

From Islamic Feminism to a Muslim Holistic Feminism

Margot Badran*

Abstract This article looks at the trajectory from secular feminism to Islamic feminism to Muslim holistic feminism, examining the changing meanings of 'the secular' and 'the religious' and the ways they intersect in the different modes of feminism. It contrasts the open, inclusive nature that typifies the secular feminisms Muslim and non-Muslims created in the twentieth century in contexts of anti-colonial struggle and early nation-state building with the communalism of the new Muslim holistic feminism now emerging in global space at a time when religious identity is fore-fronted and there is an international preoccupation with Muslim women's rights. The article argues that the communalisation of women's rights activism or the privileging of Muslim women's rights occurring at the global level and being exported to local terrain can be divisive and threatening national unity.

1 Introduction

A generation after the emergence on the global scene of Islamic feminism, we are now witness to the appearance of a 'Muslim holistic feminism'. Like the pioneering secular feminism/s that Muslims and non-Muslims created together early in the last century in their national spaces, the new Muslim holistic feminism draws upon multiple discourses, including Islamic discourse. But, unlike these secular feminisms, Muslim holistic feminism is communally based (of, for, and by Muslims) and globally anchored.

The final major feminist challenge that activists face today in Muslim majority countries is achieving equality in the family. Long after significant equality was realised in the public domain (although this is unfinished business), gender inequality in the family remains widespread, sustained by *fiqh*-backed, state-enacted laws. Islamic feminist discourse has made two potentially useful theoretical advances: (1) breaking down the notion that the sphere of the family constitutes a separate domain positing instead a continuum of private/family and public/society; and (2) dismantling the notion that Islam ordains a patriarchal construction of the family. This lays important groundwork for arguing against gender inequality shored up by Muslim family laws. However, intensive and

broad-based local political work is needed to move from a patriarchal to an egalitarian model of the family.

Today, in an era of religious revival, communal identity is fore-fronted. Social movement organising is being exported by Muslim women from global to national spaces in contrast to earlier practice in Muslim majority societies when feminist movements were locally grounded and organised within a national context. Nation-based feminist movements, such as the pioneering Egyptian feminist movement, accessed the world of international feminism and did so on its own terms. These national feminist movements were organised and directed by women as citizens of different religions. Organising activism along communal lines and exporting social movement activism from the global arena to national space is new to our time.

This article reviews the historically changing constructions of 'the secular' and 'the religious', at a time when they are politically over-loaded and central items in the linguistic arsenal. I observe the feminist trajectory from secular feminism to Islamic feminism to the emerging Muslim holistic feminism, pointing to the simultaneity of the different feminisms. I speak of the communalisation of women's rights

activism and reflect on the implications of this at the local level. The underlying argument here is that the communalisation of women's rights – or the privileging of Muslim women's rights and its export from the global to local terrain, is a potentially divisive force that threatens national cohesion and can constitute another element in the marginalisation of non-Muslim citizens.

2 Positionings and multiple identities

Like many women today, my positionings and identities are multiple and complex. It is as a life-long feminist, scholar-activist and historian of feminisms that I come to the subject of this article. As a young scholar in the 1960s, I began research on the rise and evolution of feminism in Egypt and the Middle East. From the 1990s, when Islamic feminism was ascendant, I broadened my scope to include the global Muslim world in which it circulated. My feminism first bloomed four decades ago as a form of consciousness, thinking, activism simultaneously in the USA and in Egypt while living, studying and moving between the two countries. I am a citizen of the USA by birth and of Egypt by choice, allowed to me by the patriarchal structuring of naturalisation.¹ I do not publically position myself within a religious framework and am not interested in having legitimacy conferred or withheld by my religious identity. Irrespective of my religious affiliation and nationality through marriage to a Muslim citizen, I am subject to Egypt's Muslim Personal Status Code. For more than four decades, I have been a 'woman living under Muslim Law' in Egypt. When it was being formed in the mid-1980s, I became part of the global network: Women Living under Muslim Law (WLUML). As one subject to the Muslim Personal Code in Egypt, I have an immediate stake in how it is re/constructed, and as I see it, a responsibility to become directly engaged in building a locally based movement.

My analysis and interpretation of feminism, Islam and culture, come from my research and my participation in debate, which are informed by the world of lived realities. My activism is inspired by real-life challenges that I, along with other women in the places where I live and work, experience as we defend our rights – the right to speak, to be heard, to be equal and to be included as guaranteed to us as citizens by our national constitutions. Our activism is directed towards achieving specific goals and changing

structures of thinking and the laws that express them. To these tasks, we bring the various tools we possess, including our different vantage points and varied experiences.

Egyptian feminist, Saiza Nabarawi (a close partner of the pioneering feminist leader, Huda Sha'rawi), confessed to me more than four decades ago that the greatest disappointment of the founding feminists was their inability to make significant headway in reforming the Muslim Personal Status Code and their unhappiness over the injustices such failure perpetuates. I place myself alongside others in the long struggle to complete the quest for gender equality, and especially the unfinished business of equality in the family and gender justice more broadly.

3 The secular and the religious

The equality struggle has been fought on terrain variously claimed, constituted and staked out over time and space by 'the secular' and 'the religious'. The extent to which many have been imprisoned by terms taken to be far more narrow and static than the dynamic realities suggest, is striking. It is also striking to observe how 'the religious' is equated with 'the indigenous' or 'the authentic' and 'the secular' with 'the alien', a notion with a history stretching back to colonial days. 'Secular', which is often simplistically seen as religion's other, needs to be unpacked and historicised. In Egypt, the term for secularism/secularisation was coined in Arabic in the late nineteenth century as *almaniyya*. It denoted a separation of state and religious authority and the process by which the modern state in formation assumed legal and institutional responsibility for matters previously under the purview of the religious authorities (Badran 1999, 2009). The state during secularisation took it upon itself to protect religion, not just Islam, but all religions. The state instituted a system of secular education leaving to Al Azhar, the ancient seat of religious learning, the teaching of the Islamic sciences. Law was secularised, with the exception of personal status or family law (this article uses the two terms interchangeably) that was left under the aegis of the religious authorities. The state enacted separate religiously backed personal status codes for Muslims and Christians. However, in the process of the codification of the Muslim Personal Status Code by the state in the early twentieth century, foreign elements were absorbed (Sonbol 1996).

There have been different constructions of the secular in Muslim majority countries ranging from the singular example of the total evacuation of the religious from the state and public sphere in Turkey (although the secular state retained administration of religious properties including mosques), to the Egyptian model that is described above and that was followed in the Arab countries of the east Mediterranean and Iraq (the Arab east). In the Maghreb, with its experience of French colonial rule, different from the French mandate system in Syria and Lebanon and to the less directly interventionist British colonial practices, there was a sharper distinction and polarisation between the secular and the religious than in the Arab east. These varying modes of secularism have held diverse implications for feminism in different national locations (Badran 1995; Kandiyoti 1991; Lazreg 1994; Thompson 2000).

In Egypt, as elsewhere in the Arab east, the term 'secular' was also used to denote a state whose constitutions declare all citizens equal, irrespective of religion and whose national cohesion was not based on religious affiliation.² Countries like Egypt – under colonialism with policies of 'divide and rule' or declining Ottoman suzerainty, which organised populations under its control into separate millets ordered by religion and ethnicity – sought to construct themselves as sovereign territorial countries and their populations as equal citizens. The secular nation-state signified a territorially based state composed of equal citizens sharing a common land. Early last century in the colonial and postcolonial moment, 'secular' was also used to signify national specificity. For example, *secular* nationalism indicated *Egyptian* nationalism and the *secular* feminist movement signalled the *Egyptian* feminist movement (Badran 1995). This usage, however, gradually disappeared.

In Egypt from the time the nation-state was being consolidated early in the twentieth century until around the 1970s, the term secular generally carried a positive connotation. This is not to say there were not those who previously claimed that 'secular' was a synonym for 'Western and un-religious', as the Muslim Brothers did following their creation in 1928. But, from the 1970s, the term secular began to be heavily demonised when the rising forces of political Islam or Islamists who, in opposing the

secular state, branded 'the secular' as Western and un-Islamic or anti-Islamic and, accordingly, the *secular state* as illegitimate. In the 1970s and 1980s the terms 'secularism with religion' and 'secularism without religion' began to circulate indicating two ways of understanding secularism. However, the later meaning gained ground with the continuing spread of political Islam (Badran 2009) and the secular and the religious came to be seen as stark and oppositional categories.³

Scholarship and ongoing historical investigation is now showing ways the secular and the religious have mutually constructed each other (Asad 2003; Hurd 2008). The persistent perception of 'the religious' and 'the secular' as distinct, that is reinforced by political Islam, keeps alive the notion of sharp and, indeed, antithetical demarcations. As part of their polarising political project, Islamists re-invigorate not only the secular/religious binary but also East/West, public/private and male/female oppositions. Islamists' assiduous promotion of the notion that 'the secular' is alien, foreign, non-native and hence inauthentic and that 'the religious' constitutes the indigenous, native and authentic is deliberately divisive and carries negative implications for feminisms.

4 Secular and Islamic feminisms

Feminism, because it involves the awareness and analysis of gender inequality and women's deprivation of their rights and efforts by women to redress wrongs, poses a threat to entrenched patriarchal power and privilege. Feminism which first appeared in Egypt and other Muslim-majority countries during the colonial era was branded by its adversaries as Western and anti-Islamic and thus a pernicious form of colonial cultural invasion. The notion of feminism as a Western and an alien assault upon religion – and of secular as Western and anti-religious – re-enforced by Islamists, persists to this day.

History, however, reveals a different story. In Egypt, from the moment Muslim women first began to articulate their feminism, they drew inspiration from religion in seeking the restoration of their rights as women that Islam had granted them. Christians also claimed that women's rights were religiously endorsed. Religious argumentation was embedded in the secular (national) feminism that Muslims and Christians as Egyptian citizens shaped together

in the nation-state they shared and for whose liberation they had fought side-by-side (Badran 1995). The nation-based secular feminism, which Egyptians and others created in the early twentieth century emerged in the form of social movements. These feminist movements were connected to secular nationalist movements agitating for independence from colonial rule – calling simultaneously for women’s rights and national rights – and were at the same time part of movements for religious reform (Jayawardena 1986). Following national independence, secular feminists directed their attention to building new institutions of state and society inclusive of women using constitutional, democratic, and humanitarian arguments. Secular feminists argued for equality in the public sphere (that is, the secular public sphere, not the domain of the religious professions and ritual which would later be taken up by Islamic feminism), while in the domain of the family they upheld the notion of the complementarity of gender roles, not gender equality, which in keeping with the general knowledge of their day, they accepted as ordained by religion and nature (Badran 1995).

Unlike secular feminism’s emergence in the form of a *social movement*, Islamic feminism burst on the global scene in the late twentieth century in the form of a *discourse* – a trenchant religiously framed discourse of gender equality. Muslim women in different parts of the globe from Iran to Malaysia as well as in the West simultaneously in the late 1980s and the 1990s began to articulate a discourse of women’s rights and gender equality going directly to the Qur’an and other religious texts, exercising their own *ijtihad* or independent critical examination. Iranian legal anthropologist Ziba Mir-Hosseini, and a major figure in the production of the new gender-sensitive Islamic knowledge, was among the first to report what she called ‘a feminist reading of the *Shari’a*’ (Mir-Hosseini 1996) – that some secular feminist Muslims in different parts of the world would soon label Islamic feminism (Badran 1999). It is important to note that those who have been recognised as the producers of this new discourse did not regard their formulations of gender equality and gender justice grounded in their re-readings of religious texts as ‘Islamic feminism’. Indeed they typically rejected this term and did not identify themselves as feminists (of any sort) but preferred to position themselves as committed

scholars of Islam. In time, however, some came to accept the term Islamic feminism.

It might be seen as ironic that the scholar who has been credited with writing the first book-length text of Islamic feminism was a secular feminist. Moroccan feminist sociologist, Fatima Mernissi, troubled by the rampant misogyny perpetuated in the name of Islam in the form of *hadiths* (reported sayings and deeds of the Prophet Mohammed) to denigrate and intimidate women undertook her own investigation of *hadiths*. Using classical Islamic methodologies, she exposed many commonly circulating misogynist *hadiths* as spurious (Mernissi 1987 in French; 1991 in English). Moroccan cultural studies specialist, Raja Rhouni, who offers an incisive analysis of Mernissi’s work and through the example of Mernissi, demonstrates ways individuals may generate and operate within the framework of both secular and Islamic feminisms (Rhouni 2009).

An early collective contribution to the production of Islamic feminism came from Sisters in Islam (SIS), created by professional, scholarly, and activist women in Malaysia in the 1980s, and credited as being the first Islamic feminist association. Since many practices oppressive to women were justified in the name of religion, Sisters in Islam proceeded from women’s real-life experience to Qur’anic investigation. They took up the issue of wife-beating, for example, and demonstrated that the Qur’an did not condone the practice as many have been led to believe. They disseminated their findings in accessible language via inexpensive pamphlets in order to reach a wide public (Badran 1999, 2009). The idea of scholarship-activism that became central to Islamic feminism was first manifested by Sisters in Islam, and indeed, many women, whom others labelled Islamic feminists, called themselves scholar-activists (Webb 2000).⁴

In the West, Muslim women from convert and immigrant communities in the USA produced what soon became regarded as key foundational texts of Islamic feminism. African-American theologian Amina Wadud (also one of the founders of Sisters in Islam) articulated a theory of gender equality based on her Qur’anic hermeneutic work first published in Kuala Lumpur (Wadud 1991) and later in New York (Wadud 1999). She followed this up later with a

powerful statement of human equality embedded in what she calls the '*tawhidic* paradigm', demonstrating that God is unique and above human beings who are on the same plane and equal to each other (Wadud 2008). Pakistani-American international relations scholar Asma Barlas, deconstructed patriarchy and the inequality it perpetuated in the name of Islam Barlas (2002). The work of Wadud and Barlas was soon translated into many languages commonly spoken by Muslims, enabling activists in their struggle to reform Muslim family laws to offer compelling argumentation that the patriarchy is un-Islamic.

An Islamic discourse of equality has broad implications. Wadud's *tawhidic* paradigm applies not simply to Muslims but to all human beings – to the equality all citizens irrespective of gender and religion. Indeed, non-Muslims as well as Muslims have welcomed Islamic feminism's articulation of equality.

The following two sections look at shifts in feminist organising. The first section looks at locally grounded citizen-inclusive feminist activism within the context of a Muslim-majority country. The second section discusses exclusivist communalised feminist activism spearheaded by a Muslim women's global network and exported to national locations.

5 Secular and Islamic feminisms: local ground, shared interests, mutual need

Secular and Islamic feminisms have been mutually re-enforcing. Not only is there an important secular feminist past behind Islamic feminism but also an ongoing side-by-side presence of the two feminisms. Activists have used both secular and Islamic discourses in their campaigns to achieve women's rights and gender equality. In the early twentieth century, secular feminists accessed Islamic modernist discourse and from the late twentieth century, they drew upon the new Islamic feminist discourse. While some feminists prefer to use only constitutional and human rights arguments, in campaigns to reform *fiqh*-backed family laws, activists must use Islamic arguments.

Although feminist organising, which goes back to the early twentieth century in Egypt, included calls for the reform of Muslim family law as an integral part of its comprehensive agenda, little

head-way was achieved. In Turkey, Tunisia, and south Yemen, the few places where advances were made in the twentieth century towards progressive – but not fully egalitarian – family laws, they were bestowed from on high by the states, which used family law reform as part of their larger political and nation-building agendas (Kandiyoti 1991; Charrad 2001; Molyneux 1991).

It was only in the twenty-first century (in Turkey and Morocco) when the interests of feminists and the state coincided, that the patriarchal model of the family was overturned in favour of an egalitarian model. The 2001 revisions of the secular Turkish Civil Code and the 2004 *fiqh*-backed Moroccan Mudawana cast husband and wife as equal heads of family. The Turkish Civil Code of 1926, which had gone the furthest in dismantling the patriarchal model of the family, fell short in enshrining the husband as head of family, revealing that gender inequalities could be sustained not only in Islamically backed law but in secular law as well. This was contrary to the widespread belief that secular law, especially law explicitly modelled on a western prototype (the Turkish law was patterned after the Swiss model), meant full gender equality.

The 2004 Mudawana, as the only existing *fiqh*-backed egalitarian family law, serves as a powerful inspiration today for women in other countries. The Moroccan example demonstrates that *fiqh*-backed family legislation is not immutable sacred law and shows that it is possible within an Islamic framework to enact into law an egalitarian model of the family. The Moroccan and Turkish cases show the importance of independent feminist organising – and in the Moroccan instance, the power of combined secular and Islamic feminist argumentation. The Turkish and Moroccan revisions came after two decades of intense feminist activism and at a moment when the regimes in both countries found it in their political interest to switch from a patriarchal to an egalitarian model of family law. In demanding reform of their secular family law, Turkish activists advanced arguments drawn from democratic and human rights discourse (Toprak 2010). Moroccan activists, as just noted, marshalled both Islamic and secular arguments (Mir-Hosseini 2009; Balchin 2009: 224; Pruzan 2011). In Turkey and Morocco, countries with miniscule minorities, family law activists were virtually all Muslims.

In Egypt and other Arab countries of the east Mediterranean and Iraq (unlike Turkey and Morocco) there are well-established Christian communities with ancient roots. Women from these communities formed an integral part of early twentieth century nationalist and feminist movements in Egypt. In organising, setting priorities and strategising, feminists understood that it was important to their success that their feminist movements gained the backing and input of a wide base of citizenry. The composition of the feminist movement, like the nationalist movement, reflected the religious diversity that was a hallmark of Egypt and a source of strength. Demands for the reform of the Muslim Personal Status Code were an integral part of the comprehensive feminist agenda in Egypt, which Muslim and Christian women jointly created and supported.

Today in the context of widespread religious revival and assertion of religious identity, the broad cooperation that has been a fundamental mark of Egyptian feminist campaigning – including the push for the reform of the Muslim Personal Status Code – is now threatened by the spread of communalism. One of the first areas affected by the intensifying communalisation is the now century-old cooperative effort in Egypt in seeking reform of the Muslim Personal Status Code.

Not only is broad work critical to success in altering any state-enacted laws, including the Muslim Personal Status Code, but the Egyptian Muslim Personal Status Code directly affects more than just Muslims. It is not only Muslims but some non-Muslims who fall under the purview of the Muslim Personal Status Code, and who accordingly have a direct interest in reform work. The non-Muslims include wives of Muslims (typically of foreign origin) and Christians belonging to different denominations in Egypt, who in seeking divorce (to give one example), fall under the jurisdiction of the Muslim law (Tadros 2009).

Now in Egypt, more than ever before, broad-based political work is necessary not only to achieve feminist goals but in the interests of national unity, which is threatened by communalism. Feminist, democracy and human rights movements need to re-enforce each other but this is difficult as heavy state security

measures inhibit independent activist organising of any sort. Emergency law in effect in Egypt for over three decades enables a wide range of escalating security measures aimed at controlling perceived Islamist threats. Significant change in the Muslim Personal Status Code in Egypt could ignite Islamist opposition which the state is fearful to risk and therefore such reform is stalled.

The feminist struggle to reform Muslim family law in Egypt is first and foremost an internal battle (as it was in Turkey and Morocco). Egyptian women in their long history of feminist activist work exploited international and regional or transnational forums and networks when they decided it could serve their interests. They remained in charge of their own agenda even in the early and middle decades of the last century in international forums under the shadow of imperial feminisms (Badran 1995; Rupp 1997). Today, broad collaboration across lines of religion and locally anchored feminist activism are threatened in ways discussed below.

6 From secular and Islamic feminist collaboration to communalism; from the global to the local

There has been positive synergy between secular feminism and Islamic feminism and cooperation between activists of different religions, as noted above. Increasingly, however, communalism is threatening the collaboration of Muslim and non-Muslim citizens and internal cohesion within nations. I am not interested here in the communalism among the ranks of the religious and political conservatives, but rather how communalism is being fed from within the world of feminism and more specifically through progressive Muslim women's global organising. I look at Musawah (equality in Arabic), which is a transnational organisation created and run by and for Muslims. Musawah announced itself as 'A global movement for equality and justice in the Muslim Family' at its launch in the spring of 2009 at a large conference in Kuala Lumpur. The event was hosted by Sisters in Islam, the veteran Islamic feminist organisation now two decades old, which has played a central role in the creation of Musawah.⁵

Musawah is directed by a small nucleus of Muslim women that focuses on the reform of Muslim family laws. Musawah's planning committee is composed of a small group that

includes highly respected scholars and seasoned activists, some with roots in Islamic feminism and others with more secular experience (Musawah 2009; www.musawah.org). In the run-up to its launch, Musawah held a number of closed planning committee meetings, including one in Cairo in 2007, and post-launch held a meeting in Cairo in January 2010. For an organisation aiming for massive global outreach, Musawah runs a tight ship, as was noticed in Cairo last winter.⁶ Egypt will be the upcoming focal point for activism conducted through the local NGO called the Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance (CEWLA) whose head and founder is Azza Suleiman, a lawyer and member of Musawah's planning committee (www.cewla.org; Abu-Lughod 2010a,b).

The Musawah Framework for Action (Musawah 2009) and Musawah publication *Wanted: Why Equality and Justice Now* (Anwar 2009) prepared for the launch and edited by Zainah Anwar, president of Sisters in Islam, explain that the organisation takes a holistic approach to rights work, using multiple discourses including 'religious, human rights, constitutional, and fundamental guarantees, and women's lived realities' (Anwar 2009). The religious discourse holds a special prominence, as indicated in the stunning collection of papers published in *Wanted* by leading scholars of Islam and prominent activists whose work has influenced both Islamic and secular feminists.

Because of its communalism, I call Musawah's project '*Muslim* holistic feminism'. In using Islamic feminism's theorisation of equality and justice grounded in religious sources, together with the secular discourses of democracy and human rights, the new Muslim holistic feminism echoes the multi-stranded discursive approach that characterised the secular feminism which emerged in Egypt early in the last century and was developed elsewhere in the region. As such, secular feminism was a holistic feminism before the term 'holism' came into use. We have seen earlier that 'secular' was another way to convey holistic.

However, there are clear differences in these two holistic feminisms. First, the pioneering secular feminism was created by Muslims and non-Muslims together as citizens in their respective countries. Second, as just mentioned, secular

feminists proceeded from their national base to access the world of international feminism and used its forums and networks on their own terms. Their international organising (what they called 'international' would now be referred to as 'transnational') was grounded in national associations which functioned as the centres of gravity. Third, secular feminism emerged on the scene in the form of organic social movements in progress, while the new Muslim holistic feminism of Musawah surfaced as an envisioned movement. Fourth, secular feminism was organised by politicised women who were first and foremost activists, while the new Muslim holistic feminism as the product of scholar-activists exhibits a highly developed theoretical structure. Fifth, secular feminism began and long remained voluntary and self-funding and has preserved this tradition, even as it has become increasingly 'NGO-ised' to use Islah Jad's expression, and although some secular feminists as NGO leaders and staff are now remunerated their organisations retain the openness that has been the mark of secular feminism (Jad 2004). Muslim holistic feminism is being jump-started by income-earning professional women, public intellectuals, and NGO-ers who are savvy, well-connected, cosmopolitan and income-earning (Abu-Lughod 2010a).

The new holistic Muslim feminism is being propelled during a moment when the USA and other Western governments are endeavouring to produce moderate Muslims and moderate or moderated behaviours, in the context of their larger political and security concerns and Muslim women are seen as ideal agents (Abu-Lughod 2010a). The pioneering secular feminism of the last century, on the other hand, emerged in the context of intense anti-colonial struggles.

A glimpse at Musawah's focus on 'equality and justice in the Muslim family' provides an insight into the new Muslim holistic feminism in the making and what separates it from secular feminism which dealt with the functional family (unqualified by religion) along with trying to reform Muslim family law. One asks of Musawah: 'Why the Muslim family? Is this an elision between 'the Muslim family' and Muslim family law? But, more to the point, 'What is 'the Muslim family'? This is a question I asked at Musawah's launch but no answer was forthcoming and at a subsequent conference held

in Cairo, I asked some Musawah members again to no avail. Avoidance of the question of what constitutes a Muslim family indicates reluctance on the part of Muslim holistic feminists to deal with the contemporary reality of the religiously mixed marriage about which An-Na'im and others have written (An-Na'im 2005). This indicates the limits, or the hesitation, of communally based feminism to deal with intra-religious gender issues and especially those related to the family.

The intention of this article has been to look at the porosities and complexities of 'the secular' and 'the religious' as they play out in the feminisms Muslim women have created, together with women from other religions, as well as separately in national and global spaces. I wanted to reflect on the continuities as well as the new directions in feminist thinking and activism in the context shifting grounds. I wanted to look at this from within the context of the nation-state and the

context of global feminism and their constituencies. The appearance on the scene of communal feminism, that I have called 'Muslim holistic feminism', is a striking new departure that deserves attention. I have looked at this phenomenon as expressed through Musawah (although there are other sites where Muslim holistic feminism is appearing) to consider its implications. Muslim holistic feminism is still early in the making and like other works in progress, it is fluid and not always consistent in its self-presentation, which can be viewed as a mark of creative dynamism. I have raised irksome issues out of the conviction that acknowledging them is essential to dealing with them – to discovering the conceptual, practical, and political possibilities and limits of various approaches. I end with three questions: (1) Whose interests do the new Muslim holistic feminists serve? (2) How can the rights of the communal and the national be honoured in the fluid spaces between the secular and the religious? (3) Does secular feminism have a future?

Notes

- * I would like to thank Mariz Tadros for inviting me to the workshop, 'Religious Framings of Gender Policies and Practices', at the Institute for Development Studies at the University of Sussex and the participants of the workshop for two days of lively debate and provocative discussion during which a range of views was brought to the fore. The workshop provided an excellent opportunity to share ideas in formation as well as the fruits of longer work. I thank also Philippa Strum, my colleague at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, who read the final version of this article. Finally I would like to convey my thanks to the many friends and colleagues with whom I have had the privilege of enjoying a moveable feast of conversations, in cyber and real space, on issues raised in this article, and many more.
- 1 Foreign women married to Egyptian citizens are permitted citizenship, while foreign men married to Egyptians are not.
 - 2 The secular and religious have been complexly interwoven in the 'secular state' as the case of Egypt has illustrated, where the constitution declares Islam to be the state religion and where the 1971 constitution declared the Sharia to be a source of law and the 1980 constitution declares that the Sharia is *the* source of all law (not just the Muslim Personal Status Code). However, this did not

- result in the Islamicisation of law. The latter changes occurred in the context of the spread of Islamism.
- 3 In the 1970s and 1980s when '*almaniyya bila din*' began to be used to signify secularism without religion, the implication was that '*almaniyya*' did not necessarily imply secularism as devoid of religion. Although with the spread of Islamic secularism it became commonly understood as un-Islamic and even anti-Islamic. I remember discussing this shift in meaning with colleagues at the time.
 - 4 Gisela Webb (2000: xi–xix), the centrality scholarship-activist and the scholar-activist in Muslim women's theoretical and applied work on women, gender, and Islam, points specifically to North American experience. Later, a South African scholar of Islam and gender, Sa'diyya Shaikh found that the battered women she interviewed developed what she calls a '*tafsir* (exegesis) of praxis' finding for themselves a contradiction between the ethical message of the Qur'an and the brutalities they experienced at the hands of their Muslim husbands (Shaikh 2007).
 - 5 I participated in this event held in Kuala Lumpur attending the plenary events and breakout sessions as well as engaging in numerous conversations.
 - 6 I was in Cairo at the time and heard complaints from Muslims about exclusivity, who were eager to be in the loop.

References

- Abu-Lughod, Lila (2010a) 'Anthropology in the Territory of Rights, Islami, Human, and Otherwise...', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 167: 225–62
- Abu-Lughod, Lila (2010b) 'The Active Social Life of "Muslim Women's Rights": A Plea for Ethnography, not Polemic with Cases from Egypt and Palestine', *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 6.1: 1–45
- An-Na'im, Abdullahi A. (2005) *Inter-religious Marriages Among Muslims: Negotiating Religious and Social Identity in Family and Community*, New Delhi: Global Media Publications
- Anwar, Zainah (2009) 'Introduction: Why Equality Now', in Zainah Anwar (ed.), *Wanted: Equality and Justice in the Muslim Family*, Kuala Lumpur: Musawah: 1–10
- Asad, Talal (2003) *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, and Modernity*, Stanford: Stanford University Press
- Badran, Margot (2009) *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences*, Oxford: Oneworld
- Badran, Margot (1999) 'Towards Islamic Feminisms: A Look at the Middle East', in Asma Afsarrudin (ed.), *Hermeneutics and Honor in Islamic/ate Societies*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard Middle East Monograph series
- Badran, Margot (1995) *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt*, Princeton: Princeton University Press
- Balchin, Cassandra (2009) 'Family Law in Contemporary Muslim Contexts: Triggers and Strategies for Change', in Zainah Anwar (ed.), *Wanted: Equality and Justice in the Muslim Family*, Kuala Lumpur: Musawah: 209–36
- Barlas, Asma (2002) *'Believing Women' in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*, Austin: University of Texas Press
- Charrad, Mounira (2001) *States and Women's Rights: The Making of Postcolonial Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco*, Berkeley: University of California Press
- Hurd, Elizabeth Shakman (2008) *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations*, Princeton: Princeton University Press
- Jad, Islah (2004) 'The "NGOisation" of the Arab Women's Movement', *IDS Bulletin* 35.4
- Jayawardena, Kumari (1986) *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, London: Zed Books
- Kandiyoti, Deniz (ed.) (1991) 'End of Empire: Islam, Nationalism and Women in Turkey', *Women, Islam and the State*, London: Macmillan: 22–47
- Lazreg, Marnia (1994) *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question*, London: Routledge
- Mernissi, Fatima (1987, 1991) *Le Harem Politique*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1987; translated into English by Mary Jo Lakeland, Oxford: Blackwell, 1991; and in *The Veil and the Male Elite*, Reading MA: Addison-Wesley, 1991
- Mir-Hosseini, Ziba (2009) 'Towards Gender Equality: Muslim Family Laws and the Shar'iah', in Zainah Anwar (ed.) *Wanted: Equality and Justice in the Muslim Family*, Kuala Lumpur: Musawah: 23–64
- Mir-Hosseini, Ziba (1996) 'Stretching the Limits: A Feminist Reading of the Shar'ia in Post-Khomeini Iran', in May Yamani (ed.), *Feminism and Islam: Legal and Literary Perspectives*, London: Ithaca Press: 285–320
- Molyneux, Maxine (1991) 'The Law, the State and Socialist Policies with Regard to Women: The Case of the People's Republic of Yemen 1967–1990', in Deniz Kandiyoti (ed.), *Women, Islam and the State*, London: Macmillan: 237–71
- Musawah (2009) *Musawah Framework for Action*, Kuala Lumpur: Sisters in Islam
- Pruzan-Jørgensen, Julie (2011) 'Islam, Gender and Democracy in Morocco: The Making of the Mudawana Reform', in Margot Badran (ed.) *Gender and Islam in Africa: Rights, Sexuality, and Law*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, forthcoming
- Rhouni, Raja (2009) *Secular and Islamic Feminist Critiques in the Work of Fatima Mernissi*, Leiden: Brill Publishers
- Rupp, Laila (1997) *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement*, Princeton: Princeton University Press
- Shaikh, Sa'diyya (2007) 'A *Tafsir* of Praxis: Gender, Marital Violence, and Resistance in a South African Muslim Community', in Daniel Maguire and Sa'diyya Shaikh (eds), *Violence against Women and World Religions*, Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press: 66–89
- Sonbol, Amira (ed.) (1996) *Women, the Family, and Divorce Laws in Islamic History*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press
- Tadros, Mariz (2009) 'The Non-Muslim "Other": Gender and Contestations of Hierarchy of Rights', *Hawwa* 7: 111–43
- Thompson, Elizabeth (2000) *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon*, New York: Columbia University Press
- Toprak, Binnaz (2010) 'Recent Amendments in the Turkish Civil and Criminal Codes and the

Role of Feminist NGOs', *Middle East Program Occasional Paper Series* (Fall) 10–14
Wadud, Amina (2008) *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam*, Oxford: Oneworld
Wadud, Amina (1991, 1999) *Qur'an and Woman: Reading the Qur'an from a Woman's Perspective*,

Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Fajar Bakati, 1991
and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999
Webb, Gisela (ed.) (2000) *Windows of Faith: Muslim Women Scholar-Activists in North America*,
Syracuse: Syracuse University Press