



Salafi Women, Communities of Love, and a Politics of Emotion

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Women and Islamic Revival

- Saba Maghmood (*Politics of Piety*) and Amina Wadud (*Qu'ran and Woman*)
- Research questions:
 - Why are young women in Canada identifying as 'Salafist'?
 - How do women contribute to new definitions of an Islamic-based feminism?
 - In what ways do Salafi women contribute to a non-violent, political, woman-based activism?



Ijtihad (independent reasoning)

- Legal term associated with Sunni jurisprudence
 - Refers to the capacity of an individual for independent rationalizing of the law on the basis of the *Qu'ran* and *Sunna*
- Taken up (and largely misinterpreted) by Islamic modernists and Salafists
 - “Okay....but, for example, how do you identify when someone asks you ‘where do you come from’?” “...we are not from ‘home’ anymore; now we find a home in Islam.”



Mosque circle/group

- Female space for discussing, informing and negotiating practices explained in the *Qu'ran* and *Hadith*
- “...we are not welcome in other groups so we made our own. Also, we are here to spread the word of the one true god, and to educate Canada that Muslims are not bad people - but our purpose is really to support each other and to show each other the love that we do not always feel at home or in school.”



Salafism

- Salafism is a reform doctrine within revivalist Sunni Islam that provides a guideline for living a pure and unadulterated Muslim life
- Salafists return to an authentic Islam by following the lived example of the Salafs (*al-salaf al-salih*)
- ‘Authenticity’: based in a literal reading of the Qu’ran as a blueprint for upholding or belief in *tawhid* (Oneness of God)
- ‘Purification of practice’ is delivered through *da’wa* (spreading the faith) and through education



Wahhabism

- Form of Salafism that the Saudi state is established upon
- Used to control society and enforce a strict conservative moral code
- Active and political Wahhabist doctrine is contributing to 'terror' revivalist movements from the Arab Middle East to the Indian Ocean and across western countries
- Promotes the marginalization and eradication of Shi'a Islam (Roel Meijer, *Global Salafism*, 2009)



Hamilton Mosque Group

- 8 women who identified as Salafi Muslims
- All between the ages of 18 and 30 years
- Part of a transnational 1.5 generation
- All 8 women wore the headscarf
- All 8 women described having made significant changes to accommodate their Salafism including:
 - Islamic dress (headscarf, loose clothing)
 - ‘Proper’ prayer (strict attention to ritual and practice)
 - Adopting love as a pedagogy and politics



Women's Words

- “I use my Qu’ran to defend my mind...and my *hijab* is to defend my body.”
- “...do you think I don’t see Canadians staring at my hijab, do you? They are not the only ones who stare, by the way, more Muslim men are interested in me now that I am living a pure life. But still, in my community, they are only interested to talk about the boy that I was seen with alone two years ago – you can’t win as a Muslim woman!”



Muslimwoman (Miriam Cooke)

- Idea of a stereotypical composite and reductive category employed in the west
- Muslim women have become the cultural standard for the *umma* (global religious community of Muslims)
- “The *hijab* has become an iconic symbol of North American Islamic identity in the post 9/11 period” (Yvonne Haddad)
- “I didn’t know how to put on a *hijab* at the beginning – it was so hard! My friend, she laughed at me, and tried to show me, but really I had to practice a lot on my own!” (10th December 2009)

Communities of Knowledge

“I didn’t know you can practice as a Muslim in different ways because we read the same book. Actually, it is because of this that I turned to the Qur’an for guidance, and I found my friends also wanted to learn what it meant to follow the true path. I asked my mother, and she said ask your father.”

“And...did you ask him?” another women asked her, “Of course!” she responded “what do you think? My family, they are all bad Muslims! He says just become Canadian and make your life easier, but I said to him that he will be sorry when his *rouh* (soul) cannot rest!”
(17th December 2010)

'Hijab Feminism'?

“You see,” she commented, “it is not about safety really because in Canada you can wear what you want. But I want you to look at me, at my eyes, and listen to my mouth when I am talking,”

“I feel like I am free when I wear *hijab* – no one can control my body, and the society cannot influence how I use my body. Here it is all about women making themselves attractive to men, and I do not want to participate in this. I am a good Muslim woman,” (17th December, 2010)



Sisters in Islam (online network)

“The fact that Islam is increasingly shaping and redefining our lives means all of us have to engage with the religion if we do not want it to be hijacked,”

“Include the work of activists, students, scholars, social critics and other such groups who are bravely stealing away the reality that we must consent to a world of oppression and violence. Our form is to take account of the dissenting voices of advocates for gender emancipation in the ‘Muslim world’,”



The Salafist Feminist (Facebook group)

- Author: “A Goth, (Steam)Punk, wannabe-biker niqaabi feminist who may or may not be a Salafi according to your definition thereof” (thesalafifeminist.blogspot.com)
- Salafi Feminist: “Someone who just likes to see everyone get their knickers in a knot when they see the words 'Salafi' and 'feminist' put together, and love to say things like, "in salafi-feminism you have combined two of the most disastrous movements in modern history!" (True story.) Okay, so maybe I'm deliberately being a tease. It's hard to resist, though, seeing as how everyone wants to shove me and my views into an annoyingly narrow box, because unless you fit into a pre-constructed box, you don't count!”



Follow-up Interview

“But why do you ask me about love this time when last time you asked us a lot of questions about religion and what we were doing in the group?” “...Ah, okay....well, this is different because this love that binds us is based in our faith.”

“Well...I do not want to say to you no because then I am not being a good believer. Well, actually, no – its not about that, but it is not wanting to tell you that maybe I did not understand it enough at the time. Now I say that I am a proud Canadian Muslim who wants to be involved with educating young Muslim women about their faith.”

“Well...I do not want to say to you no because then I am not being a good believer. Well, actually, no – its not about that, but it is not wanting to tell you that maybe I did not understand it enough at the time. Now I say that I am a proud Canadian Muslim who wants to be involved with educating young Muslim women about their faith.”



Love and Terror

“What war on terror? The war is on Muslims – always bombs are dropping on us – what about our terror? What about our love? When we die, there is no love just the blood and the silence, and then the screaming. Terror? Oh yes, tell them that Muslim women know all about terror.”



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Follow-up Interview (2)

“What you want to know – about religion? You see, maybe its not about religion, but what I found was the love of women who also were lost in a new world.”

“...when you are cut off from a home that formed your world, how can you love yourself let alone others. We learn to love from our mothers and grandmothers, and since we had lost our lives, I do not find my mother is loving and supportive to me when we came to Canada.”



Love and Terror

“I am sorry! I am really not laughing at you, I promise!” (she laughs again) “I laugh because there is no love *and* terror. If there is terror then it kills love, and there is much terror with love already. Why you are discussing such things? Why you don’t just ask me if I am a terrorist? Say to them that I am a love terrorist -I try to bring terror to the Canadians with my Muslim love,” (she stops and laughs again,) “you see! You see! There is always terror with love!”



Follow-up Interview (3)

“For me there is no change in my dress – my hijab was the best decision of my life, and as you know, I will not take it off even if any man or woman would beg me on their knees,”

“Well, it is not for me to say who is and who is not a feminist. But actually I think we were all feminist in that group because we were teaching each other how to love human beings – just to believe in an equal right for every person to be living and having a good life. Okay, maybe I say these days I do not follow such a strict way. But even when I started, we were following the words of these Muslims in the chatrooms and on Facebook. How else do you learn what is Salafism – of course it is from the internet. There is no Salafi flyer in the door like for the pizza! Do you remember the women I showed to you that we were following? This was our teacher, and we were just repeating. So today I do not say I am Salafi.”



‘Revising’ Salafism

“Now my role is to wear my hijab to educate young women what a strong Muslim independent woman looks like. Its just like that feminist t-shirt that I keep seeing – “this is what a feminist looks like” – I think that message is so powerful because it is important for young women to see us as their role models just the way we watched Amani (Muslimgirl.net) become famous on the internet and then meet Michelle Obama. And she tells women all the time, you can do anything as a Muslim woman in a *hijab*. This is what I will teach my daughter, *insha'allah*.”



Mapping Global Salafism

- GIS interactive digital model to illustrate spatial analytics
- ‘Map’ the movement of ideas
- Mixed-method approach: feminist cross-cultural and post-colonial ethnographic methodology that incorporates digital spatial methods in order to assess the processes of transnational social networks



Rethinking 'Archives'

- Connecting public domain groups (eg., Salafist Feminist) with 'dark' net networks
- Dark net/Deep web: overlay network that can only be accessed through specific software and keys that acts as a kind of 'dark mirror' to our current (light) internet
 - 'Safe' (encrypted) area where multiple forms of illegal activities take place (drug trafficking; human trafficking; terror-cell recruitment; assassins for hire, etc.)

