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The Muslim Religious Right ('Fundamentalists') and Sexuality

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As increasing numbers of scholars have pointed out, the study of Muslim peoples and their societies - including their faith, histories, behaviours etc. - has often been made difficult by a number of essentialisms and conflation. Before turning to the specific concern of this paper, I want to deal with some of these because of their implications for the issue of sexuality. First, the point has been made more than once that there is a tendency to essentialise 'Islamic societies.' That is, there is the habit of "reducing everything to a given set of doctrines, with a given set of edicts on women [or anything else], and attributing the practices and ideology of Islamic movements to the implementation of these doctrines" (Najmabadi 1991:63 - my insertion).

The Confusing Conflation of Islamic and Muslim

One reason for this is the conflation between 'Islamic' and 'Muslim.' Islam is the religion or faith (the way of Allah), while Muslims are those who believe in Islam and attempt to practice it. Islam is an issue of theology. However, what Muslims (human fallible people) make of Islam is an arena open to social scientific inquiry. In other words how human beings understand and apply Islam in their contemporary realities and daily lives can be seen to be often contentious (or at the least an area of debate). This is so not only in the present but throughout the past history of Muslim communities. The recognition that Islamic and Muslim are not synonyms is important because it helps avoid essentialising Islam and reifying it as an a-historic, unembodied ideal which is more-or-less imperfectly actualised in this or that community. It also refuses to privilege the dominant discourses of one particular Muslim community at one particular time over all others hence avoiding essentialising the histories of Muslim communities (see Shaheed 1994).

Muslim societies do, of course, have commonalities. An acceptance of the Qu'ran as the holy book of Islam and of the hadith as exemplary sources of knowledge of Islam is one. As a direct revelation, the text of the Qu'ran is not questioned. Nonetheless, interpretations of what the message of the Qu'ran means in the daily life of Muslims are - and always have been. There are debates about how particular verses should be understood and what their implications are for contemporary life. Furthermore, there are debates on the reliability of particular hadith themselves, as well as on their implications for the everyday lives of Muslims. Similarly the development of various schools of sharia testify that there are diverse understandings about how Islam should be practiced. The Hanafi, Hambali, Maliki and Sha'afi schools of Sunni Sharia as well as the Shi'a school provide differing understandings of Islamic legal opinion, all of which are Muslim. They vary, for instance, in their opinions about the permissibility of the use of contraceptives and abortion. (See, amongst others, Mernissi 1993, Ahmed 1992.)

Essentialising 'Islamic societies' ignores the real existence of a multiplicity of ways of being Muslim. Amongst all the possibilities who can authorise the 'the essential Islam'? This question hence directs attention to the power relations in Muslim communities - who has the power to define and enforce particular ways of being good Muslims - including dealing with the sexualities of Muslims? Muslim and Islam are not synonymous with Arab and Middle East

A second common conflation is to make Muslim and Islam synonymous with Arab and Middle East. Despite its historical origin in Arabia and the honourable status accorded the Arabic language, there

are far more non-Arab and non-Arabic speaking Muslims than there are Arabs or Arabic speakers. This is evident in Asia. Indonesia is, after all, the largest Muslim country with a population of nearly two hundred million, which alone outnumbers Arab Muslim populations. Similarly Pakistan and Bangladesh between them account for around another hundred million or so Muslims.

It is also the case in Africa, where it is less obviously evident for a number of reasons. First, there is the habit of referring to much of North and East Central Africa, (all the way from Morocco on the far north west coast of the continent, to Sudan and Somalia on the east of the continent down as far as the equator), as part of "the Middle East." Second there has in these countries been a series of processes of Arabisation. These began with the early Muslim expansions in the first two centuries of Islam (i.e. the seventh and eighth centuries of the Gregorian calendar), during which time, for example, the indigenous languages of lower Egypt disappeared. They move on, more recently, to the periods of nationalist independence in the 1960s - as in Algeria, where state policy deliberately ignored other Algerian languages, like Berber, in favour of Arabic. They also include the increasing influence of fundamentalist movements in the 1990s, as in contemporary Sudan.

However even in less Arabised areas, there have been many Muslim communities for a long time. Parts of East Africa have been Muslim influenced since the seventh century, and particularly since the eleventh century. In some areas of West Africa Islam has been recognised as a state religion since the eleventh century. In fact, there are almost as many Muslims in West Africa as in the whole of the 'Middle East' (Nigeria alone has about 50 million) and Islam remains the largest growing religion in Africa.

This recognition of the geographical variability and historical spread of Islam points to the fact that the practice of Islam in Muslim communities is neither identical nor static. Each community has its own history - and hence there is the need also to periodise Muslim discourses in specific locations as well as referring to broad similarities. The actual lives of women and men in Muslim societies show not only similarities, but also enormous differences from one time period to another, between different communities, and within the same societies at any point in time. For instance, in very many countries in Africa and Asia (as in Egypt and in Nigeria), the past shows elite women recognised and esteemed as scholars (Badran and Cooke [eds.] 1992, Boyd 1982, Keddie and Baron [eds.] 1991). However, often in the contemporary world, schooling for girls is resisted on the grounds that Muslim girls should marry early and not waste time studying.

Divorce and polygyny are very common and unremarkable in Muslim communities in Nigeria (Smith 1981, Pittin 1979), but uncommon and currently regarded as shamefully embarrassing in India and Bangladesh (Rehnuma?). Similarly, women's seclusion practices are generalised in Bangladesh, in northern Nigeria, in Mombassa, Kenya and in northern Sudan, where they are regarded as intrinsic to Islam (see Papanek and Minault 1982, amongst others). Yet seclusion is virtually unpracticed in Indonesia, Senegal, the Gambia, Burkina Faso and Niger. Further, the very forms of seclusion and the strata of women and men implicated in seclusion practices in both northern Nigeria and in Bangladesh have changed in the last fifty or sixty years - but for different reasons and in different ways (compare Feldman and McCarthy 1983 and Imam 1994, for instance). Evidently the simple reference to 'Islamic seclusion' in discussions of sexuality may obscure more than it clarifies.

Muslim Discourses of Sexuality

The issues of divorce, seclusion and even access to education all have implications for considerations of sexuality. Thus, evidence of their variability points to the need to recognise and distinguish different Muslim discourses of sexuality. There is a dominant discourse and stereotype about 'Islamic sexuality' which presents Muslim women as always both submissive to and tightly controlled by men who have the capacity to marry four wives. Sexuality in this discourse is, of itself, neither good nor bad, but an elemental and natural force that should however be suitably channelled in society. Both men's and women's sexuality are seen as naturally active, and while men's arousal pattern is faster, 'foreplay' is enjoined as a religious duty on men as women also have a desire for and right to sexual pleasure and satisfaction. Women are thought to have a greater potential for sexual desire and pleasure, nine times

that of men. However, it is women's passive exudation of sexuality to which men are vulnerable which provokes men who then deliberately arouse and fulfil desire in women. Thus women's sexuality is seen as naturally both greater and more passive than that of men. The idea of natural sexuality here is not solely reproductive, but it is definitely heterosexual with masturbation, homosexuality and bestiality condemned as unnatural (see Boudhiba 1975, Mernissi 1975, Al-Hibri 1982, Sabbah 1984 for this and opposing views).

Muslim patriarchs conspire with the salacious 'other' gaze of the West to present this as a single monolithic discourse of sexuality in Muslim societies - but realities are very different. The infamous honor-shame complex, where a man's honor lies in the control of the bodies and sexual practices of women in the same family, is widespread in the Mediterranean area, Arabia and parts of South Asia (see Antoun 1968, for example). However, it is virtually unknown in sub-Saharan Africa and much of South East Asia. For instance, in Hausaland 'honor' killings are unknown, even as a bad joke. Men marry prostitutes eagerly and women may be known to be prostitutes by their families. It is not a favoured profession but women are not killed for it either - much less for suspicions of non- or extra-marital affairs (Imam 1994).

Similarly, the view of women's sexuality as threatening to the social order, overwhelming, impossible for women to control themselves and/or impure and therefore needing purification and control to protect women's virtue which is behind the practice of clitoral amputation is commonly practiced in some countries (like Egypt, Sudan, Mali, the Gambia). Clitoral and labial amputation and labial closure makes sexual intercourse painful and difficult for women - sometimes necessitating re-opening with a knife, razor blade or other sharp instrument (see El Saadawi 1980, Toubia and An-Na'im 1993). In all these countries, it is defended as a requirement of Islam. Yet, in other countries with Muslim communities it is wholly unknown (e.g. Algeria, Tunisia, Pakistan, Singapore) or (as in northern Nigeria) not common among Muslims and considered to be a pagan practice (Dorkenoo and Ellsworth 1992, Mandara 1995). In fact, by contrast, in northern Nigeria a baby girl may be made to undergo hymenectomy in order to ensure she can be easily penetrated, although this is apparently a disappearing practice (Mandara 1995).

Muslim discourses of sexuality vary not only by community, but also over time. For example, northern Nigeria has been dominantly Muslim at least since the eighteenth century, some argue the fourteenth century. But, even in the last sixty or seventy years there have been changes in the discourse of sexuality such that tsarance (Hausa - institutionalised pre-marital lovemaking or sexual play that stops short of actual penetration) which used to be a common and unremarkable practice up to the 1940s and 1950s (Smith 1981) is now considered to be unislamic and 'rural.' To the other extreme, girls are frequently now not being allowed even to dance at the kalangu (Hausa - drumming and dancing held each market day - Imam 1994).

The Nature of Sexuality and Subjectivity

The analysis of different discourses of Muslim sexuality - their conditions of possibility, their histories, their implications in daily life - depends, of course, on our understanding of the nature of sexuality. In general terms one needs to have an understanding of the processes by which selves (always gendered, always sexual) are formed, in order to investigate the ways in which people realise themselves in, resist, or support particular ideologies and practices of sexuality. This historical and comparative approach to sexualities clearly rules out biologicistic premises. But what is sexuality? A fundamental component of identity is our sense of being not simply human, but male or female in sex and with particular gender formations. Juliet Mitchell (1980) argues that this is a relational difference, based on the necessity of heterosexual reproduction. However, she, along with many others, stresses that the 'contents' of sexuality are social, rather than a matter of reproductive biology, since what masculinity or femininity entail is not the same universally.

Although we may feel our sexuality as emanating from and personal to each of us, it is constructed and regulated publicly in many different ways. These include in customs or laws defining who may

marry or engage in sexual practices with whom, in which ways and in what circumstances. They also include policies (formal or informal) about the control of fertility and so forth. Sexuality is not restricted to physical sensual gratification either, but informs, for instance, senses of self-worth (indicated in statements like "I'm only a woman") and modes of self-fulfilment (such as that Hausa men may feel their virility is bound up in economic control of their households but not in carrying out domestic labour, or Arab men that their manhood is expressed in controlling the sexual conduct of wives and sisters). Sexuality also has to do with how one relates to people of one's own or other genders, regardless of any intention of seeking sensual gratification with them (for instance, with avoidance, contempt, deference, competition, bonding...). Finally it is structured also into the organisation of social space and relations of production (e.g. gender divisions of labour in agrarian societies, and occupational sex segregation and the 'woman's wage' virtually world wide). See Weeks 1985 and 1986, Coward 1980 and 1983, Burniston et al 1978, Milchell and Rose 1982.

Subjectivity (including sexual, gender identity) should be seen as constructed not through entry into one symbolic order but possibly through a number of discourses (Coward 1983, Mama 1987, Imam 1988). In so doing, one moves toward seeing the subject as constituted through taking subject positions in a number of (often intersecting) discourses. Thus subjectivity entails sexual identity, but also positioning in ethnic, religious and other forms of identity.

Foucault suggests the importance of looking at the constitution of the subject "at the level of those continuous and uninterrupted processes which subject our bodies, govern our gestures, dictate our behaviours etc." (1986:233), regarding subjugation to the 'how' of power operations as itself constituting the subject. That is to say that our subjectivities and sexualities are themselves partly constituted in the ways in which we daily act in the discourses which govern gender divisions of labour, daily dress, behaviour towards spouses and so on.

Discourses are themselves historical products however. The conditions of their existence and the historical terrains they construct are not static. However, new ideological terrains are not so much completely new fields but the reordering, dis-articulation and re-articulation of ideological elements in new ways, as well as to new elements (Gramsci 1971, Laclau 1979, Hall 1988). And, I might add, so that they intersect other ideological terrains at different points or in new ways. Further some ideological elements are more crucial and stable than others in the constitution of the fractured and unsecured subjectivity - not around the Phallus alone, as Lacan suggests - but certainly around key questions of sexual, ethnic, class and other forms of identity. The work of Gramscian intellectuals can be seen as transforming subjectivities to the extent they are able to keep a resonance with these key elements while forging new articulations of other ideological elements with them. And this is where we can begin to consider the discourses of sexuality being (re-)constructed and (re-)invented by contemporary religious and other movements and their implications for changing ideas about and practices implicated by sexuality.

'Fundamentalism'?

Here, I wish to enter a caveat on the term 'fundamentalism' which has come into use to describe all sorts of conservative right-wing movements, and particularly on the phrase Muslim or Islamic fundamentalism. First, it is a term which derives from Christian history, and is not particularly appropriate to other religions. The common usage also causes political difficulties as many Muslims have no objection to being termed those who are concerned with the fundamentals or the roots of the faith. Many of these are not otherwise supporters of the types of movement referred to as 'fundamentalist,' but who then have declared an affinity with them through acceptance of the nomenclature. In addition, it is a misnomer as what the fundamentals of a faith are depend very much on who is doing the defining - they are not a simple or uncontested issue. Furthermore, it is necessary to distinguish between general moves to increased religiosity and cultural assertions - such as Muslim renaissance or revivalism - and what many of us prefer to term the 'religious right' or 'religious conservatives' who are only one strand of a broader phenomenon.

Muslim religious right movements share a number of characteristics - which are shared with all religious right movements (see ROAPE 1991, Sahgal and Yuval Davis 1992, WLUML 1992, Yuval Davis 1980). First, they claim a return to the fundamentals of faith and to a tradition unsullied by modern excesses. Subjected to inspection this is actually a creative vision (re/construction) of 'Islamic society' and **not** a return to any known historical past nor actual literal interpretation of surahs. There is selection and interpretation always. Second, there is the claim to the only true vision and an intolerance of all other views, whether or not also Muslim. Muslim dissenters are denied with the argument that Islam is danger, therefore all protesters against their views are traitors to Islam - hence giving the excuse for forcible suppression (Helie-Lucas 1993). Third, there is the seeking of power to impose their own vision forcibly on others. Fourth, the community of identity focused upon is the Umma, the community of Muslim believers, and all other forms of identity (national, ethnic, occupational) are considered irrelevant. Fifth, they excoriate 'western feminism' and attempt to brand all forms of women's assertions to autonomy as foreign, western and anti-Islamic. Finally, there is the objective of the control of women (including women's sexuality) by men and the wish to legislate what women can or cannot do and to punish non-conformers. It is this view of sexuality that is discussed below.

Commonalities of Muslim Religious Right Views on Sexuality in keeping with their vision of a boundary-less Umma, Muslim religious right movements - from Afghanistan to South Africa, and Iran to Bangladesh, and including in Muslim minority communities in countries like Britain and France - have a remarkable consistency of vision regarding gender relations and sexuality. Commonalities include the centrality of concern with women, an asceticism about the body, a focus on (in particular) women's sexuality as a source of immorality, the increase in means for men to satisfy hetero-sexual desires, and, the reconstruction of patriarchal control over women and their sexuality.

At the heart - so to speak - of Muslim religious right groups is their concern with women (see Helie-Lucas 1995). Where logically one might expect a focus on the (gender neutral) five pillars of Islam - the profession of belief in Allah and the prophet, the five daily prayers, the annual month-long fast, the giving of a tenth of one's goods for charity each year, and the pilgrimage to Mecca - there is instead a preoccupation with women. It is women's dress and behaviour which is frequently made a symbol of new 'Islamic' orders from Iran to Sudan and now in Afghanistan. When women refuse to conform, by wearing other than the movements' prescribed dress code or continuing to go to work or to school, they are threatened and violent attacks made on them (see Benoune 1995, WLUML 1995, for instance). As a huge literature has pointed out with regard to nationalism also, women are made the repositories of culture, as opposed to participants and co-creators (see Yuval-Davis 1980). Thence interests in the control of women's reproductive powers and their influence in social transmission to children to ensure a proper next generation becomes stronger. And 'authentic' Muslim culture becomes the (re)invention of customs which lower women's autonomy - such as in Algeria empowering men to vote for their wives and daughters - while delegitimizing or ignoring all other practices. The objective is the increased domesticity of women, their identities and sexualities tamed into a restriction to women's "primary roles as wife and mother."

Asceticism (one hesitates to say "Puritanism") about the body, particularly for women, is another characteristic of religious right movements, where it is generally referred to as the requirement of 'modesty.' In Muslim religious right groups modesty is expressed through the imposition of dress codes - most particularly for women, though the Taliban in Afghanistan is requiring presently that men grow beards. Muslim women's dress codes are often misleadingly referred to generically as veiling or the hijab. This obscures both historical changes in modes of dress and cultural contexts - and thus the fact that people may be talking of quite different modes of dressing when they refer to increased veiling or women's hijab. The black loose cloak covering head to ankles known as the chador in Iran is not the same as the loose swathe of sometimes diaphanous cloth draped around the body called the tobe in Sudan. Both are unlike the headscarf and maiyafi (cloth covering head and shoulders) of 'modest' women in Nigeria. Nor are any of these identical with the headscarf (sometimes worn with jeans) that is acceptable in South Africa. All however signify a control of women's sexuality, indicating that women need to be covered in some way to prevent their exudation of sexuality. Increasingly

Muslim right groups are taking the most restrictive dress codes, homogenising them and imposing them on varied Muslim communities. The Bashir regime in Sudan, for instance, attempted to impose the Iranian chador on Sudanese women in the early 1990s.

In addition to increasing restrictive dress codes 'modesty' is often also seen as requiring a denial of sensuality or openness in body care. The wearing of make-up, jewellery, or perfume is frowned at in many places. Hammans (even for single sex use) and massages, despite the long historical and cultural traditions of their use and enjoyment, are now not licit or at least questionable in Iran and Turkey. It has been suggested that this unwillingness to see or touch the unclothed body is resulting in unease in touching oneself and thence in lower standards of personal hygiene in Iran, particularly where households do not have private bathrooms (Homa Hoodfar - personal communication). It certainly has implications concerning the control of sexuality and the permissibility or not of open enjoyment of bodily sensations.

Muslim religious right groups focus on sexuality as a source of immorality. There is the commonly stated assumption that if un-related women and men are together they must be engaging in (illicit) sexual acts. This unrestrained sexuality is dangerous to morality and social order. However, it is women's sexuality that is peculiarly responsible and culpable. It is women who must abide by restrictive dress codes that signify asexuality. It is women who must be segregated or secluded so as not to tempt men. Thus it is women's very presence that is so powerfully sexual that men's restraint falls. And, it is women who are most at fault in any situation suggesting possible 'immorality' because they should have avoided it. Thus this discourse both finds women's sexuality to be naturally and unconsciously powerful, and, simultaneously, blameworthy. Female sexuality must therefore be constrained, controlled and punished in Muslim religious right practices.

Thence, in Nigeria local state decrees penalise girls engaging in street hawking of goods, rather than the men who harass and molest them (Pittin 1991, Imam 1991). Thence too, in areas where the honor-shame complex is found, women are killed by fathers and brothers, sometimes on mere suspicion of having engaged in non-marital sex. However, neither female nor male relatives of the men who are suspected of immorality find it incumbent upon them to kill their sons or brothers. 'Honor' killings of women are condoned by the communities in which they occur (in the Arab-speaking Middle East, for instance). Often enough 'honor' killings are also condoned by the state (for example, Iraq and Israel - see Al-Fanar 1995, WLUML Dossiers, Shirkat Gah Newsheets), who accept suspicion of immorality as a defense precluding murder charges. While, in Bangladesh, there has in the past few years been a surge of completely extra-legal decisions by village salishes or councils to stone and burn women they charge with immorality (see the award-winning documentary Eclipse made by Ain-o-Salish Kendra). Or, in Sudan since the 1990s, a woman can be legally stopped and questioned by any man who feels she is not wearing appropriate attire. Or she can be harassed, picked up and held by the police until her husband, father or brother arrives to guarantee her suitable dress in the future (Sudan Women and Law Project 1996).

This control of women's sexuality is particularly clear in the stances concerning women's fertility management. Most typically the whole range of practices which relate to managing fertility are removed from women's control to that of men and the state. This ranges from decisions over whether or when to have intercourse, to decisions over knowledge of and access to different types of contraception, to permissibility or not of pregnancy termination. Neither women nor men are expected to have intercourse before marriage - although, as mentioned above, the penalties for women are far more severe. However, as wives, women may never refuse to have sexual intercourse - it is their husbands who have the right to decide. Muslim religious right groups also frequently initially refuse any form of birth prevention (whether pregnancy prevention or abortion). This often ignores the fact that there are different positions on this permissibility within Sharia over fertility management. Even with abortion this often hinges on when the soul is infused into the foetus and hence at what stage of development abortion is permissible. Instead, the most restrictive formulations are postulated - a complete ban or the only defense that it is to save the mother's life. New restrictions may also be instituted in Sharia, such as that the woman must have been raped as well as in the first trimester of

pregnancy (e.g. Sudan in the 1990s), before it is defensible to carry out an abortion. Attitudes to pregnancy avoidance can, nonetheless vary. In the early days of the Iranian revolution use of contraception was considered antithetical for good Muslims. Of recent however, the Iranian religious right (still in state power) have started to encourage family planning and list acceptable forms of contraception. Even so, in either case it is not women themselves who may judge and decide whether and how to manage their fertility.

Men's sexuality is also channelled, but in a way that gives them more control. The religious right discourse gives men more means and avenues of satisfying desires - if heterosexual. Polygyny frequently becomes an unbridled right of Muslim men - in some cases (like Nigeria) almost an obligation. The right to marry girl children is defended and promoted as men's right and the prevention of immorality. There is increasingly a lack of concern for the consent of the bride to marriage. Women's right to choice of marriage partner is increasingly whittled down or removed altogether, as in Sudan where there has been a shift from allowing women to make the choice to enabling her waliyi (guardian, always male) to enforce his choice on her. Mut'a (temporary marriage permitted in Shiite Sharia) is on the increase, including in Sunni communities where it was previously unknown or condemned as Shiite apostasy, such as Algeria and Sudan (WLUMML 1995, Sudan Woman and Law Project 1996). The treatment of rape militates against women. It not only refuses categorically to recognise rape within marriage, but also poses such severe conditions (such as the eye witness testimony of four upright men) that a woman charging rape or pregnant as a result of rape may well find herself, rather than her rapist, punished on the grounds of 'self-confessed immorality' or 'unfounded charges' as has happened in Pakistan (see Shirkat Gah Newsheets).

In general terms, one might say that the Muslim religious right (like Christian and Hindu religious right groups - see WAF Journals) have been reconstructing patriarchal control over women and their sexuality. The locus of control has been shifting from the patriarch proper (father as household or family head) with control over women and men of his household/family) to state control of women (and men), to state-sanctioned control of all women by all men (i.e. any individual man in street or house). Thus, any man may enforce his idea of women's appropriate dress on any woman he sees in Sudan. There is the use of salishes to condemn women for adultery or bigamy etc., in Bangladesh even when the act in question is done with her father's permission. There has been tacit state toleration of acid-throwing when a woman refuses intercourse with a man, even if that refusal was in the name of modesty and chastity in Algeria, or of women's abduction for being in public spaces in Nigeria. There has been increasing violence against women who refuse to conform in Algeria, Sudan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan amongst others.

Finally, there is the issue of same-sex relations, about which there is still rather little literature or research. Muslim establishments converge with religious right groups in condemning 'unnatural deviations' (homosexual relations of men or women, transvestitism, transsexuals and so on). There seems always to have been a loud silence on women's same-sex relations. However, in many Muslim communities in the Middle East, in east coast Kenya or in Northern Nigeria for example, there has been a centuries long history of quiet toleration of male same-sex relations (including sexual intercourse and forms of cross dressing). The condemnations of these practices, often now explicitly including women's same-sex relations, have become increasingly strident. They are denounced as not only unnatural, but also anti-Islam and due to the corrupting influence of the West and/or feminism (which is itself viewed as a solely Western construct).

Specificities of Muslim Religious Right Discourses of Sexuality

However, the ideal of a boundary-less Umma is just that - an ideal. Despite the many commonalities of rhetoric there is a need to periodise and contextualise religious right discourses also, and not to assume that they are all the same. There are many links and the internationalising of the Muslim religious right (in political links, money circulation and donations, printed, audio and visual matter, scholarships) is an important topic not yet well researched (but see ROAPE 1991). Where and how the ideologies and programmes are decided, passed on and shared, what the links are between

religious right groups in different communities are issues yet to be elucidated. Even so, how ideologies are reconstructed, transformed, influenced and construed in the practices of specific communities is extremely important. It does make a real and crucial difference if exhortations for women's modesty are couched in terms of men's lack of culpability in killing women on 'honor' grounds (Iraq) or relatively lightly in terms of wearing a headscarf outside one's home (South Africa). There is a substantive divergence in effects on women's and men's lives and sexuality between the religious right saying in one place that any form of contraception is anti-Islamic (immediate post-revolution Iran), and in another place or at another time that Allah has provided certain safe and legitimate means for spacing births (contemporary Iran).

Despite the commonalities and the similar rhetorical flourishes, Muslim religious right groups are not identical to each other. The appendix to this paper is a table of differing principles and claims of the religious right in different countries. It is incomplete, but it serves to illustrate the point. Nor are the contexts in which Muslim religious rights groups operate, the ideological-political state and content of hegemony in each community, or the arrangement and power of groups who are not part of the religious right, and/or non-Muslim groups all the same. In addition, it behoves us to remember that Muslim is not the only identity that groups (even religious right groups) may choose to inflect in particular circumstances. Other identities - post-colonial, ethnic or regional, professional, gender... - may be also drawn upon. In every community these and probably other issues have a recursive effect on discursive practices at ideological levels and in behaviours.

There is, furthermore, a need to look at the varying impacts of religious right discourse by social relations in communities. In Pakistan, for instance, the hudood ordinance affects mostly poorer women who have not the social and economic resources to avoid being entangled in it. Restrictions on formal sector work affect mostly middle class women (for instance in Algeria, Sudan, Nigeria). Segregation and seclusion, and the lack of work outside the home affects poorer women the most in Bangladesh and in Sudan, where women street food sellers are being picked up, harassed and fined. There are reports that female genital mutilation is on the increase in refugee camps, which affect the poor and displaced of both Somalia and Sudan.

Finally, women's and men's relations with religious right discourses of sexuality (or other) are likewise diverse. As mentioned 'modesty' may lead to a dislike of undressing or touching one's body. But dress codes may also be rejected even in the face of death threats as in Algeria and Sudan, or resisted in favour of a modesty of demeanour demanded from both women and men (northern Nigeria), or adopted for a whole parade of different rationales. These could include acceptance of the view that women's sexuality must be hidden and controlled, as a symbol of one's faith in minority communities, as a means of protection from harassment, as a means of asserting mobility outside one's home (i.e. achieving some freedom of movement), or fear of the consequences if it is not worn. Restrictive dress codes have also been adopted in ways which subvert any hope of making women socially invisible or diminishing their sexuality - there are women's magazines which advise on how to wear hijab in an attractive manner, as well as fashion parades and designer chadors in countries as varied as Egypt and Nigeria, at least.

Similarly, the adoption of seclusion or acceptance of segregation may be the expression of a view of sexuality as uncontrollable in the presence of non-related women and men. Or, it may also be a result of the renegotiation of the patriarchal bargain (see Kandiyoti) so that men take the responsibility of household maintenance (Imam 1994), or because there is no option of work outside the home, or because of social pressure - or a mixture of all of these. Obviously each of these situations has different implications for sexuality. Conforming behaviour alone is not sufficient to establish conforming realities.

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Appendix: Table of Various Practices/Claims of Religious Right in Different Countries

Iran	Sudan	Nigeria	Bangladesh	Pakistan
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Religious right in state power	Religious right in state power	Religious right in not power, but increasingly vocal and influential	Religious right not in state power, but very vocal and influential	Religious right in power, but access to influence on state
legal imposition of dress code	legal imposition of dress code but won battle ref to be. However non-compliance is grounds for sack or lack of promotion	social imposition of dress code - but affects also non-Muslim women in multi-religious state		women-Islamic dress but men national dress
Iranian women may not marry non-Iranian men Rafsanjani now talking of more open relations between women and men	(1994 revival of 1959 law) Sudanese men students abroad may not marry non-Sudanese women (unless Egyptian) without diplomatic permission	in principle women should not marry non-Muslim men but is done and accepted		
cannot give self in marriage	rejection of Hanafi law that woman can give self in marriage in favour of Maliki where it is more difficult	both women and men have waliyi - often consent sought but father has right to compel virgins		
women first eliminated from urban work outside home (especially formal sector). gradual return in some areas	women being eliminated from urban work (especially public sector, and in judicial system)	increasing pressure for dress code, calls for gender segregated work, failed attempt to ban women from civil service	attacks on NGOs working on issues of women's economic autonomy (tree-planting now unislamic') or education	
contraceptive use/abortion unIslamic first - now regarded as permissible. Both positions with fatwas to support	abortion legal only if in first trimester and woman was raped	abortion - defense that mother's life threatened dislike of contraceptive use - coitus interruptus and safe period OK	development of extra judicial practices of salishes accusing women of adultery, bigamy	Jamaati-Islami resolve that family planning unislamic. abortion illegal (10 years)
mut'a on increase polygyny on increase	mut'a introduced 1990s 'house of obedience' legalised 1992	stress on men's right to polygyny and to child brides		h u d o o d ordinance not distinguish non-marital sex from rape. evidence rules favour men, but punishment is same

first women's sports discouraged - now females do sports covered up and swimming not televised or open to men spectators		girls not encouraged to do sports. dancing now increasingly considered as not licit		music + dance banned in girls' schools
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This, of course, is something that fundamentalists, whether Muslim or Christian, prefer to deny. Although Muslim societies today can be described as generally homophobic, it's a mistake to view homophobia as a self-contained problem: it's part of a syndrome in which the rights of individuals are subsumed in the perceived interests of the community and often maintaining an "Islamic" ethos. The result is that society places a high value on conformity and expressions of individuality are frowned upon; there is a strong emphasis on upholding social "norms" and keeping up appearances "in public." On the religious front, prevailing Islamic views of homosexuality have been challenged here and there, but not on a scale that is likely to make much difference. Between that religious and political fundamentalist zealot only the names are changed. For the religious they may go under the name of Christian, Jew and Muslim. For that political zealot they may be called Fascist, Nazi, Communist, Marxist or just socialists. If one was to rank one against the other in terms of effectiveness judged by number of people killed, imprisoned and impoverished the fanatical fundamentalism of the socialist ideal would be the clear winner. From France to Malaysia, Muslim women's rights activists are challenging those who ask them to "choose between being a Muslim and a feminist". Nandini Archer. 7 February 2019. She described how women's rights advocates need to engage with communities and individuals working from within religious frameworks as "a way out of this deadlock" which leaves Muslim women squeezed between Islamophobia and fundamentalism. But one of the key challenges, she said, is that many human rights activists and western feminists see religion as an inherently patriarchal construct. There are "valid concerns" about the power held by religious institutions, she said.