Qalam*'s focus on women's issues decreased. Currently an occasional article or column dealing with women and Islam sees the light of day in the paper. Seemingly, the MYM has not developed a new strategy to use the paper in the promotion of its Islamic feminist agenda.

The other medium that the organisation controlled or influences, the community radio station *The Voice* still has women's empowerment as part of its mission. Its mission statement agreed on in 1999 says: 'Empowering people to live Islam in a changing society through broadcasting excellence.'[8] In a document teasing out the implications of this mission and an explication of the vision for the station, 'non-sexism' is listed as one of the station's values. 'In accordance with the guidance of the Qur'an we should not tolerate any form of sexism, be it violence against women, sexist language or even stereotyping,' says the document.[9] However, on air, the emphasis that *The Voice* had placed in the past on Islamic feminist positions seems to have been watered down. Most significantly, its weekday programme "*Saut al-Nisa*" (Voice of the Women) seems to deliberately evade feminist issues. "Breaking the Silence", the weekly programme about violence against

women, is no more. And "Lifting the Veil", which was the feminist exposition of Islamic scripture and the reconstruction of the lives of prominent Muslim women has become a current affairs programme. Nevertheless, women still play as important a role in the station as they have since it started – at the level of the Trust, staff and volunteers.

One of the flashpoint events of the mid-1990s that resulted in much publicity for Islamic feminists was the 1994 lecture of Amina Wadud at the Claremont Main Rd Mosque. This event also saw the first South African mosque to arrange 'equal access to mosque space' for Muslim women. The event – and the mosque – however, did not result in continual re-evaluation among Islamic feminists about what the role of women in the mosque should be and how that could be exemplified in Claremont. Why did the mosque not take the 'gender jihad' further? *Was* there any further that the mosque could have taken the Islamic feminist agenda? Could women have been incorporated into the mosque in a more meaningful way? With the emotion raised by the lecture and with the spirited defence of the mosque and the person of Wadud by Islamic feminists, one would have thought that these questions and this mosque would feature more strongly in their deliberations. Women *are* involved in the activities of the mosque, but the extent of that involvement is somewhat ambiguous.

Esack notes how he, after an obituary for Shamima Shaikh that he delivered at the mosque, called on the congregation to 'remove another symbol of gender discrimination in our mosque, by enabling the women to move to the front two rows'.[10] Since the 1994 lecture, women had shared the main space with the men but – for some inexplicable reason – the first two rows remained all-male. After Esack's call, women moved to the front two rows – for just two nights. And, Seedat told me that she had felt somewhat uncomfortable at the mosque at times. She gives the example of the talks after the *Tarawīh* prayer. Abdul Rashied Omar, the mosque's imam until August 2000 and the person who was instrumental in planning the 1994 incident, 'spoke about various things but

inevitably the idea that came through was the centrality of the family, normalcy of marriage'[11] which Seedat, as a single woman, could not identify with. She mentions how Omar once congratulated his wife on her birthday and followed that with 'and to all the women who support us in what we do'. For her, this is how women have been portrayed – as the supporters. When Omar spoke of women, says Seedat, he spoke of them 'as wives and mothers', neither of which she could relate to. And, since Omar's leaving the mosque for his studies in the United States, the absence of his strength has seen the mosque take an even more cautious approach.

The issue of access to mosques also needs to be addressed in terms of the two congregations in Johannesburg mentioned in Chapter Two. The Mayfair congregation fizzled out in 1997. Most of the congregants moved to Masjidul Islam, which had facilities for women, albeit in a gallery. It was regarded as a somewhat progressive mosque. Also, the mosque had established a practice of having women sometimes delivering the pre-*khutbah* lecture on Fridays – from the upstairs women's section. Nevertheless, the mosque initiated a new 'Id prayer in 1996 – a prayer on the open field. This is not an unusual practice for the 'Id prayer, but it was the first one organised by Masjidul Islam, and it was one of less than five throughout Johannesburg that had facilities for women. Significantly, in this instance the women did not pray upstairs (there was no upstairs on the football field), nor did they pray behind the men. They prayed alongside the men separated by a two-metre swathe of grass. That 'Id practice continues. And the Masjidul Islam Management Committee took a decision early in 2001 to consult with its congregants about the possibility of creating a space for women in the mosque's main section – *a la* Claremont Main Rd.

This section has attempted to give a brief overview of the current state of the initiatives mentioned in Chapter Two as the hallmarks of Islamic feminism in South Africa in the 1990s. I have shown that with the exception of a little activity – for example, proposed campaigns around MPL – Islamic feminism is virtually non-existent. I will now discuss some of what I regard as the critical issues

currently facing the Islamic feminist project in South Africa. These are factors that I believe have contributed to the weakness of Islamic feminism that I have written about in this section.

Critical Issues

In this section I will address some of what I regard as the most critical issues facing Islamic feminisms in South Africa today and the reasons for their current virtual impotence. These issues derive out of the previous section as well as out of Chapter Two. I will bring these issues together into three main groups: the danger of the academicisation of Islamic feminism, the relationship of Islamic feminists with the community and the question of male feminists.

In Hallowed Chambers

In this section, two important points need to be made which refer to the issue of theory. At a superficial level these might seem contradictory. However, they most definitely are not. The first point is the importance of the development of Islamic feminist theory. The second is with regards to my contention that Islamic feminism in South Africa has become an academic pursuit and has moved away from its objective of emancipating women and fighting the struggles of women on the ground.

Charlotte Bunch says of the significance of developing feminist theory:

> Theory enables us to see immediate needs in terms of long-range goals and an overall perspective on the world. It thus gives us a framework for evaluating various strategies in both the long and the short run and for seeing the types of changes that they are likely to produce. Theory is not just a body of facts or a set of personal opinions. It involves explanations and hypotheses that are based on available knowledge and experience.[12]

Bunch highlights here the importance of developing theory for the prosecution of the feminist struggle. Her argument applies equally to Islamic feminism. Because of the fundamental basis of Islamic feminism being Islamic scripture, the first level at which Islamic feminists need to sharpen

their theoretical frameworks is around the notion of developing an Islamic feminist hermeneutic with which to approach the Qur'ān and Sunnāh. Much work has been done in this regard internationally, even more work remains to be done. Beyond this, however, Islamic feminists in South Africa have often been ad-hocist in their efforts to develop theories for the furtherance of feminist objectives in this society. Short- and long-term goals have not been well thought through and articulated, and strategies have not been carefully developed in order to meet these objectives. While the peaks of Islamic feminisms in South Africa were witnessed in the 1990s, the different strands of such feminisms did not consolidate themselves; there was no serious internal dialogue and no serious critical engagement among feminists themselves on such theoretical issues. Ignoring both these levels of theory-development will result in Islamic feminisms in South Africa continuing to flounder and come under increasing attack by a conservative expression of Islam that is on the rise.[13]

There is, however, an important caveat to my insistence on the importance of developing theory: the problem of the increasing academicisation of Islamic feminism in South Africa. I turn now to this phenomenon which I regard as dangerous for the agenda of Islamic feminism. In 1997 Esack wrote:

> While progressive Islam in the 1980s was manifested on the streets, in townships, in church halls, mosques and in a plethora of organizations, it now seems to be located in the portals of academia and in a single mosque.[14]

His lament about 'progressive Islam' applies also to Islamic feminism in the late 1990s and the present: its location seems to have shifted from the mosques, the debating forums of MPL, the media, the house visits, the women's workshops and other fora where women were challenged to consider their positions within Islam to the relatively safer arena of academia. And, despite his warning, Esack was one of those responsible for the academicisation of Islamic feminism. His 'Islam and Gender Justice'[15] and interview with me are both indications of Esack's own retreat into academia away from community activism.

Part of the reason for the 'retreat'[16] into academia has been the loss of some of the important personalities from the Islamic feminist scene. Sa'diyya Shaikh left South Africa for the United States in 1996 to pursue a PhD in religious studies – focusing on women in Islam. Soraya Bosch, the feminist lawyer who took up issues and cases of MPL, died in 1997; a few months later, in 1998, Shamima Shaikh also died. Ebrahim Moosa left South Africa to teach in the United States after his house was bombed in 1998, Abdul Rashied Omar followed in 2000 and Farid Esack left the country at the beginning of 2001 to teach at various universities in Europe and the United States for two years. The departure of Bosch and the two Shaikhs severely affected the activist component of the Islamic feminist project. In the absence of on-the-ground activities, Islamic feminists began to rely on academic discourse to give them a sense of existence.

One negative aspect of the increasing academicisation is the focus on theory as opposed to a focus on women. Chandra Talpade Mohanty[17] makes valuable arguments for why women's local and lived situations need to be always researched when developing theories about women's oppression and the alleviation of that oppression. 'Feminist scholarship… is not the mere production of knowledge about a certain subject. It is a directly political and discursive *practice,*'[18] she writes.

Sa'diyya Shaikh's dissertation[19] is a good example of the attempt to provide theoretical understandings of the practical situation that Muslim women find themselves in, while deriving knowledge of that practical situation from the affected women themselves. She examines the situation of Muslim women in the Western Cape that are survivors of domestic violence and theorises how such violence fits into different Muslim discourses. The MYM Gender Desk's questionnaire project also attempted to achieve a similar objective. Hundreds of questionnaires were distributed to Muslim women throughout the country on a random basis. The questions related to issues of marriage and divorce and asked women directly what their feelings were regarding issues of patriarchy in the family, polygyny, divorce, etc. The Desk hoped that the results of the

questionnaires would guide its activities and direct it to focus on areas of work that Muslim women themselves felt strongly about. The academicisation of Islamic feminisms that has existed in South Africa in the last three years of the 1990s has largely ignored the need to develop empirical research about the lived experiences of Muslim women and about their needs and interests. The result could easily become one where Muslim women are told what they should want by academics rather than them deciding that for themselves.

Some of the other results of the increasing academicisation of Islamic feminism will be shown in the next sections when I discuss the weakness of various structures that were involved in the feminist project, the distance from the community and the role of men.

Structures

Islamic feminisms in South Africa are more than just a few prominent organisations; they also manifest themselves in various organisations that might not be themselves feminist and among various individuals within Muslim society. Nevertheless, their most visible manifestations have been through particular organisations, most notably the Call of Islam and the Muslim Youth Movement (MYM) – in the case of the latter, mainly through its Gender Desk. Further, the two media organisations linked to the MYM – *Al-Qalam* and *The Voice* – have also played key roles in the Islamic feminist arena. All of these structures have become increasingly ineffectual after 1997 in promoting the Islamic feminist agenda. As a result of these organisational weaknesses, there have been no clear definitions of new objectives, new campaigns and new strategies forthcoming from the Islamic feminist camp. As I have shown above, the current state of Islamic feminisms is therefore extremely weak.

One reason for the current state is the inability of the two organisations with the most potential as regards Islamic feminism – the Call and the MYM – to work cooperatively. While there was

cooperation around issues related to the Muslim Personal Law Board, that cooperation was not translated into more concrete unity. The MPL Board provided a convenient conjuncture for the two to come together in more meaningful ways. However,

> the Call, misjudging the durability of its struggle pedigree and burdened with a misplaced political arrogance, played the difficult suitor. The Call also misread the leadership orientation of the MYM and overestimated the modernist, as opposed to the liberative, element therein.[20]

As pointed out in Chapter Four, the main reason for the Call-MYM merger not taking place was the Call's concern about the 'ultra-radical' position of the MYM towards women's issues.

The Community, Comrades, The Community!

'The community' was a common refrain used by anti-apartheid activists in the 1980s. Such activists often spoke on behalf of 'the community'; often such representation was assumed rather than bestowed. But the passionate sentiment was always to do that which was supposedly good for the community, that which the community wanted. Of course, the fact that the activists lived within 'the community' meant that they were plugged in to the pulse of 'the community'. A similar link with the pulse of Muslim women by Islamic feminists has been missing in the last few years of the 1990s. This is, of course, linked to the issue of the academicisation of Islamic feminisms.

The first issue to be mentioned here is that of the consultation with the community of Muslim women. This issue was mentioned earlier when I referred to the question of the academicisation of Islamic feminisms and raised the concern about Islamic feminist theory developing in isolation from the needs of women as proposed by them.

While it might be comfortable and easy (for feminists themselves) for Islamic feminisms to be developed as a safe space outside of society, that is not what the objective of feminism should be. Jeanne Gross responded to Mary Daly's call to give up 'the securities offered by the patriarchal system' and to create new space that would be women-centred by writing:

> Creating a 'counterworld' places an incredible amount of pressure on the women who attempt to embark on such a project. The pressure comes from the belief that the only true resource for such an endeavour are ourselves. The past which is totally patriarchal is viewed as irredeemable…
> If we go about creating an alternative culture without remaining in dialogue with others (and the historical circumstances that give rise to their identity) we have no reality check for our goals. We run the very real risk that the dominant ideology of the culture is re-duplicated in the feminist movement through cultural imperialism.[21]

The Mayfair congregation was one such alternative space that was created by Islamic feminists. It was perhaps inevitable that it did not last for more than two years. As hooks commented about Western feminism: 'Equating feminist struggle with living in a counter-cultural, woman-centred world erected barriers that closed the movement off from most women.'[22] Sad at leaving their comfortable space, the members of that Johannesburg congregation were nevertheless not unhappy about rejoining with the rest of the community in order to prosecute their feminist struggle with ordinary Muslim women.

Further, the attitude of doing things *for* the marginalized (women, in this instance) rather than *with* them at their own pace runs the risk of any imagined gains being reversed by the women who are the supposed beneficiaries of those gains. In 1997, thousands of Muslim women signed a petition supporting the position of Radio Islam of excluding women's voices from being broadcast. Esack asked about this: 'Will this be another case of the masses cheering while their "liberators" are being fed to the lions?'[23] The crucial question is not whether the women will cheer at the deaths of 'their liberators', but, rather, whether the action of a few activists on behalf of those women – without having worked with those women about the need for such action – is really the liberation of such women. Can activists and intellectuals assume the responsibility to decide what the paradigm of women's liberation should be without engaging with those women about their understanding of their liberation? 'How connected to women and their concerns are these progressive Muslims?' Esack correctly asked.[24]

Earlier, I noted an incident from the Claremont Main Rd Mosque which has relevance here as well. Esack referred to the incident at the mosque which happened after the death of Shamima Shaikh. He and Firdouza Waggie had opened up the front two rows for women to be able to pray right to the front of the mosque. The women used the two rows for the two nights that he was at the mosque, he said. When he left, the situation reverted to what it had been. According to Esack:

> I felt a bit like a presumptuous White trade unionist wanting to organise Black farmworkers in a couple of days and then fleeing back to the comfort of his trendy suburb after a nice speech to the workers, leaving them to deal with the farmers.[25]

This incident highlights the need for Islamic feminists to locate themselves within the community which they claim to work with and for. Not having a rootedness to a community and then claiming to be working on its behalf would yield the kind of result Esack laments. Also, Islamic feminists have themselves to blame when they do not engage in the most important task of consciousness-raising among the women they claim to want to emancipate or uplift. It is important to note that the Claremont women that Esack refers to were not left to the mercies of the equivalent of a 'white farmer'. Instead, they were left to the mercies of their own consciences and that of a 'progressive' mosque committee. And yet there was a reversal of his action.

Two important questions are raised by Esack's story. Firstly, have Islamic feminists become contented with making symbolic points rather than engaging in the substantive tasks of education and consciousness-raising for women about their roles and rights? Secondly, why should Islamic feminists expect that their actions would be defended by people who do not understand the reasons for those actions? Further, the reality is that it is much easier for the activists and academics to extricate themselves from a dangerous situation than it is for the ordinary women who are called upon to take radical actions. The 'flight' of Moosa, Omar and now Esack bear testimony to this. The tenuous link and commitment to the community of women that Islamic feminists claim to be striving for is a critical issue.

But Men are Not *Women*

> There are very few women interpreters in the history of Islam because women are seen to be the subject of the Islamic *shari'a* and not its legislators. Yet even the few interpreters who have appeared during the long history of Islam have been kept at the periphery, their views never allowed to influence Islamic legislation. Moreover, even men interpreters who were open-minded about women were marginalized and, in some cases, found their authority questioned.[26]

Shaaban's observation above is an important note when considering the significant role that men have played in the development of Islamic feminisms in South Africa. While women themselves took the 'frontline' in the Islamic feminist struggle in the 1990s – as shown in earlier chapters – the seeds for this were, to a large extent, sown by men who were concerned about Islamic resurgence but whose primary focus was not necessarily feminism or women's rights. As with the emergence of Islamic feminisms in various parts of the Muslim world,[27] in South Africa too their emergence owes much to Muslim men. It was men who began the process of deconstructing scriptural interpretations of women. It was also men that started the organisations that 'allowed' women greater space and allowed them to express their feminisms. And, as in various parts of the Muslim world, in South Africa too women then took up the issue of their emancipation and began articulating their own scriptural interpretations and encouraging 'reading the Qur'ān as a woman'[28]. In many – though not all – instances, women then took the issue of their emancipation further than the men would dare to. While the acknowledgement of the role of men in this process is important, it is even more important to realise that men are *not* women and that this fact is important when evaluating Islamic feminisms and discussing the future of this phenomenon.

Margot Badran wrote of the men that assisted in the emergence of feminisms in Egypt that, 'While women were motivated by reflection upon their own lives and in the first instance sought improved conditions for themselves, men began more abstractly.'[29] The 'more abstractly' for many South African Muslim men was the engagement with the texts – often an exciting endeavour in itself – rather than engagement with the reality of women's oppression. A sentiment expressed at a national MYM meeting in 1996 holds true for many men:

> Women and women's issues are important enough on their own as a focus for the MYM, given the raw deal women get in the Muslim community and the broader society. However, for the MYM they also take on a particularly important status *because women's issues are the main battleground and also the beacon in the battle between Islamic Progressiveness and Conservatism*. Thus this as a focus for the MYM serves as a way of taking forward the project of Progressive Islam in South Africa.[30] (Emphasis mine.)

For men, women's rights is often 'a way of taking forward' some other project. It might be 'Progressive Islam' or the struggle against apartheid (as seen in Chapter Four). Fatima Seedat issues a similar concern when she talks about 'Progressive Islam appropriating the women's issue'.[31] The fact that Islamic feminist women in the 1990s began to take charge of the feminist agenda was a positive development. It also reflected the new confidence that the women had in their Islam and the importance they gave to their experiences *as women*. The discussion in Chapter Two about the MPL Board is a good indication of this new initiative. Incidentally, the phrase 'as women' was one that was often used in the 1990s. One example was the insistence by the Call and MYM that a sector that should be represented on the MPL Board was 'women, as women'. Fully realising that such women might not promote a progressive (and pro-women) agenda on the board, they nevertheless felt it was a principled position to take that in an area where women had been largely excluded, they should be represented 'as women' and not only through different organisations.

Islamic feminist women seemed to be quite sensitive to the sometime-ambiguous role of men. Shamima Shaikh, in what has come to be regarded as her final testimony on women's rights, made a statement that men who regard themselves as Islamic feminists would do well to note:

> Another problem is that men write women into their experiences. For a long time men have been writing about women, men have been writing the interpretations. Even if a progressive man writes about women, it's from a male perspective. They write us into their experiences. Ebrahim Moosa experiences life much differently than I do. He's progressive, fine! But I'd rather Firdouza [Waggie, at the time the MYM Gender Desk coordinator in the Western Cape] wrote it. It would be more real. Our experiences are different because we're in an oppressive situation.[32]

And such sensitivity is not due just to theoretical considerations about the role of women in feminist struggles but based on experience as well. Fatima Nordien, hailed as the woman who forcefully

raised the issue of women's leadership within the MYM and as the first woman on the organisation's national executive,[33] did not stand for a second term as Western Cape regional chairperson. She felt intimidated by 'ambitious males' in the MYM, new entrants who were 'growing up and very ambitious people'.[34] She also spoke about the personal costs to her of being a feminist. While a student activist and beyond, she was often told that 'someone like you' would not be able to get married because men were not comfortable with a woman as strong and assertive as she.[35] These personal costs are not experienced by the men – particularly the male academics for whom 'feminist' credentials are very useful.

The tensions around the role of male Islamic feminists were raised several times during my interviews for this Research Report – including by some men themselves.[36] When asked about the role of men in the arena of Islamic feminism, Tahir Sitoto was extremely cautious and reluctant to comment. 'I'm not sure about men,' he said.

> Of course Farid Esack comes up, yourself perhaps. I'm reluctant to name the others based on a simple fact and that is that perhaps at the level of public discourse they took up these issues but to what extent did they apply this in their lives? Did we allow the conventions to dictate how they should react and respond? And hence I'm not comfortable with coming up with a list of names.[37]

Sitoto's allusion to the private-public divide is an important one. Men's 'feminism' seems to often manifest itself publicly while in private their patriarchy comes to the fore. For women, of course, patriarchy is all-pervasive and their feminism needs to be asserted at all levels.

Esack refers to those men who think they are 'doing women a favour' by their feminism. There is a tension, he says, between 'where their heads are and where their hearts are. Their heads are with gender justice but not their hearts.'[38] He also makes the private-public distinction about such men, saying that the way many of them treat their own wives is as if they were patriarchs. For many of them, he argues, an Islamic feminist discourse is 'trendy' and 'no different from Whites who pay lip service to affirmative action'. However, he has also been criticised for treating women

condescendingly and for deciding what is good for women. Further, his recollection of the history of women in the organisation he founded, the Call of Islam, is important to note. Asked about women's leadership in the Call, he said that the Call had four founder members[39] who 'owned the organisation'. 'Men were in charge of the organisation; it was men who preached the gender equality message,' he asserted. While his version seems to be incorrect in that the Call did have (even if just *de jure* rather than *de facto*, which is possibly what Esack suggests) women in its leadership (see Chapter Two), it is significant that *this* is his recollection. Does it imply that despite the fact that women *were* in the leadership positions of his organisation, he did not place much value on that leadership?

Firdouza Waggie[40] also spoke passionately about certain men known to be in the forefront of the Islamic feminist struggle. She gave an example of a woman from her divorce support group who she referred to a prominent male who is known for his pro-women positions. Waggie was extremely angry at his response, which favoured the husband and told the woman that she would be better off with him and that she should return to him – despite the fact that the woman wanted a divorce. Waggie also refers to the period when she was a coordinator of the MYM Gender Desk and the response of a male national executive member that the task of the Desk was to simply deal with 'women's issues' and not more broadly the issues of gender. She says the Gender Desk was perhaps 'too ambitious' because the men 'were not ready for it. Men in the organisation did not see it as mainstream MYM work. Men felt threatened by the Gender Desk.'

Such ambiguity among men was present throughout the 1990s. In 1993, with the 23rd Street Mosque incident which gave an impetus for the formation of the MYM Gender Desk, there was vacillation among the men in the MYM. That was the reason that neither the pamphlet issued by the '23rd Street Women's Jamaat' nor the article about the incident in *Al-Qalam*[41] even mentioned the MYM or the leading involvement in the action by Shamima Shaikh – a national executive member of the

MYM. The MYM – not ready for the criticism that would inevitably follow this action – distanced itself from the action by its silence. Not long after this incident the *Weekly Mail & Guardian*[42] published an article examining Shaikh's ideas about the issue of women in mosques and her involvement in the 23rd Street Mosque incident. Two Transvaal (male) regional executive members publicly distanced themselves from their chairperson and her views.

Perhaps the most damning criticism of the role that men had played in the emergence of Islamic feminisms in South Africa in the 1990s is an article soon to be published as a chapter in a book by Amina Wadud.[43] She writes about her experience in Cape Town in 1994 when she delivered the lecture at the Friday prayer at the Claremont Main Rd Mosque – the first woman to perform such an act in South Africa. She writes about how she – as a woman – felt marginalized by the whole incident. She was not properly consulted about the issue, she contends. But, her main criticism is that the organisers of the event and the progressive Muslim men were more concerned with form than with substance. They were not interested, she argues, in the content of what she said but only with the fact that she was saying it. She quotes Esack, for example, as telling her – when she asked him after the lecture what he had thought about it, 'Honestly, I didn't listen,' because he was too elated by the fact that a woman had delivered the lecture. For her, it was another way in which a woman was marginalized and her voice not listened to. For her, the message of her experience was that South African (male) progressives were saying: 'Our struggle to eradicate the formality of gender disparity in Islamic public ritual leadership in South Africa is the struggle that all Muslim women should embrace' even 'if the cost was our very womanhood'.[44]

Many of the organisers of the event and other observers might take objection to some of her assumptions and conclusions – as I would too, as a keen observer of that event. However, the important point for us is the *feeling* of marginalization that a woman was left with after such an important interaction with male Islamic feminists. It was a feeling which led her to lament:

> The conservatives allow me to maintain my womanhood, as long as I don't try to be fully human. The progressives allow me to be fully human, as long as I am not too much woman. What a choice. I prefer to reject both limitations. I perceive of myself as fully equal in my humanity as I am embodied in my womanhood.[45]

I have addressed in this section some of what I regard as the most critical issues currently facing Islamic feminisms in South Africa. With Islamic feminisms now facing an impasse, these are issues, I believe, that need urgent attention if there is to be a revival of Islamic feminist discourse and action within the Muslim community in South Africa.

Conclusion

In this concluding Chapter I have argued that Islamic feminisms in South Africa are currently weak and floundering. There are various reasons for this. I have highlighted some of the more critical issues. Any attempt at reviving Islamic feminisms and moving forward beyond the peak of this phenomenon in South Africa – in the mid-1990s – requires close attention, in my opinion, to these issues. I raised concerns around the questions of the academicisation and the organisational weakness of Islamic feminisms, the distance that has developed between Islamic feminists and ordinary women on whose behalf they claim to act and the often ambiguous roles played by men in the Islamic feminist struggle. While I discussed these issues in this Chapter, they are really a distillation of the earlier chapters.

In moving forward, the question is, how might Islamic feminists address these critical issues. I do not claim to be able to answer all these questions and will not attempt to do that in this conclusion. Nevertheless, I wish to raise a few points related to these critical issues.

For me, the most important factor in attempting to find resolution to the above critical issues is to re-place women at the centre. The most consistent effect of the above issues is the displacement of women from the centre. This displacement might be in favour of men, theory, politics or

organisational expediency. But the result is always this displacement of women. Put in another way, women are marginalized for the sake of these other factors. Women then become 'the gendered other'[46] and their voices become the voices of the other. This language of otherness implies, of course, that the male is the norm.

> The point is neither to subsume other women under one's own experience nor to uphold a separate truth for them. Rather, it is to allow them to *be* while recognising that what they are is just as meaningful, valid and comprehensible as what we are…. Indeed, when feminists essentially deny other women the humanity they claim for themselves, they dispense with any ethical constraint. They engage in the act of splitting the social universe into us and them, subjects and objects.[47]

While Lazreg writes in the above paragraph about the othering of Third World women by Western women, the same warning applies to Third World feminists themselves in their relations with each other, as Mohanty reminds us.[48]

Sometimes feminists (and I am particularly referring here to Islamic feminists in South Africa – male and female) talk as if they know better what women want and need than the women themselves. While I do not deny the existence of false consciousness, I also believe that women *must* speak for themselves and be heard. Abdulkader Tayob raises an interesting question about women's right to work – a right that Islamic feminists often fight for. Firstly, almost all women *do* work –whether in or outside the house. Secondly, he points out that while women's work outside the house might be a big issue in middle class situations, in working class communities in the Western Cape, for example, where most women *do* work outside the home, they might not be as enthusiastic about 'the right to work' and might actually prefer 'the right *not* to work'.[49]

It is therefore important that Islamic feminists focus more attention on empirical research which allows women to speak for themselves about their experiences.

> Since the basis of Islamic history has been patriarchal, we must make a concerted effort to correct the imbalance this has caused in the ummah. We need to give ear to women and women's experiences, not forming a new consideration of Islam, but forming a new public voice.[50]

Sometimes, feminists themselves could be surprised at the results of such an exercise. I remember in the mid-1980s the lone but consistent voice of Zuleikha Mayat at MYM public meetings, protesting at the MYM's policy of segregating men and women in such a way that women were often disadvantaged – for example, seating women in the gallery of a hall while the men were seated in the main hall. Hardly anyone would regard Mayat as a feminist, nor would she regard herself as such.[51] Wadud warns that:

> If gender bias in Islamic practices is ever to be genuinely removed, women need to articulate from the center of our own marginality. Those stories need to become models for the over arching process of Islam: engaged surrender.[52]

The question of the centring of women is also important in addressing the imprisoning of Islamic feminism in academia. Academic discourse about women and Islam itself needs to be tempered in a way that it addresses the experiences of disadvantage and oppression that Muslim women face rather than addressing only 'abstract' questions. Women's experiences and voices need to be granted greater importance. While I regard the issue of the centring of women as the most fundamental issue in the attempt to revive Islamic feminism in South Africa, other issues also need to be addressed. I turn to some of these now.

From the early years of the MYM, the organisation had spent a great deal of energy and effort in setting up institutions. Many of these subsequently became independent organisations.[53] Some of those organisations are today important and entrenched parts of the communal life of Muslims in South Africa.[54] From the late-1980s the MYM began paying less attention to setting up such institutions and began to shed them from its organisational stable. This experience points to an important lesson: the institutionalism of certain communal objectives has often resulted in such objectives and projects developing lives of their own and growing in independent directions which allowed the original objectives to be better achieved. Unfortunately, no such thought of institutionalisation was given by Progressive Muslims to the project of Islamic feminism. Perhaps this is an opportune time for such an idea to be mooted, for an institution/s to be created to develop

Islamic feminisms and take them forward with a dedicated group of people. I will not propose what form such institutionalisation might take; such proposals can only be developed through intense debate and consultation.

The final proposal I would like to make relates to the need for further research. This Research Report scrapes the surface of a range of extremely important areas and what it does, in fact, is to issue the demand for much more research in these areas. While I considered some important manifestations of Islamic feminisms in South Africa in the 1990s, I omitted an important area from that spectrum. I would argue that Islamic feminisms exist in not-so-overt ways in various niches of Muslim society. The possibility of such existence and the ways in which they are manifested needs close examination. I think here of the assertiveness of women within organisations like Pagad. The women and men in such an organisation might baulk at the idea of their being called feminists. Nevertheless, the fact is that Pagad, as an example, has affected the relations between women and men even in the private sphere by bringing women out onto the streets.[55] The assertiveness of women in this scenario would make for interesting study.

Another fascinating study would relate to the results – after two years – of Radio Islam's 'allowing' women broadcasters to go on air. What effect has this development had on the women involved? And on the men? How has it affected the notion of gendered space in a public structure like a radio station and how has it affected Radio Islam and its listeners' perceptions of the acceptability of women's activity outside the home? How do they now relate to the idea of listening to women's voices when in 1998 they still regarded such an act as being prohibited? Do women really have an authentic voice on Radio Islam? What are the possibilities for Islamic feminists exploiting this space that has been 'given to' women?

The development of an Islamic feminist hermeneutic is an important and necessary endeavour. There has been work done on this internationally; however, much more study is required to develop such a hermeneutic. A comprehensive theory of the texts, together with specific feminist approaches to these texts, is necessary. Such an effort would develop a hermeneutic for the Qur'ān, the ḥadīth and Muslim history.

Islamic feminisms in South Africa are not quite dead. There might have been a temporary coma afflicting feminists, but there are signs of resuscitation. That a group of women have taken their own initiative to set up an organisation to deal with the question of Muslim Personal Law[56] is an indication that while the strong, aggressive and public positions of the mid-1990s have been absent in the past few years, the fervour for an Islamic feminist project has persisted.

Phambili Makhosikazi, Phambili!!!

Forward Women, Forward!!!

[1] While I readily talk of 'progressive Muslims' and 'progressive Islamic thought', I prefer to avoid the term 'progressive Islam'. While I do believe that there are many islams as understood and lived by different individuals and groups of individuals, I prefer to regard Islam as an essence. How it is expressed and lived might differ considerably between people, however, and hence one might find a 'conservative' or a 'progressive' *expression* of Islam.
[2] Farid Esack, *Qur'ān Liberation & Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression*, Oxford: Oneworld, 1997, 250.
[3] Esack, *Qur'ān Liberation & Pluralism*, 234.
[4] "Giving houses to the people", *al-Qalam*, January 1995, 1.
[5] Issue Paper 15, Project 59: "Islamic Marriages and Related Matters", South African Law Commission, May 2000.
[6] Submission on Issue Paper 15 of the South African Law Commission, Ashraf Mahomed, on behalf of the Muslim Youth Movement of South Africa, 31 August 2000.
[7] Interview with Fatima Seedat, 15 January 2001.
[8] Funding Proposal for *The Voice*, June 1999.
[9] Vision Document of *The Voice*, July 2000.
[10] Farid Esack, *On Being a Muslim: Finding a Religious Path in the World Today*, Oxford: Oneworld, 1999, 121.
[11] Interview with Seedat.
[12] Charlotte Bunch, "Feminism and Education: Not By Degrees", *Quest*, Vol. 1, 1979 quoted in bell hooks, "Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression", in bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre*, Boston: South End, 1984, 29-30.
[13] For an argument about the rise of conservative expressions of Islam in the Muslim community in South Africa and within South Africa generally and how that affects feminism, see interview with Julie Adam. Relating to the current conjuncture in South Africa, she is extremely sceptical about the immediate future possibilities for Islamic feminism and feminism generally.
[14] Esack, *Qur'ān Liberation and Pluralism*, 250.
[15] Farid Esack, "Islam and Gender Justice: Beyond Simplistic Apologia" in (eds.) John C. Raines and Daniel C. Maguire, *What Men Owe to Women: Men's Voices from World Religions*, New York: Suny Press, 2001.
[16] I use the word 'retreat' in quotes because on its own it might seem to indicate a planned strategic move. My contention, however, is that it is an ad-hoc retreat that is not part of any strategy.
[17] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" in (ed.) Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres, *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.
[18] Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes", 53.
[19] Sa'diyya Shaikh, "Battered Women in Muslim Communities in the Western Cape: Religious Constructions of Gender, Marriage, Sexuality and Violence", Unpublished MA Dissertation, Religious Studies, Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 1996.
[20] Esack, *Qur'ān Liberation and Pluralism*, 252.
[21] Jeanne Gross, quoted in hooks, "Feminism", 71.
[22] hooks, "Feminism", 71.
[23] Esack, *On Being A Muslim*, 120.
[24] Esack, *On Being A Muslim*, 120.
[25] Esack, *On Being A Muslim*, 121.
[26] Bouthania Shaaban, "The Muted Voices of Women Interpreters", in (ed.) Mahnaz Afkhami, *Faith & Freedom: Women's Human Rights in the Muslim World*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1995, 61.
[27] Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the making of Modern Egypt*, Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1996, Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, and Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999, provide illustrations of the role of men in assisting the development of Islamic feminisms in different parts of the Muslim world.
[28] A phrase used by the feminists involved with the Iranian women's magazine *Zanan*. See Zohreh T. Sullivan, "Eluding the Feminist, Overthrowing the Modern? Transformations in Twentieth-Century Iran" in (ed.) Lila Abu-Lughod, *Remaking Women*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998, 236.
[29] Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 16.

[30] Ebrahim wa Bofelo and Naeem Jeenah, "Towards a Streamlined, Activist Movement", paper presented to the MYM General Assembly, Zamdela, Sasolburg, June 1996.
[31] Interview with Fatima Seedat. Of course, her comment also points to another possible problem: that in their concern that the women's agenda might be simply a tool for 'progressive Islam', Islamic feminists might themselves 'appropriate progressive Islam' for Islamic feminism.
[32] Shamima Shaikh, "Women and Islam – the Gender Struggle in South Africa: The Ideological Struggle", <<http://shams.za.org/itppaper.htm>>, 1997.
[33] See Abdulkader Tayob, *Islamic Resurgence in South Africa: The Muslim Youth Movement*, Cape Town: UCT Press, 1995, 173-174.
[34] Interview with Fatima Nordien, 20 November 2000.
[35] Interview with Nordien.
[36] I have decided to omit the names of most of the men spoken about in these interviews. Most often, those names were told to me off-the-record. What is important to note, however, is that the criticisms were directed even against other men that were interviewed. So Esack and Sitoto, for example, were among those strongly criticised.
[37] Interview with Tahir Sitoto, 27 September 2000.
[38] Interview with Farid Esack, 12 December 2000.
[39] Esack, Adli Jacobs, Ebrahim Rasool and Shamiel Manie. All of them are male.
[40] Interview with Firdouza Waggie, 21 November 2000.
[41] "Johannesburg women take initiative", *Al-Qalam*, March 1993, 3.
[42] "Making History in a Man's World", *Weekly Mail & Guardian*, <<http://shams.za.org/makinghistory.htm>>, 1993.
[43] Amina Wadud, "Ritual Leadership and Islamic Futures: A Critique of the Cape Town Mosque Experience August 1994", 2000. The article will be Chapter 1 in a forthcoming book by Wadud.
[44] Wadud, "Ritual Leadership and Islamic Futures".
[45] Wadud, "Ritual Leadership and Islamic Futures".
[46] I take this phrase from Farid Esack, *On Being a Muslim*. Esack names a chapter "On Being with The Gendered Other" (111-136).
[47] Marnia Lazreg, quoted in Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes", 77.
[48] Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes".
[49] Interview with Abdulkader Tayob, 20 November 2000.
[50] Wadud, "Ritual Leadership and Islamic Futures".
[51] Interview with Zulaikha Mayat, 25 September 2000.
[52] Wadud, "Ritual Leadership and Islamic Futures".
[53] See Tayob, *Islamic Resurgence.*
[54] Such organisations include the South African National Zakah Fund, the Islamic Medical Association, the Association of Muslim Accountants and Lawyers for Islamic Law and the Islamic Dawah Movement.
[55] Abdulkader Tayob argues that such assertiveness of women *is* feminism. Interview with Tayob.
[56] I discussed the organisation – *Shurah Yabafazi* – earlier in this Chapter.

Appendix A

STATEMENT BY THE 23RD STREET MOSQUE WOMEN'S JAMAAH

In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, The Dispenser of Grace

Statement by the 23rd Street Mosque Women's Jamaah

(28 Ramadan 1413)

Muslim women in the Transvaal have been for long denied our right of performing our salah in jamaah. We were thus very grateful to the trustees of the 23rd Street Mosque last year when special facilities were provided for us on the 27th Ramadan.

This year Muslim women have been performing salah at *this* mosque on *this* level since the 1st Ramadan. We exercised great tolerance, especially on the first night, just so that we could fulfil this Sunnah of our Nabi Muhammad (saw). On the first night we were shouted at, intimidated, and some women's salah was broken, after which they left to perform salah at another mosque over five kilometres from here. We did not expect such behaviour from a trustee of a mosque. Yet we continued attending salah here, and this practice enhanced our appreciation of Ramadan.

Last night we were shocked and disappointed that after performing tarawih here for 26 nights we were forced to offer our salah behind the mosque in a marquee with wet mats. There were about 150 women, and there would have been enough space here for all of us.

What hurts us is that while we had performed salah here for the whole month, and many of us arrived at 7:30pm last night, men that arrived late – many of whom had possibly not regularly attended the tarawih – got preferential treatment and performed their salah in the area we had, we believe, earned through our perseverance. Why were the late men not directed to the marquee?

It is about time that our community, especially the men, begins educating itself about issues that are crucial to our lives and survival as a community. Women and children are not second-class citizens to be denied access to mosques, to be hushed up whenever we begin talking, and to be shunted around at the whims of men.

It is the Grace of Allah that liberated women through Islam 1400 years ago. It was this expression of Allah's Grace that the Prophet Muhammad (saw) ordered that women not be prevented from attending mosques.

We will not depend on the grace of some men above that of Allah. We have performed salah here for this month and will continue to perform salah here in the months to come. This mosque does not belong to a committee, or to the men in our community; it belongs to the whole community: children, women and men.

Women's attendance at this mosque for all salawat will, insha Allah, become a regular feature!

IN DEFENCE OF A POSITIVE IMAGE OF ISLAM: THE ISSUE OF WOMEN'S VOICES

This was a memorandum drawn up by a group of progressive Muslims and submitted to the Independent Broadcasting Authority during the controversy surrounding Radio Islam*'s decision not to allow women to be on air. The memorandum had about 30 signatories from throughout South Africa. (February 1998)*

In the Name of Allah, The Gracious, the Dispenser of Grace

1. We, the undersigned South African Muslims, are deeply concerned about the message of discrimination against women being conveyed by the current controversy around the issue of women on radio.

2. Islam is a religion of justice and promotes the equality of men and women. We, therefore, believe that discrimination on the basis of gender goes against the very spirit of Islam.

3. We are also concerned about the implications of a discredited minority religious opinion that purports that women may not be heard in public. This position implies that women are perpetual social minors and goes against the spirit of Islamic teachings. Perpetuating such a view not only lacks religious credibility, but militates against the hikmah (wisdom) the Qur'an exhorts all Muslims to employ in public life.

4. As citizens, Muslims have made a significant contribution to South Africa's liberation struggle and its general socio-economic development and are an inseparable part of this country. The current controversy not only reinforces negative stereotypes that portray Islam

as an anti-women religion and all Muslim men being women-hating fundamentalists. It also has the potential to erode the positive gains Muslims have made in this country for centuries. This is not the best way of exposing others to the beauty of Islam.

5. We urge all Muslims who have just rejuvenated themselves in the holy month of Ramadan to continue with the process of social transformation aimed at upholding the dignity and equality of all of humankind. This is the vision of the Qur'an and was actively promoted by the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him).

6. We call upon all our Muslim fellow citizens to commit themselves to a democratic South Africa with the entrenched ideals of non-racialism and non-sexism and to deal with their differences with dignity and integrity.

Interviews

Adam, Zulaikha. 6 January 2001

Amra, Mohamed. 28 September 2000

Esack, Farid. 12 December 2000

Fakier, Sadia. 3 February 2001

Hoosen, Fatema. 26 September 2000

Jacobs, Adli. 4 February 2001

Jadwat, Ebrahim. 26 September 2000

Mayat, Zulaikha. 26 September 2000

Nordien, Fatima. 20 November 2000

Samodien, Mahdi. 21 November 2000

Seedat, Fatima. 14 January 2001

Shaikh, Sa'diyya. 8 January 2001

Sitoto, Tahir. 27 September 2000

Tayob, Abdulkader. 20 November 2000

Waggie, Firdouza. 21 November 2000

Bibliography

"In defence of a Positive Image of Islam – the Issue of Women's Voices", email memorandum submitted to the Independent Broadcasting Authority, February 1998.

"Statement by the 23rd Street Mosque Women's Jamaah", pamphlet, 1993.

Abbott, Nabia. *Aishah, the Beloved of Mohammed*, London: Saqi, 1985.

Abu-Lughod, Lila. "Introduction: Feminist Longings and Postcolonialist Conditions" in (ed.) Lila Abu-Lughod, *Remaking Women*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998, 3-31.

_____. "The Marriage of Feminism and Islamism in Egypt: Selective Repudiation as a dynamic of Postcolonial Cultural Politics" in (ed.) Lila Abu-Lughod, *Remaking Women*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998, 243-269.

African National Congress, "Statement of the National Executive Committee of the African National Congress on the Emancipation of Women in South Africa", 2 May 1990.

Ahmed, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

al Farūqī, Ismā'īl Rājī. *Tawḥīd: Its Relevance for Thought and Life*, IIFSO, 1983.

Albertyn, Cathi; Goldblatt, Beth; Hassim, Shireen; Mbatha, Likhapha and Meintjies, Sheila. Engendering the Political Agenda: A South African Case Study, Johannesburg: Centre for Applied Legal Studies, 1999.

al-Faruqi, Lamya'. *Women, Muslim Society and Islam*, Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1988.

Al-Hibri, Azizah. "Islam, Law and Custom: Redefining Muslim Women's Rights", *Journal of International Law and Policy 306*, 1997.

'Ali, Yusuf. *The Holy Qur'ān: Text, Translation and Commentary,* Washington DC: Amanah Corporation, 1989.

Ali, Yusuf A. *The Holy Qur'an*, Islamic Propagation Centre International, undated.

al-Marayati, Laila. "Women in Society: Political Participation", <<http://www.mwlusa.org/pub_book_polirights.shtml>>, 1999.

al-Qalam. April 1995.

_____. August 1994.

_____. January 1994.

_____. January 1995.

_____. June 1995.

_____. March 1993.

_____. March 1995.

_____. November 1994.

_____. October 1993.

_____. September 1994.

Al-Turabi, Hassan. "Women's Liberation in Sudan", *al-Qalam*, August 1995, 11.

_____. "Women in Islam and Muslim Society", <<http://soundvision.com/women/turabi2.shtml>>, downloaded September 2000.

Anon. "God, Earth and Spirits", in *African Mythology Legends & Stories*, <<http://www.uwsp.edu/stuorg/bsu/Spirits.htm>>, downloaded September 2000.

Asad, Muhammad. *The Message of the Qur'ān,* Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980.

Badran, Margot. "Feminisms and Islamisms", *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 10 No.4 (Winter), 1999, 196-204.
_____. *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt*, Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1996.
Bosch, Soraya. "Muslim Family Law must meet the changes", *Mail & Guardian.*

Call of Islam. "Call of Islam", undated – probably 1984.
_____. "The Call of Islam", brochure, Cape Town: Call of Islam, undated but probably 1984.
Campaign for Muslim Awareness. "Resolutions of the Women's Caucus at the Conference", *Shariah and South African Law: An Islamic Conference organised by the Campaign for Muslim Awareness*, 1996.
Cape Provincial Court. *Rylands vs. Edross*, 4ALL SA557 (C), 1996.
Chakravorty Spivak, Gayatri. "Feminism 2000: One Step Beyond", *Feminist Review*, Number 64, Spring 2000, 114-116.
Charman, Andrew; de Swardt, Cobus and Simons, Mary. "The Politics of Gender: Negotiating Liberation", *Transformation*, 15, 1991, 40-64.
Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, The. 1996.
Coward, Harold. *Sacred Word and Sacred Text: Scripture in World Religions*, Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988.

Dhorat, Haider Ali. Letter to YIELD and the IBA, 26 May 1997.

Engineer, Asghar Ali."Islam, Women, and Gender Justice", in (eds.) John C. Raines and Daniel C. Maguire, *What Men Owe to Women: Men's Voices from World Religions*, New York: Suny Press, 2001, 109-128.
Engineer, Asghar Ali. *The Rights of Women in Islam*, New York: St. Martins Press, 1992.
Esack, Farid. "Death of a Muslim Joan of Arc", *Electronic Mail & Guardian,* <<http://shams.za.org/20jan-shamima.htm>>, 20 January 1998.
__.____. "Hang in there, Brother Rashid", *al-Qalam*, August 1994, 12.
_____. "If this be madness", *Women in Action*, 1:1998, 50-51.
_____. "Our Struggle Has Had To Cope With Many Slogans", 1991.
_____. "Three Islamic Strands in the South African struggle for Justice", *Third World Quarterly*, 10(2), 1988, 473-498.
_____. "Islam and Gender Justice: Beyond Simplistic Apologia" in (eds.) John C. Raines and Daniel C. Maguire, *What Men Owe to Women: Men's Voices from World Religions*, New York: Suny Press, 2001.
_____. *On Being a Muslim: finding a religious path in the world today*, Oxford: Oneworld, 1999.
_____. *Qur'ān Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression,* Oxford: Oneworld, 1997.
Esposito, John L. "Introduction: Women in Islam and Muslim Societies" in (eds.) John L. Esposito and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *Islam, Gender and Social Change*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, ix-xxviii.

Hassan, Riffat. "An Islamic Perspective", in (ed.) Becher, Jeanne. *Women, Religion and Sexuality*, Geneva: WCC, 1991, 93-128.
Hassim, Shireen. "Gender, Social Location and Feminist Politics in South Africa", *Transformation*, 15, 1991, 65-82.
Hicks, Joanna. "Leila Ahmed's *Women and Gender in Islam*", <<http://www2.soc.hawaii.edu/css/dept/owr/Joanna.html>>, downloaded June 2000.
Holt, Maria. "Palestinian women and the Intifada: An exploration of images and realities", in (ed.) Haleh Afshar, *Women and Politics in the Third World*, London: Routledge, 1996, 186-203.

hooks, bell. “Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression”, in bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre*, Boston: South End, 1984, 17-31.
Horn, Patricia. “Conference on women and gender in Southern Africa”, *Transformation*, 15, 1991, 83-88.
Horn, Patricia. “Post-Apartheid South Africa: What about Women’s Emancipation?”, *Transformation*, 15, 1991, 25-39.
Humm, Maggie. *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory*, Harvester: Wheatsheaf, 1989.

Jeenah, Na’eem and Shaikh, Shamima. *Journey of Discovery: A South African Hajj*, Ocean View: Full Moon, 2000.
James, Joy. “Radicalising Feminism”, *Race and Class*, Volume 40 Number 4, 2000, 15-31.

Kandiyoti, Deniz. “Introduction” in (ed.) Deniz Kandiyoti, *Women, Islam and the State*, London: Macmillan, 1991.
_____. “Women, Islam, and the State: A Comparative Approach”, in (ed.) Luan R. Cole, *Comparing Muslim Societies: Knowledge and the State in a World Civilization*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992.
Kathrada, A. M. Letter to Muslim organisations, 15 April 1994.
Kishwar, Madhu. “Women, Sex and Marriage: Restraint as a Feminine Strategy”, *Manushi*, Issue No. 98, <<http://www.freespeech.org/manushi/99/sexuality.html>>, March-April 1997.

Lewis, Desiree. “Feminisms in South Africa”, *Women’s Studies International Forum 16*, 1993, 535-542.

Magardie, Khadija. “Faith on the Move”, *Mail & Guardian (Friday)*, January 12 to 18 2001, 5.
Mahomed, Ashraf. Submission on Issue Paper 15 of the South African Law Commission, on behalf of the Muslim Youth Movement of South Africa, 31 August 2000.
Majlisul-Ulema. *Women in Musajid and Islam*, Benoni: Young Men’s Muslim Association, undated.
Manjra, Shuaib. “Obituary to a Courageous Campaigner”, <<http://shams.za.org/shuaib.htm>>, January 1998.
Marimuthu, Zayn. Letter to *Radio Islam* and the Independent Broadcasting Authority, 15 May 1997.
_____. Letter to *Radio Islam* and the Independent Broadcasting Authority, 23 April 1997.
Meintjies, Sheila. “The Women’s Struggle for Equality during South Africa’s Transition to Democracy”, *Transformation*, 30, 1996, 47-64.
Mernissi, Fatima. *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry*, translated by Mary Jo Lakeland, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991.
Mir-Hosseini, Ziba. *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.
Moghadam, Valentine M. *Modernizing Women: Gender & Social Change in the Middle East*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1993.
Mohammed, Patricia. “The Future of Feminism in the Caribbean”, *Feminist Review*, Number 64, Spring 2000, 116-119.
Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. “Introduction: Cartographies of Struggle” in (eds.) Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres, *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991, 1-47.
_____. “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” in (eds.) Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres, *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991, 51-80.
Moosa, Ebrahim. “Application of Muslim Personal Law in South Africa”, unpublished MA thesis, Religious Studies, Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 1988.

_____. "Muslim Personal Law in South Africa – Quo Vadis", *Al-Qalam*, February 1998.
Muslim Personal Law Board of South Africa. "Constitution of the Muslim Personal Law Board", adopted at the launch of the Board, August 1994.
Muslim Students Association. Minutes of the annual MSA Natex meeting, 1984.
_____. Minutes of the annual MSA National Executive meeting, 1984.
Muslim Youth Movement. *Halqa Manual*, Muslim Youth Movement, undated but from the early 1980s.
_____. *Handbook of the MYM of SA*¸ undated.
_____. "Introducing the MYM's Women's Rights Campaign", MYM, 1990.
_____. *Islamic Training Programme Manual*, Durban: Muslim Youth Movement, 1981.
_____. Minutes of MYM Gender Desk Meeting, Cape Town, September 1994.
_____. Minutes of the MYM General Assembly, 1990.
_____. "Muslim Youth Movement Gender Desk", brochure of the MYM Gender Desk, reproduced also on <<http://shams.za.org/gdesk.htm>>, undated (but most likely from 1994).

Najmabadi, Afsaneh. "Feminism in an Islamic Republic: Years of hardship, Years of Growth" in (ed.) Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito, *Islam, Gender and Social Change*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, 59-84.

O'Connor, June. "The Epistemological Significance of Feminist Reasearch in Religion", in (ed.) King, Ursula. *Religion and Gender*, Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995, 45-64.
Omar, Abdul Rashied. "Women in Islam", unpublished talk delivered to the Cape Town Business and Professional Women's Club, 25 January 1989.
Omar, M. S. Letter to Muslim Personal Law Board member organisations, 12 April 1995.

Pickthall, Marmaduke. *Holy Qur'ān with English Translation,* Karachi: Taj Company, undated.

Q-News, 2-9 September 1994.
Quraishi, Asifa. "Her Honor: An Islamic Critique of the Rape Laws of Pakistan from a Woman-Sensitive Perspective", *Michigan Journal of International Law,* Volume 18 Number 2, Winter 1997, 287-320.
_____. *Islamic Legal Analysis of Zina Punishment of Bariya Ibrahim Magazu, Zamfara, Nigeria*, 20 January 2001, memorandum submitted to the Governor of Nigeria's Zamfara state.
Qutb, Sayyid. *In The Shade of The Qur'ān, Volume 1*, Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1999.
_____. *In The Shade of the Qur'ān, Volume 30,* London: MWH, 1979.

Rahman, Fazlur. "Some Key Ethical Concepts in the Qur'ān", *Journal of Religious Ethics* 11, 1983.
_____. "The Status of Women in Islam: A Modernist Interpretation" in (ed.) Hanna Papanek, and Gail Minault, *Separate Worlds*, New Delhi: South Asia Books, 1982, 285-310.
_____. *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.
_____. *Islam*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.
_____. *Major Themes of the Qur'ān,* Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980.

Sahih Bukhari, CD-Rom version, "The Islamic Scholar", Johannesburg: Par Excellence Computing, 2000.
Shaaban, Bouthania. "The Muted Voices of Women Interpreters", in (ed.) Afkhami, Mahnaz. *Faith & Freedom: Women's Human Rights in the Muslim World*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1995, 61-77.
Shaikh, Faaiza B. "Muslim Women's Rights to Mosque Space", unpublished MA dissertation, Gender Studies, Durban: University of Natal Durban, 1998.

Shaikh, Sa'diyya. "Battered Women in Muslim Communities in the Western Cape: Religious Constructions of Gender, Marriage, Sexuality and Violence", Unpublished MA Dissertation, Religious Studies, Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 1996.
_____. "Sexual Men and Spiritual Women", *al-Qalam*, September 1994, 7.
Shaikh, Shamima. "Gender Desk and Gender Equality Campaign", Proposal to the MYM National Executive Meeting, January 1994.
_____. "A Brief 'Dialogue' with the ''ulama'", <<http://shams.za.org/dialogueulama.htm>>, 1995.
_____. "Denying women access to the 'Main Space' – A Betrayal of the Prophet (pbuh)", <<http://shams.za.org/access.htm>>, 1995.
_____. Gender Desk Report to the General Assembly 96, 29 June 1996.
_____. Letter from the Gender Desk to MYM Regional Chairpersons, undated.
_____. "Women and Islam – The Gender Struggle in South Africa: The Ideological Struggle", <<http://shams.za.org/itppaper.htm>>, 1997.
_____. "Women's Role in Contemporary Society", <<http://shams.za.org/role.htm>>, 1994.
Siddique, Kaukab. *Liberation of Women thru Islam*, Maryland: American Society for Education and Religion, 1990.
_____. *The Struggle of Muslim Women*, Maryland: American Society for Education and Religion, 1986.
Siddiqui, Hannana. "Black Women Feminism coming of Age", *Feminist Review*, Number 64, Spring 2000, 83-96.
Siddiqui, Mona. "Law and the Desire for Social Control: An Insight into the Hanafi concept of Kafa'a with Reference to the Fatawa 'Alamgiri (1664-1672)" in (ed.) Mai Yamani, *Feminism and Islam: Legal and Literary Perspectives*, New York: New York University Press, 1996, 49-68.
South African Law Commission, Issue Paper 15, Project 59, "Islamic Marriages and Related Matters", May 2000.
Spelberg, D.A. *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past: the Legacy of `A'isha Bint Abi Bakr*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
Stowasser, Barbara. *Women in the Qur'ān, Traditions, and Interpretation*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
Sullivan, Zohreh T. "Eluding the Feminist, Overthrowing the Modern? Transformations in Twentieth-Century Iran" in (ed.) Lila Abu-Lughod, *Remaking Women*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998, 215-242.
Sunday Independent, <<http://shams.za.org/sundayind.htm>>, 18 January 1998.

Tayob, Abdulkader. "The pre-khutbah, khutbah and Islamic change", *al-Qalam*, August 1994, 15
_____. *Islam: A Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oneworld, 1999.
_____. *Islamic Resurgence in South Africa: The Muslim Youth Movement*, Cape Town: UCT Press, 1995.
The Voice, "Brochure", 1998.
The Voice, Programme schedule for 1997-1998.
The Voice, Vision Document of *The Voice*, July 2000.
Tuttle, Lisa. *Encyclopedia of Feminism*, Essex: Longman, 1986.

United Ulama Council of South Africa. Letter to Shamima Shaikh, "A Brief 'Dialogue' with the ''ulama'", <<http://shams.za.org/dialogueulama.htm>>, 24 July 1995.

wa Bofelo, Ebrahim and Jeenah, Naeem. "Towards a Streamlined, Activist Movement", paper presented to the MYM General Assembly, Zamdela, Sasolburg, June 1996.
Wadud, Amina. "But what did she *really* say?", *al-Qalam*, September 1994, 4.

_____. "Ritual Leadership and Islamic Futures: A Critique of the Cape Town Mosque Experience August 1994", unpublished article, 2000.
_____. "Towards a Qur'ānic Hermeneutics of Social Justice: Race, Class and Gender", *Journal of Law and Religion,* Vol XII, 1999, 37-50.
Wadud-Muhsin, Amina. *Qur'an and Woman*, Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Fajar Bakti Sdn. Bhd., 1992.
Warnock Fernea, Elizabeth. *In Search of Islamic Feminism: One Woman's Global journey*, New York: Doubleday, 1998.
Women's Cultural Group, "Women's Cultural Group", Brochure, 1989.