

Introduction

Huma Ahmed-Ghosh

While challenging popular contestations of the Muslim woman, Syed Jamil Ahmed states that, “representations of the ‘Muslim woman’ as the ‘Othered’ object of the ‘Western’ gaze and the domesticated ‘object’ which the Islamist apologists strive hard to defend, are both constructions and false anti-thesis of each other.”¹ This book reinforces and elaborates this view by addressing the pressing issues of feminisms and Asian Muslim women’s movements in the world. The world post-9/11 has seen a rapid increase in discussions of Muslim women’s lives in Islamic states and in states with substantial Muslim populations. Following this event, there is a sense of an Islamic identity that is more commonly shared among Muslim women today than in other historical periods. This identity is framed by a contentious political and ideological dichotomy between the West and Islamic states and other Muslim communities, albeit through the creation of an anti-West identity politics. This period has also witnessed a dramatic increase in research on Muslim women’s status in order to better understand their lives and lifestyles, the societies in which they live, and the issues faced by Muslim populations in non-Muslim societies and in the West. Despite this scholarship, we still know far too little about the lives of Muslims in Asia.²

This book brings together essays that contend with issues of feminisms and women’s movements as they pertain to Muslim women’s lives in Asian countries and in the Western diaspora. Each essay in this book speaks to Muslim women’s struggles to claim agencies and rights within their countries as dictated by regional historical, political, and social institutions that lead to constantly shifting cultural values and prescriptions. Shifting of cultures is also a result of global embroilment, and thus these essays illuminate how

women's lives are directly influenced by them. This collection offers nuanced insights into scholarly debates that wrestle with the current politicization of Islam, particularly for women who reside in countries with a Muslim majority or have a substantial Muslim minority. These collected essays fill a void in the literature on Muslim women in Asia and bring to the forefront debates that critically engage and expand our understanding of transnational feminisms. By addressing the question of what is gender equality, this book explores ways in which a multifaceted understanding of Islam can contribute to productive dialogue about the future of Muslim women in Islamic and secular states and in the Western diaspora.

Much has been written and debated about women's rights in Muslim countries where women themselves are divided on the "best practices" approach to empower women. Most of these debates, however, have been confined to academia. Bridge building is essential to relate these academic debates to women's realities, and vice versa. In attempting to do so, one might be able to defuse tensions among academics, theologians, and feminists, and importantly, help to influence government, international institutions, and policy makers more effectively.

While there is rightfully a revival of the debate on women in Islam, especially regarding their representation in the Quran, this has, until now, largely intended to address the West's perception of Muslim women. The essays in this book decenter the West-centric framework of feminism and offer an exploration of women's status within their own social, economic, and historical contexts. When Muslim women choose to conform to an Islamic lifestyle, they are viewed by Westerners as symbols of a regressive Islam that is oppressive to all women, whereas Islamists see them as supporters of the perfect Islam that reinforces Islamic patriarchy and "rejects" Westernization. If Muslim women choose not to conform to a "strict" Islamic lifestyle, they are seen as betraying the Islamic cause by their "brothers," and viewed by Westerners as "liberated" women who oppose "oppressive" Islam and conform to Western feminism. Such external constructions and expectations of women's behavior render their own decisions, choices, and life circumstances invisible, and their realities are reduced to simplistic and judgmental interpretations.³ The essays in this book deconstruct Western hegemonic interpretation of Muslim societies and the everyday lives of Muslim women to reveal the multiple realities of Muslim women in Asia and the diaspora, and contribute to an understanding of women within their local cultures. In so doing, the essays create a dialogue between empowerment and religious spirituality. They also challenge the oft-repeated sentiments that "Muslim women are victims," and that Muslim societies are hyper-patriarchal, thereby

concluding that Muslim women need to be rescued and protected by the West. In challenging these notions, this book speaks to the complexity and diversity of Islamic/Muslim feminisms and to the heterogeneity of the Muslim population, and focus instead on Muslim women's agency. As editor of this set of essays, my objective is to expose the reader to a range of complex discussions on the multiplicity of Muslim women's lives that speak to the diversity and, at times, contradictory consequences of Islamization, secularization, and local politics for Muslim women. This book opens up spaces for future research and understanding of Muslim women's lives and reflects on how Muslim women "build and extend their social knowledge within the larger nexus of nationalism, kinship and religion."⁴

Locating Islamic and Non-Islamic Feminisms in Asia⁵

The word *feminism* continues to be a contested term globally. In the modern era, with the emergence of Islamic states forty years ago, and the rapid spread of the faith and its intensity around the world, "concern" over Muslim women's lives has increased. Scholars studying women in Muslim societies have responded by defining feminism in new and nuanced ways, and challenging what they perceive as "Western feminism." In general, these challenges have led to two broad theorizations of feminisms—Islamic feminism and secular feminism—that are rooted in support of and opposition to Islam and its impact on Muslim women's lives. As explicated in my earlier work on the deconstruction of these two feminisms,⁶ many liberal feminists see Islamic feminism as a paradox or oxymoron, while those who conflate feminism with Western feminism see secular feminism as problematic in Islamic states and for Muslim women globally. But there is a contested space between these two theories where the lives of most Muslim women are situated. It is in this space that I engage with the concept of collaborative/hybrid feminism in an attempt to expand the discussion on this evolving trend in studies of feminism. To clarify, "hybrid feminism" does not necessarily refer to a blending of Islamic and secular feminism to create a new form of feminism, but rather implies a compromised agreement reached by the two opposing feminisms and feminists on issues pertaining to women that they deem oppressive. Thus, an example of hybrid feminism would be the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act of 2012 in Pakistan. A group of multiparty women formed the Women's Caucus in the Pakistani Parliament and fought together to bring about this Act without compromising on their feminisms (ranging from Islamic fundamentalist to secular).⁷ Such feminism

does not challenge patriarchy head-on but is a movement that is issue-based in its approach.

An interesting debate also exists amongst Asian Muslim feminists who are educated in the West and in their home countries. Exposure to Western feminism and to the realities of women's lives in their home countries and in the diaspora has led to ideological positions on feminism grounded in the "politics" of their own location in a globalized world. Most secular feminists base their feminism on a human rights discourse, which they see as fundamental to secularism.⁸ Then, there is a category of secular-left intellectuals and feminists⁹ "who espouse Islamic feminism as a "strategy" with an emphasis on reinterpretation of the Quran¹⁰ by questioning the Hadith¹¹ and Shariah¹² in Islamic states."¹³ Another set of scholarship on Islamic feminism delves into the Quran and other texts of Islam to claim that the texts do guarantee equal rights to women, and that it is through the false interpretations of these texts that women have been rendered subservient to men.¹⁴

Based on the lives of women in their local cultures, a group of feminists¹⁵ have focused more on class and theories of patriarchy rather than just religion, in this case Islam, to analyze women's disparate status in society. Thus, for Muslim women whose lives are positioned at the intersection of kinship, local culture, religion, class, ethnicity, nation, and global politics, "hybrid feminism provides a useful analytic tool to address women's issues."¹⁶ One needs to look for coalitions that can emerge in different communities, and which are able to bring together Islamic, secular, and other discourses in a collaborative form that attend better to women's lives and sense of personhood. Muslim women's heterogeneous realities challenge mainstream/Western feminisms, since these women's lives, as products of local cultures and politics, do not fit into typical Western feminist ideological compartments. Muslim women's lives also do not conform to the rigid parameters of a secular or Islamic nation but are impacted by women's class, region, ethnicity, and local politics. These variables could potentially give women the option to negotiate their status and rights contrary to the dominant ideology. Toward this end, the essays in this book articulate the numerous interpretations of Islamic, secular, and hybrid feminisms that have surfaced in Islamic and non-Islamic democratic and secular states in Asia.

The important question here is: what are the best discourses to bring about progressive policies for equal/better rights for Muslim women in Islamic states and other Muslim communities? The essays in this book address this question from various authors' perspectives and expertise, employing interdisciplinary approaches and methodologies, "yet each essay is infused with the particularity of its context."¹⁷ The book is divided into three parts. Each

part, while focused on the thematics of its specific topic, builds on the previous parts to expand the discussion on Muslim women's lives—from claims for individual agency, to relationships with the nation state, and ultimately to how transnationalism affects their lives and identity. Part I of the book focuses on “conceptually redefining empowerment;” Part II “is anchored in a feminist analysis of Muslim women's discursive and material practices”; and Part III “highlights some of the dilemmas at the heart of the transnational Muslim women's specific realities and histories.”¹⁸ Each essay is framed in accordance with the main theme of the relevant Part, with a discussion preceding that abstract. These discussions are substantiated by meticulous analysis of the contestatory space in which they are embedded.

Part I. Whose Feminism? Muslim Women Redefining “Empowerment”¹⁹

The emergence of contemporary Islamic feminisms in the modern world is the product of the Islamization of particular countries such as Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan since the late 1970s and early 1980s, and in response to 9/11 in the United States. The latter event created a renewed awareness of the “us versus them” divide between the Muslim world and the Western world. These historical precedents are important because women in these societies have had to wrestle with their everyday realities, as limited as they may be, and engage in processes to empower themselves. Islamic feminism, while different in its message from secular feminism, may have been an appropriate strategy for women to employ under the watchful and critical eyes of Islamic regimes. While some women choose Islamic feminism for pragmatic reasons, others view it as an appropriate form of feminist dialogue and struggle. For many women, Islam is used strategically to empower women within an Islamic framework.

As noted earlier, “Islamic feminists are seeking Muslim women's emancipation within the rubrics of Islamic patriarchy whether progressive, modernist, traditionalist, pragmatist, neo-Islamist, or fundamentalist.”²⁰ Many Asian feminists distinguish between equity and equality, and argue that gender roles are complementary and assign “equitable” rights to each gender. A phrase such as “separate but equal” is used to define Asian feminism. Rebecca Foley²¹ through research in Malaysia “elaborates that equity refers to fairness whereas equality to equal rights with men.”²² Many Islamic women theologians and scholars refer to empowered women in Islamic texts to challenge the subservience of women during the early stages of Islam in Arabia

by pointing to Prophet Muhammad's wife and the first convert to Islam, Khadija, who ran a flourishing trade business. As another notable example, Prophet Muhammad's last wife, Ayesha, led a battle on camelback to fight against Ali, who had laid claim to the caliphate in Arabia.

Islamic feminist theologians base their understanding of gender relations primarily on the Quran rather than the Sharia. Sharia is the prescriptive text of Islamic law that is based on the Quran and Hadith. Though Sharia compilations started shortly after Prophet Muhammad's death, the text solidified its legitimacy almost a hundred years later by incorporating local traditions and politics that were far removed from the early Quranic era. For example, the oft-quoted Islamic theologian Riffat Hassan claims that human rights are not the prerogative of secularism and can be claimed through a proper understanding of Islam. Hassan recognizes the atrocities perpetuated against Muslim women such as honor killings and discrimination against girl children in Pakistan, but is quick to point out that such institutions are not part of the Quran.²³ Politicization of religions legitimizes moral and social codes that lead to gender discrimination, and gender hierarchies exist in the texts of all mainstream religions. Therefore, Islamic theologians do need to deconstruct the religious texts as they are interpreted today to align with social changes and cultures to ensure women's rights.

Since all women, religious or nonreligious, live in patriarchal societies, research reveals that many women are keen to conform to religious ideals in what I term "patriarchy trading,"²⁴ a negotiation that allows them to claim some agency and access to spiritualism. Through various case studies, the following essays elaborate the notion of agency and "empowerment" for Muslim women within an understanding of Islam that is perceived to be "fair" and "just," and "Islam is shown to be a discourse and form of praxis utilized by Asian Muslim women."²⁵ The following four essays examine women's agency not only expressed through their decisions to engage actively with their faith, but also through the strategies these women employ as believers. In all four essays, Muslim women tussle with their perception of Islam and how their contribution to their faith as leaders, participants, and enforcers through their class status empowers them.

Svetlana Peshkova, in her essay, asks the basic question, "Can Muslim women lead?" The questions of whether women can be leaders and in what capacity are central in debates about leadership in Muslim communities. Peshkova argues that our understanding of Muslim women's leadership (as *otinchalar*) should not be reduced to its social manifestation and constitution, but must include an analysis of an important and often ignored dimension of leadership—its emotional nature. Without the human body, mind,

and consciousness, leadership as a concept and a set of actions does not exist. She develops this argument by analyzing leadership provided by some Muslim women in Uzbekistan. By foregrounding the in-bodied existence of an individual as a part of a composite society, Peshkova challenges existing debates about women's leadership to reflect corporal location and emotional constitution.

Similar to otinchalar in Uzbekistan, Alexander Horstmann examines women's empowerment through faith in his research on women in Tablighi Jama'at's Missionary movement in Southern Thailand. Horstmann argues that lower-class women shed their economic, social, and gendered marginality in society by becoming Tablighi missionaries. Such women are encouraged by the leadership of the movement, despite protests by other Muslims and even some within their movement, to step out of their homes and travel to proselytize the faith. These women are also seen as instrumental in developing boundaries between the Muslims and Buddhists in an attempt to foil the dominance of Buddhism in their region. Through their participation in this movement, which continues to be male dominated in its leadership, Muslim women are able to transcend class and ethnic boundaries as they are absorbed within the Tablighi Jama'at Missionary movement.

Another example of claiming empowerment through Islam is the work of Maris Boyd Gillett who, through nearly two decades of ethnographic research in Xi'an, China, describes the lives of three Hui women who express their agency as "empowered" Muslim women in their village. Through their stories, Gillett highlights the rise of Islamic consciousness among the Hui, especially men, who with the aid of their wives become better followers of the faith, and create more peaceful marital lives for themselves. She elaborates on this process by detailing the lives and decisions of three women, and concludes that they do not express agency through decisions pertaining to them as autonomous individuals, but rather as integral members of their collective and larger kinship relations. In so doing, Gillett deconstructs the concept of "women's empowerment" to determine what issues women themselves consider important to their social status and the well-being of their families, thereby contesting "Western feminist" notions of empowerment.

In her essay on conflicting Muslim groups in the Southern Philippines, Birte Brecht-Drouart skillfully delineates the politics of gender discourse as competing perspectives between two opposing Islamic parties and the national government of the Philippines (GRP). Brecht-Drouart points out how the discussion of women's issues and women's rights are confined to these competing patterns of Islamic politics, and thus are not part of discussions independent of political interests. This situation, according to the

author, limits space for any progressive laws to be considered and complicates debates on Islamic feminism. Besides making different claims on women's status through its diversity in the Philippines, Islam is a syncretic faith that has been preserved by the sultans to maintain their power in the community by ascribing women some political power—albeit those with class and clan status.

The essays in Part I speak to the complexity of Muslim women's roles in these regions, thus making it difficult to categorize these essays into neat compartments or distinct theorizations. Islamic feminists use religion as a framework to define gender roles and to structure their family and community and women's inclusion in the nation state. As the above essays reflect, the individual is subsumed by the collective that is presumed to preserve culture, religion, and family better than an individualistic approach. In this collective, Muslim women are able to legitimize and negotiate their status by reclaiming Islam through its various interpretations to augment the status of their communities.

Part II. Contesting Feminisms and Muslim Women's Movements in Contested Spaces²⁶

While Part I focused on individual women claiming their stake and status as practitioners of their interpretations of Islam to enhance their communities, essays in Part II engage the State in their questioning of Muslim women's rights. In these essays, feminisms are contested and validated through competing interpretations of secularism and women's rights. The essays in this part show that it is within secular states and human rights discourses that Muslim women fight for their right to follow their faith on their own terms. While cognizant of the space secularism provides for alternative discourses on Muslim women's rights, these essays critique the same space for stifling those rights. All four essays complicate the arguments of secularism and Islamism by critiquing limitations both ideologies place on women's rights.

An example of secularism providing contestatory spaces for Muslim women is most visible in the cases of France and Turkey, where secular state policies ban or allow veiling of Muslim women in their respective countries. In France, wearing of headscarves and veils has been a contentious issue for some decades. Reclaiming their century-old laws and secularist philosophies, France banned the use of religious symbols in schools in 2004, following a fifteen-year debate to ban headscarves worn by Muslim

girls in schools. In 2011, the ban was extended to include full-face covering by Muslim women in public spaces, once again in the name of secularism. In Turkey, Kemal Atatürk prohibited the headscarf in his quest for secularism and modernization in 1924. This prohibition led to passionate debates between secularists and more Islamic-minded people in the 1980s. This debate became even more intense and, on the grounds of freedoms and rights, the headscarf ban was lifted in October 2013 with the support of the AKP (Justice and Development Party that is founded on a “liberal” Islamic agenda) that came into power in 2002. One of the strongest arguments proffered by conservative women was that the ban on headscarves prohibited their enrollment in education and participation in the workplace. In these ways, the essays in Part II question the duplicity of the State in order to reclaim religious rights.

Zeynep Akbulut, through ethnographic research, deliberates on the strategies head-scarved women in Turkey engage in to reclaim their Islamic rights in a secular democracy. She elaborates on how these women co-opt women’s rights discourses to claim their space in a country generally hostile to veiling because it is seen as a reversion to fundamentalism. Akbulut’s aim is to “elaborate on new discourses” such a situation creates among head-scarved women, and she does so by examining the State’s right to exclude women from universities. She implicates the State in its denial of human rights to its citizens. Through her discussion of the Women’s Rights Association against Discrimination (AKDER) and the Capital City Women’s Platform, she explores how such organizations use the human rights discourse to demand rights to wear the headscarf. She concludes that through this process linkages can be created locally and internationally to bridge understandings between the secularists and religious interpretations of women’s rights.

The essay by Nadja-Christina Schneider, thematically similar to Akbulut’s essay, examines the “new forms of feminist articulations” among Muslim women in the context of secularism that India and the mainstream Indian women’s movement have adopted. Through deconstruction of the concepts of “mobility” and “immobility,” she relates them to Muslim women’s representations, especially through media, to elaborate on the emergence of a “new” feminist movement. By examining the static construction of the Muslim woman, Schneider takes to task the right-wing Hindu movement and the restrictive Muslim Personal Law. In so doing, she considers the Muslim women’s movement as located at the crossroads of transnational interpretations of Islamic feminism and the networks they enable, and how such interpretations translate for movement members. Schneider looks to Sisters in Islam in Malaysia to inspire the Muslim women’s movement in India.

Yasmin Moll explores the epistemological assumptions of Islamic feminist discourses. Using the Malaysian group Sisters in Islam (SIS) as a case study, Moll argues that the hermeneutical strategies and activist methodologies of SIS partake in the same objectifying rationalities of the Malaysian state when it comes to Islamic jurisprudence. While acknowledging the important political labor performed by SIS in contesting patriarchal norms from within a religious frame, Moll highlights how this labor is made possible by the changing relations of knowledge and power that enable Qur'anic interpretation to be conceptualized as a matter of individual rights. She argues that such Islamic feminist claims and strategies take for granted the interpretive closure introduced by the codification of Islamic law in the modern period. Through her analysis, Moll shows how contemporary Islamic feminism, far from "reclaiming" an "uncorrupted" Islamic tradition, redefines the very epistemological basis of this tradition through advocating new ways of reading and relating to the Qur'anic text.

Following on the heels of Moll's essay, on a contrary note from Moll, Afiya Shehrbano Zia problematizes the wisdom of using Islam as a strategic tool for women's empowerment by secular working-class women and how women's movements in Pakistan occupy conflicting spaces in support or in contestation of state agendas. To quote Zia, her essay addresses "the interplay of the understandings and contradictions of Islamic and secular identity politics in the Pakistani women's movement." She claims that secularism in Pakistan has become a delegitimized space for fundamentalist Islamic groups to not just occupy to enforce Islamic impositions in certain aspects of Pakistani life, but especially to inflict severe restrictions on women's status. Zia helps debunk General Musharraf's regime in Pakistan that promised secularization and a progressive agenda for women's rights by exposing the false promise of "moderate" or "enlightened" Islam which the Islamists exploited to the fullest.

Together, the essays in Part II shed light on how the authors use a human rights discourse made possible through secularism to address contestatory feminisms in their countries. As detailed in my work on women's rights in Afghanistan, a rights discourse is culture-specific and is not a universally detailed imposition by the West. In the study, I have posited that "the notion of universal human rights is a powerful ideology and philosophy but not the ideal political strategy when played out on the stage of global politics of the West and the Islamic East."²⁷ Democracies and secularism endow their people with the ability to claim rights that have been suppressed by states' opposition to these religious ideologies. But to reclaim religious and human rights within a secular democracy and within Islamic states is problematic and contestatory, especially when trying to empower women. Part II "situates

faith-based Islamic feminism within the larger Islamic statist discourse to show that religion can be a lobbying force for justice for women"²⁸—albeit with limitations in some countries.

Part III. Transnational Feminisms: Locating Muslim Women at the Crossroads²⁹

The essays in Part III address issues and responses to the complexity of transnational feminisms as they pertain to Asian Muslim women expanding the debate beyond the nation state. The essays in this volume could be seen as “case studies” from Asia and the diaspora that in nuanced ways wrestle with Muslim women’s status and rights in diverse parts of Asia and the West. Authors in Part III reflect the “changing times” and engage in debates on what Islamic feminism is and its many avatars emerging from modernity and a transnational perspective. Through a deconstruction of the concepts of feminism and empowerment, authors locate Muslim women’s lives and their options and choices within locally produced gendered discourses, expanding the meanings of these concepts and creating the space for further discussions and theorizing. In bringing these essays together, this part brings to the forefront debates that critically engage and expand our understanding of transnational feminisms.

In the larger understanding of globalization and feminist advocacy, Eloora Halim Chowdhury draws our attention to the importance of transnational feminism in Muslim societies. Through her discussion of the anti-acid violence campaign in Bangladesh, Chowdhury analyzes “transnational feminist praxis” by engaging with the local, national, and international discourses that emerged when “victims” of acid throwing were brought to the United States. Chowdhury critiques existing linguistic/rhetorical frameworks assigned to women as “victims,” “subjects,” and “agents.” In her assessment, she reflects on the complex relationships among women’s organizations in the South.

Continuing with the complexity of transnational women’s organizations, Cyra Akila Choudhury looks at transnational feminist advocacy by the Feminist Majority in the United States and RAWA (Revolutionary Afghan Women’s Association) in Afghanistan to critique liberal legal feminism. Choudhury’s main contention is that liberal feminists co-opt justifications for colonialism and are not sensitive to Muslim women’s lives. Using 9/11 as a watershed mark, she claims that there has been a bigger push since to “help” Muslim women by liberal feminists through their discourse on Western-style reform. Choudhury also critiques Governance Feminism as being rooted in a universalism that borders on imperialism. While acknowledging

the repressive strictures some Muslim women must abide to, she calls for a better understanding of the choices Muslim women may make. This essay points to the further damage militarization and appeals to international law and state interventions do to local women.

In a different setting but continuing the debates put forward by Choudhury, Beverly M. Weber's theoretical essay raises very pertinent questions about the validity of European Muslim women's claims regarding perception of women's rights and senses of democracy. Drawing on diverse European Muslim scholars, Weber elaborates on the complexities of such discourses. Her essay focuses on Muslim immigrants, a majority of them Turks living in Germany, to untangle the perceptions of these women and other Muslim immigrant women "in the face of racialized forms of exclusion." Weber attempts to understand the location of Muslim women's agency within the larger debate on Muslim women in Europe and how it complicates feminist thinking in the region. Weber, like Choudhury, questions the validity of Governance Feminism in its interface with state institutions to understand the location of Muslim feminism and its various incarnations.

All the essays in Part III build on previous ones "through selecting the issue of victimization as its subject."³⁰ Seeing Muslim women "as witnesses rather than as victims" disrupts the common assumptions of Muslim societies as "being static and [overtly] patriarchal." These essays call for a hybrid feminist understanding and solidarity that is crucial for creating an environment for learning and exchange of ideas. This theorizing can lead to examining critical issues that shape understanding feminism, Islam, and the complexities of women's lives transnationally. It is within the hybrid feminist discourse that Muslim women's lives can be negotiated given the struggles of the politics of identity formation by the Islamic and Muslim community and nation post-9/11.

Conclusion

I frequently ask the question: Can there be pragmatic value to developing a standard for feminisms for Muslim women that can be "modern" and holds up to more oppressive local conditions and politics and their particular forms of patriarchal domination? To answer this question, we need a comprehensive understanding of the local and global oppressions that exist in specific countries, and the feminist perspectives that can be brought together in a coalitional and negotiable manner. The essays in this book examine Muslim women's issues, feminisms, and women's movements through a "myriad of strategies and ideologies," and argue for the need to recognize that lived

experiences and political ideologies lead women to negotiate their rights and lives in diverse ways. Recognizing this need can contribute to the creation of new approaches and tools to analyze diverse feminisms and challenge hegemonic national policies. “[F]or example, Western feminists need to challenge their governments’ policies and Islamic women need to challenge the religious extremism of their own governments’ policies.”³¹

As is apparent from all these essays, there is constant turmoil in women’s lives and status due to shifting global and internal politics that complicate women’s demands for justice and rights in all societies. These essays reflect some of the theoretical dilemmas of feminisms, feminists, and women’s movements as they play out for Asian Muslim women in fundamentalist Muslim majority and minority countries in Asia and in the Western diaspora.

Similarly, for women in Islamic states and in Muslim communities, dilemmas exist as to should they contest internal oppressive religious norms or “support” their communities in their resistance to westernization. These dilemmas mainly exist because of the politicization of not just Islam but also secularism. There needs to be a multi-pronged approach to understanding feminism in Islamic countries and Muslim communities giving prime importance to the multi-causal ground reality of women’s lives.³²

It is essential for feminists to look at women’s reality in society in order to grasp an understanding of women’s lives, and help craft consequential and implementable policies and build meaningful praxis. Sadly, the gap between theory and practice is glaring in all Muslim communities. The depiction and analysis of Muslim women’s lives and agencies in this book are contrary to Western beliefs of constant objectification of Muslim women as oppressed, and diverge from Islamic fundamentalist expectations of Muslim women as being servile and obedient, preferably confined to “four walls.” Rather, the essays present themes at the juxtaposition of feminism and activism, and highlight Muslim women as activists who do fight for and create for themselves situations that are liberatory.³³

What is apparent is that national ideology, cultural hegemonies, international politics, and global dependencies contribute to the heterogeneity of Muslim women’s lives. In so doing, various derived feminisms and demands of a range of women’s movements lead to contesting feminist beliefs in contestory spaces. The objective of this book is not just to highlight women’s lives as shaped by local conditions, but also to step back and look at the bigger/global picture to understand the complexity of issues when one tries to unravel the intricacies of women’s lives anywhere, irrespective of culture or religion. The

essays in this book attempt to address the questions raised in this Introduction. I hope in their contestatory nature these essays will, while educating readers on the diversity in realities of Muslim women's lives in Asia, also expose them to the complexities and dilemmas to render them curious enough to delve deeper into understanding the gendered politics of identity and religion.

Notes

1. Ahmed-Syed Jamil 2006, 1.
2. This book includes essays on Muslim women from Uzbekistan, Thailand, China, Philippines, Turkey, India, Malaysia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Germany (Turkish diaspora), and Bangladesh.
3. Ahmed-Ghosh 2004.
4. Comment by anonymous reviewer of manuscript. May 2014.
5. Parts of this section are adapted, with permission, from a previous publication: "Dilemmas of Islamic and Secular Feminisms." *Journal of International Women's Studies* 9, no. 3, 2008.
6. Ahmed-Ghosh 2008.
7. See: Kalhoro, Sanam, 2014. *The Politics of Space and the Creation of the Third a Study of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus in Pakistan*. Unpublished Master's Thesis. Department of Women's Studies, San Diego State University.
8. To name a few, Moghadam 1993, 2002, 2003; Moghissi 1996; Sahidian 1994; Jalal 1991; Jahangir 1990; Khan 1994; Jilani 1998.
9. For example Tohidi 1998 and Najmabadi 1993 among others.
10. The Quran is the divine holy book of the Muslims revealed to the Prophet Mohammad over a period of twenty-three years starting in AD 608.
11. The Hadith is the compilation of the Prophet Mohammad's deeds and sayings as recollected by his Companions, wives, and others during the eighth and ninth century AD that dictate the way of life for Muslims.
12. Shariah is the Islamic religious law derived from the Quran and the Hadith during the seventh to ninth century AD.
13. Ahmed-Ghosh 2008, 102-103.
14. Wadud 1999; Webb 2000; Hassan 2004; Engineer 2001; Ali 1996; Mir-Hosseini 1996; Mernissi 1991; Karmi 1996.
15. Kandiyotti 1996, 1991, 1989; Lateef 1990; Hasan and Menon 2004; Khan and Zia 1995; Zafar 1991.
16. Ahmed-Ghosh 2008, 102.
17. Comment by anonymous reviewer of manuscript. May 2014.
18. Comment by anonymous reviewer of manuscript. May 2014.
19. Parts of this section are adapted, with permission, from a previous publication: "Dilemmas of Islamic and Secular Feminisms." *Journal of International Women's Studies*. Vol. 9, no. 3, May 2008.
20. Badran 2001, Yamani 1996; Najmabadi 1993.

21. Foley 2004.
22. Ahmed-Ghosh 2008, 103.
23. Hassan 2004.
24. Patriarchy trading: Ahmadi women are aware of the patriarchal constraints in their religion but opt for it over what they refer to as Western patriarchy, which is overlaid with resentment toward Islam and is racist. See Ahmed-Ghosh 2004.
25. Comment by anonymous reviewer of manuscript. May 2014.
26. Parts of this section are adapted, with permission, from a previous publication: "Dilemmas of Islamic and Secular Feminisms." *Journal of International Women's Studies* 9, no. 3, 2008.
27. Ahmed-Ghosh 2006, 126.
28. Comment by anonymous reviewer of manuscript. May 2014.
29. Parts of this section are adapted, with permission, from a previous publication: "Dilemmas of Islamic and Secular Feminisms." *Journal of International Women's Studies* 9, no. 3, 2008.
30. Comment by anonymous reviewer of manuscript. May 2014.
31. Ahmed-Ghosh 2008, 113.
32. Ahmed-Ghosh 2008, 112.
33. Idea from anonymous reviewer of manuscript. May 2014.

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